

Sumatra



Anchored tenuously in the deep Indian Ocean, this giant island is still as wild and unpredictable as the Victorian-era jungle-seekers dreamed. Millennia of chaos erupting from the earth's toxic core or from the fierce ocean waves create and destroy in equal measure. When the earth and sea remain still, the past's death and destruction fertilise a verdant future. The rugged mountains and fertile valleys are fed by near-constant rains colouring the jungles and the rice terraces many shades of green.

Sumatra is still visibly diverse, with more than 52 tribal languages and the full spectrum of societal organisation. In a few remaining pockets, hunter-gatherer tribes collaborate with the jungle for survival. Other tribes have sewn together the expectations of the outside world with their own customs. The Bataks of Danau Toba; the matrilineal Minangkabau of West Sumatra – each bus ride will deliver you to another tribal heartland.

Don't come looking for a holiday, that's Bali, or empire builders, that's Java. Sumatra is an adventure, the kind of demanding ride that requires a dusty knapsack and tough travelling skin. Climb up a smoking volcano, slog through muddy jungle paths, spot a wild orang-utan high up in the canopy, or scuba dive through a sculpted underwater landscape. Endure the Sumatran spin cycle and earn your rest amid a picturesque volcanic lake where you can slip into the morning mist and swim through the land before time.

HIGHLIGHTS

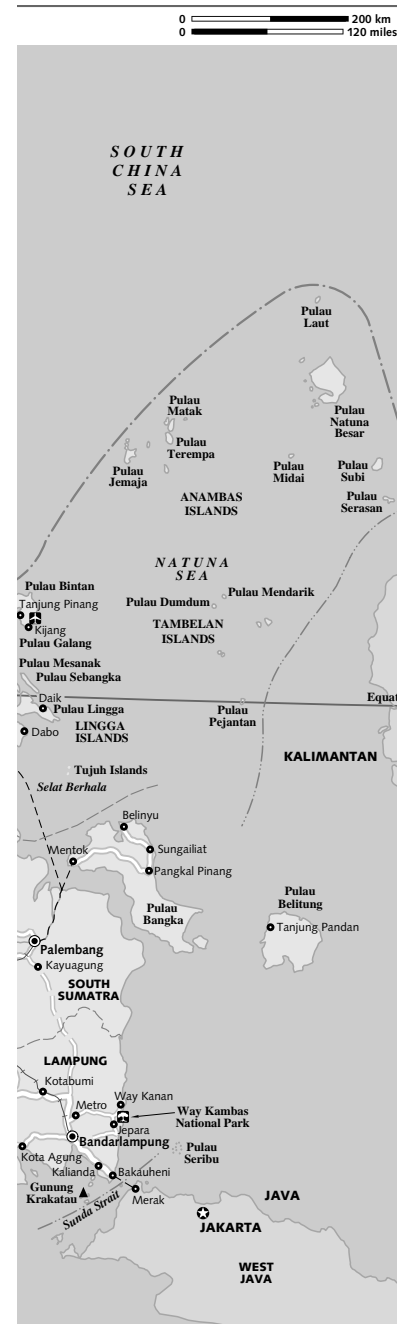
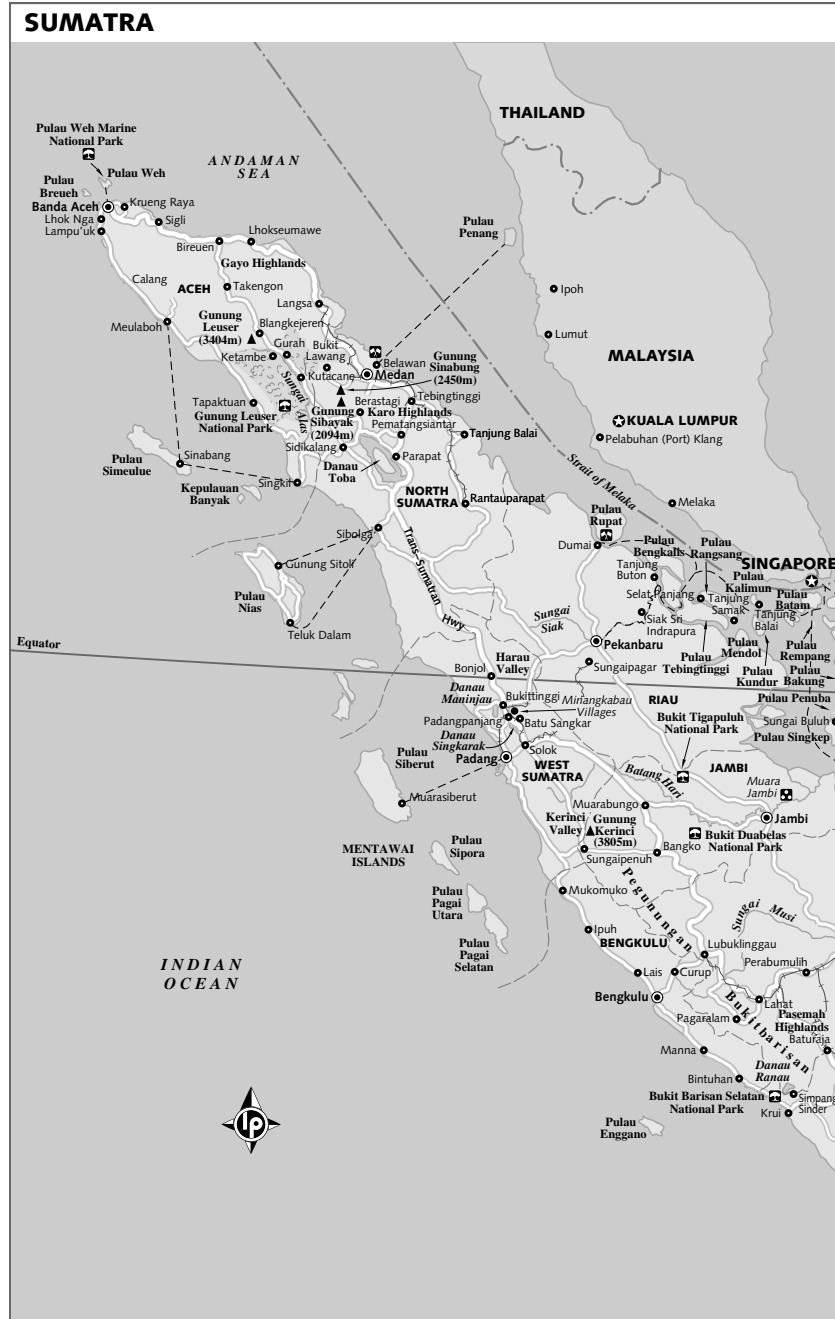
- Finding your inner Batak in laid-back **Danau Toba** (p399), where friends are forthcoming and days undemanding
- Checking out the orang-utan centre at **Bukit Lawang** (p390); it's better than Clint Eastwood's *Any Which Way But Loose* if you want encounters of the ape kind
- Sneaking a peek inside the gaseous volcano craters that ring the hill town of **Berastagi** (p394)
- Exploring underwater peaks and valleys at the dive sites around **Pulau Weh** (p422), a tropical island that hasn't sold out
- Casting off your city slicker in the scenic countryside around **Bukittinggi** (p441), where the matrilineal Minangkabau built soaring-roofed houses and the women told the men what to do



■ POPULATION: 40 MILLION

■ LAND AREA: 473,606 SQ KM
(WORLD'S SIXTH-LARGEST
ISLAND)

■ HIGHEST PEAK: GUNUNG
KERINCI (3805M)



HISTORY

Pre-Islamic history is often more a matter of myth than fact, but archaeological evidence suggests that Sumatra was the gateway for migrating tribes from mainland Southeast Asia. Stone tools and shells unearthed north of Medan indicate that hunter-gatherers were living along the Strait of Melaka (Selat Malaka) 13,000 years ago. Two megalithic cultures appeared around 2000 years ago, one in the mountains of western Sumatra, and the other on Pulau Nias.

The Strait of Melaka, an important trade route between China and India, exposed the east coast of Sumatra to the regional super-powers and popular ideas of the day, such as Islam. The kingdom of Sriwijaya emerged as a local player at the end of the 7th century, with its capital presumably based near the modern city of Palembang. After Sriwijaya's influence waned, Aceh, in the northern tip of Sumatra, assumed control of trade through the strait. Aceh is presumably where Islam was first introduced to Indonesia by Muslim sea traders from Gujarat (western India). In the spirit of diplomacy and trade, the animist Acehnese adopted the faith of their visitors and continue to practise a more devout form of Islam than their neighbouring provinces. Aceh's control of the shipping route increased after its main rival, Melaka, fell to the Portuguese in 1511. The era of Aceh's sultanate prevailed until the beginning of the 17th century, when Dutch traders decided they wanted a piece of the spice trade.

The most influential port of the day, Samudra (meaning 'ocean'), near Lhokseumawe, eventually became the name that the traders used to refer to the entire island, alternatively referred to as Lesser Java. It was Marco Polo who corrupted the name to 'Sumatra' in his 1292 report on the area. In more poetic times, the island was known as Swarnadwipa (Island of Gold).

Throughout the colonial era, Sumatra saw almost every foreign power stake a claim in its resources: the Dutch based themselves in the West Sumatran port of Padang, the British ruled in Bencoolen (now Bengkulu), American traders monopolised pepper exports from Aceh, and the Chinese exploited tin reserves on the islands of Bangka and Belitung, east of Palembang. Oil and coffee were other prized Sumatran exports.

In the early 19th century, the Dutch attempted to establish military control over all of Sumatra, a move met with resistance by the disparate tribes. In 1863, after three military expeditions, the Dutch finally established authority over Nias. Treaties and alliances brought other areas of Sumatra under Dutch rule, including Bengkulu, which the British willingly traded for Melaka.

A peace might have been brokered, but the Dutch were never welcomed in Sumatra, and the island contributed several key figures to the independence struggle, including future vice-president Mohammed Hatta and the first prime minister, Sutan Syahrir. Despite these liberators, Sumatra was as dissatisfied with Jakarta's rule as it was with the Dutch. From 1958 to 1961, rebel groups based in Bukittinggi and the mountains of South Sumatra resisted centralisation, resulting in clashes with the Indonesian military. Fiercely independent Aceh, though, proved to be Jakarta's most troublesome region. Aceh's separatist movement started in the late 1970s and continued until 2006 (see p414), with brief spells of quiet counter-weighted with extreme repression by the Indonesian military.

No human conflict could compare to the destruction of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, in which a 9.0-plus-magnitude earthquake off the northwestern coast of Sumatra triggered a region-wide tsunami. In Aceh

province, the landmass closest to the epicentre, nearly 15m-high waves rose up like the mythical *naga* (sea serpent) and swallowed coastal development and dwellers. The Indonesian death count was estimated at more than 170,000 people, mainly in Aceh. An 8.7-magnitude aftershock that followed several months later was centred near the island of Nias, destroying the capital city and killing hundreds of inhabitants. Aid organisations responding to the tsunami first focused their relief operations on Aceh and are now shifting attention to Nias.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Once upon a time along the backpacker trail, travellers sailed the high seas to reach the island of Sumatra, touching down in one of the international ports: Batam, Belawan (near Medan), Pekanbaru or Dumai. But the era of budget airlines has made the friendly skies a faster and more affordable option for international arrivals. In addition, as fuel prices and fares for land and sea travel soar, airfares consistently take a nose dive.

Keep in mind that Sumatra is one hour behind Singapore time.

Air

Medan is Sumatra's primary international airport, with frequent flights to mainland Southeast Asian cities such as Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Penang. In West Sumatra, Padang receives flights from Singa-

SUMATRA AU NATUREL

Sumatra's main superlatives come from its natural endowments: it stretches nearly 2000km from Banda Aceh in the north to Bakauheni in the south, is nearly cut in half by the equator and covers an area of 473,606 sq km, just shy of the size of France. The island's backbone is the Bukit Barisan range, which runs most of the length of the west coast, merging with the highlands around Danau Toba and central Aceh. Forming the most dramatic peaks are a military formation of almost 100 volcanoes; 15 of them are still active, and the tallest is Gunung Kerinci measuring in at 3805m. The string of islands off the west coast, including Nias and the Mentawai Islands, are geologically older than the rest of Sumatra.

The coastal lowlands on the east coast are swampy and drained by wide muddy rivers, such as Batang Hari, Siak and Musi, that empty into the shallow Strait of Melaka.

In the remaining forests, Sumatra boasts some of Indonesia's most interesting biodiversity. Flowers and primates top the naturalist's list. The *Rafflesia arnoldii*, the world's largest flower, and the *Amorphophallus titanum*, the world's tallest flower, can be found in pockets of the Bukit Barisan jungle. The island is also home to endangered species such as the two-horned Sumatran rhino, the honey bear, the elephant and the Sumatran tiger. But scientists from all over the world come to northern Sumatra's Gunung Leuser National Park, where it is believed that more than 5000 orang-utans still live in the wild.

VISA ON ARRIVAL

Regulations for visiting Indonesia are in flux. At the time of research, most nationalities could obtain a visa on arrival at the following international entry points, but check with an Indonesian consulate for the current situation.

- Pulau Batam: airport and the ports of Nongsa, Sekupang, Waterfront City (Teluk Senimba) and Batam Centre (p461).
- Pulau Bintan: ports of Tanjung Pinang, Bandar Bentan Telani Lagoi and Bandar Sri Udana Lobam in Tanjung Uban (p466).
- Medan: Polonia airport and Belawan port (p388).
- Pekanbaru: airport and port (p458).
- Padang: airport and Teluk Bayur port (p435).
- Dumai: Yos Sudarso port (p459).
- Sibolga port (p406).

pore and Kuala Lumpur several times a week. In eastern Sumatra, Palembang is linked to Singapore. The primary international carriers include Garuda Indonesia, Malaysian Airlines, Lion Air, Tiger Airways, Air Asia, and Silk Air.

You can also hop on a plane from Jakarta to every major Sumatran city aboard Garuda, Merpati Nusantara Airlines, Jatayu, Adam Air, Mandala or Sriwijaya. Flights from Sumatra to other parts of Indonesia typically connect through Jakarta. One notable exception is Merpati's flight between Medan and Pontianak (Kalimantan).

Boat

Despite cheap airfares, many travellers still heed the call of the sea and enter Sumatra by ferry from Malaysia. Except for more remote islands, most destinations are more easily and affordably reached by air. There are two primary port options: Melaka (Malaysia) to Dumai (Indonesia) or Penang (Malaysia) to Belawan (Indonesia). If you don't have a lot of time to explore Sumatra, Belawan is your best option, as it is a short bus ride from Medan (see p388), which sits at the centre of most tourist attractions. Dumai is on Sumatra's east coast and is a five-hour bus ride to Bukittinggi; see p459 for more information.

From Singapore, ferries make the quick hop to Pulau Batam and Bintan, the primary islands in the Riau archipelago. These water routes are used mainly by Singaporean weekenders heading to the Riau islands' beaches and resorts.

From Batam, boats serve the following mainland Sumatran ports: Dumai, Palembang and Pekanbaru. Only a few backpackers use Batam as an entry into Sumatra because all but Dumai are a long way from postcard-worthy spots. See Pulau Batam (p462) or Pulau Bintan (p466) for more information on boat transfer between Singapore and beyond.

Ferries swim across the narrow Sunda Strait linking the southeastern tip of Sumatra at Bakauheni to Java's westernmost point of Merak. The sea crossing is a brief dip in a day-long voyage that requires several hours' worth of bus transport from both ports to Jakarta on the Java side and Bandarlampung on the Sumatran side. See p480 for more details.

Pelni-operated boats still paddle between Indonesia's islands, carrying freight and families. Except for more-remote islands, most destinations are more easily and affordably reached by air.

Check with local ticket agents for schedules and prices as both are subject to change.

GETTING AROUND

Most travellers bus around northern Sumatra and then hop on a plane to Java, largely avoiding the Third World conditions of Sumatra's highway system. Most of the island is mountainous jungle and the poorly maintained roads form a twisted pile of spaghetti on the undulating landscape. Don't count on getting anywhere very quickly on Sumatra.

On the other hand, Sumatra's airports are incongruously modern and numerous, providing a quick and cheap means of arrival or escape.

Air

An hour on a plane is an attractive alternative to what may seem like an eternity on a bone-shaking bus filled with chain smokers and cockroaches. For long-distance travel, airfares are competitive with bus and ferry fares, but routes within the island are limited. Medan to Banda Aceh and Medan to Gunung Sitoli are two popular air hops.

Domestic carriers include Merpati, Mandala, Jatayu, Adam Air, Lion Air and Sriwijaya. Sabang Merauke-Raya Air Charter

(SMAC) flies to minor destinations that the bigger airlines don't bother with. See the Sumatra Airfares map (p380) for routes and sample fares.

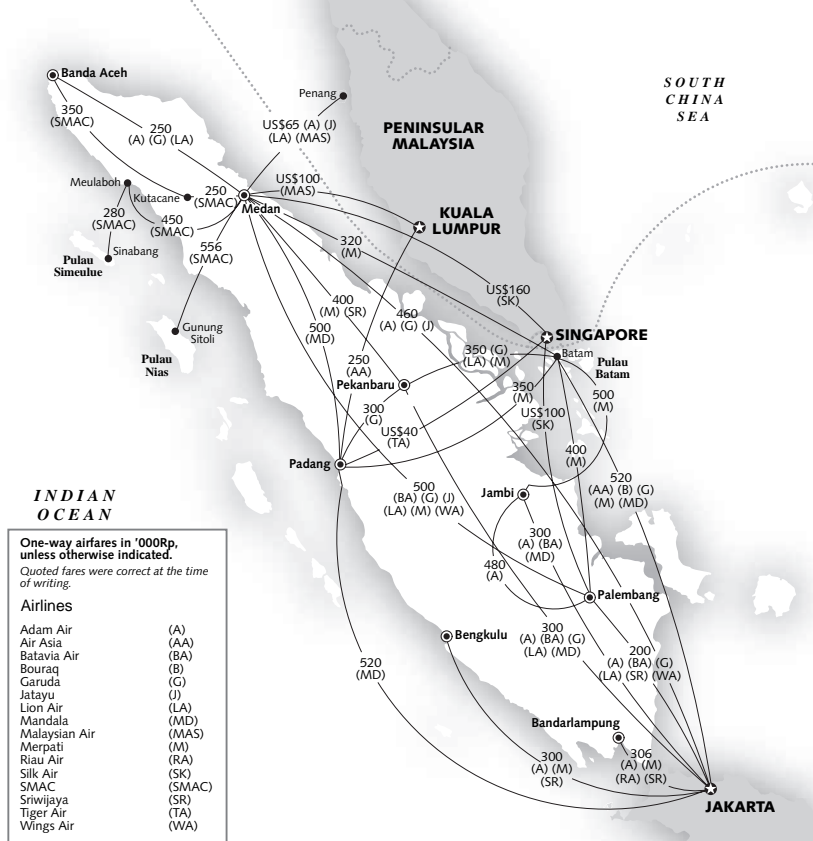
All Sumatran airports charge an airport departure tax (between 15,000Rp and 30,000Rp) that is not included in your ticket. Ticket agents are located in the smallest of towns and typically charge 10% commission.

Boat

Most boat travel within Sumatra connects the main island with the many satellite islands lining the coast.

The most commonly used routes link Banda Aceh with Pulau Weh, Sibolga with

SUMATRA AIRFARES



CULTURE IN A CAN

You could visit every tribal minority, hike every peak and read every anthropological study, but nothing puts you closer to 'Sumatra' than the economy buses. Grindingly slow, uncomfortable and thoroughly exhausting, economy buses are a cultural experience not to be missed.

Anything goes on economy: sacks of rice, chain-smoking, travelling cockroaches and unabashed littering. Often the roads are so twisty that drivers carry a stash of plastic bags for the weak stomachs. Welcome to the vomit route.

At various stops, young troubadours hop aboard and strum a few chords on the guitar. The collection hat is passed around and filled with spare cigarettes, snack food and wrinkled 1000Rp notes.

Then there are the tea and 'mystery' stops. Sometimes these stops are meal breaks at roadside cafés, other times they are prayer stops at local mosques. And still other times they are totally inexplicable and must surely be a quick visit by the bus driver to a clandestine girlfriend.

By and large, English isn't widely spoken in Sumatra, but occasionally the public bus is an exception. After circumnavigating the country, we found that all but two rides had a near-fluent passenger, usually a student or English-language graduate, and conversations meandered from their love of Kurt Cobain to the security of an Indonesian government job.

Pulau Nias, and Padang with Pulau Siberut (in the Mentawai Islands chain). In the less-visited areas of southeastern Sumatra, Jambi, Palembang and Pekanbaru are important towns for river transport. The Riau islands of Batam and Bintan are also linked to southeastern port towns by ferry.

Most long-distance ferries have several classes, ranging from filthy and crowded to filthy and less crowded. An upgrade in class might be a necessary luxury.

Bus

Bus is the most common mode of transport around Sumatra and in many cases is the only option for intercity travel. But it is far from efficient or comfortable. The primary thoroughfare is the Trans-Sumatran Hwy, which is little more than a jungle-bound animal track for beasts who eat petrol. Locals prefer a more affectionate term – 'chicken roads' – as the pavement inexplicably disappears, oncoming traffic must yield to one another and the potholes are as big as moon craters. It is not uncommon during the rainy season for mudslides to block the road or for bridges to wash out.

Most trips take extra long because of road conditions. At this laborious pace you have plenty of time to soak up the views: cascades of deep lush greens, terraced rice fields, mottled rushing rivers and isolated villages gathered around the communal well.

Buses range from economy sardine cans to modern air-con coaches. At the top of

the class structure are super-executive buses with reclining seats, deep-freeze air-con, toilets, and an all-night serenade from Scorpios albums. Many passengers come prepared with winter hats, gloves and earplugs.

Bus terminals in Sumatra can range from modern and organised to run-down and abandoned. In some towns, you can go straight to the bus terminal to buy tickets and board buses, while other towns rely on bus company offices located outside the terminals. Ticket prices vary greatly depending on the quality of the bus and perceived gullibility of the traveller. It pays to shop around and to ask at your guesthouse about reliable companies; but do be aware that some accommodations act as booking agents and charge a commission for their services.

Local Transport

The usual Indonesian forms of transport – *bemo/opelet* (small minibuses), *becak* and *bendi* (two person horse-drawn carts) – are available for getting around towns and cities in Sumatra. The base rate for a *bemo* or *opelet* is 1500Rp to 2000Rp, while the minimum fare for *becak* and *bendi* is 5000Rp.

Establish a price for a *becak* ride before climbing aboard. For an *opelet*, you pay after you disembark.

Minibus

Back when Sumatra was crawling with backpackers, there were numerous tourist

TIPS FOR TOURISTS

- Spick-and-span cash – greenbacks and other foreign currencies might cross borders with ease but moneychangers in Sumatra want pristine bills. No rips, folds or pen marks. Some will even nit-pick over serial numbers.
- Bathroom fright night – you could be an old hand with the Asian sky bombers but toilets along the Sumatran bus route are sometimes a logistical challenge. That's the hole? Just wait till you get into the country and find that the hole is the river.
- Gratis? Never met him – when your economy is in the toilet, very few things are free. Hospitality without a tip? Try that trick in more prosperous times.
- Solo equals loco – forget language barriers, if you're travelling alone, especially women, you'll confuse the moustaches off Sumatrans. The West's appreciation of solo survival doesn't have a counterpart in Sumatran culture. And a woman with no male escort makes about as much sense as wearing a hot-dog costume.
- Happiness is an avocado shake – 'Hello mister' chases you through a fitful sleep until the 5am call to prayers. Everyone is a friend for hire. And you've started littering because garbage disposal seems so hopeless. Nothing puts a Wellbutrin glow on the day like an avocado shake.

minibuses that linked the major stops along the trail. These are long gone, but there are some locally used minibus services that can be more convenient than hustling out to the bus terminal. Some minibuses are in superb shape and provide door-to-door service, while others are a little rickety and shovel in more people than a clown car. Typically, tourists will end up paying more than the locals; negotiating a front seat ensures a little breathing room as the driver won't crowd his steering range. This way you get to look death head-on.

Train

The only useful train service in Sumatra runs from Bandarlampung (p480) to Palembang, and then on to Lubuklinggau. There are also less useful passenger trains from Medan to Pematangsiantar, Tanjung Balai and Rantauparapat.

NORTH SUMATRA

With surgical precision, most travellers make a delicate incision into North Sumatra's key attractions: orang-utans in Bukit Lawang, volcanoes in Berastagi, and hanging out in Danau Toba. Medan is the focal point of this circulation and sees new arrivals leave again in less than 24 hours.

North Sumatra stretches from the Indian Ocean to the Strait of Melaka and from sea to shining sea it is anything but homogenous.

The rolling landscape varies from sweaty plains to cool highlands, while the houses of worship switch between the metal-domed mosques to the arrow-straight steeples of Christian churches. The coastal Malays, relatives of mainland Southeast Asia, live along the Strait of Melaka and are the largest ethnic group. In the highlands around Danau Toba are the delightful Batak, which are further subdivided into five classes. If you can name them all then you've either married into the clan or are destined to. Then there are the Pesisirs (central Tapanuli) along the Indian Ocean coastline and the megalithic culture of Pulau Nias (p407).

North Sumatra has a population of almost 12 million and is an economically robust province, producing more than 30% of Indonesia's exports. Oil, palm oil, tea and rubber are produced in large quantities and fine tobacco is grown in the rich soil around Medan.

MEDAN

% 061 / pop 2 million

Medan is the capital of North Sumatra and is the third-largest city in Indonesia. Depending on your perspective, you'll either love it or hate it. If you're coming from saner parts of mainland Southeast Asia, Medan will be everything that's wrong with an Asian city: choked with traffic, pollution and poverty. If you've worked your way north through Sumatra, Medan is thankfully modern, with air-con, internet and a middle class.

Most people only stay a night and grab transport out the next day. The city's major attraction is a graveyard of colonial buildings centred around Kesawan Square. For urban junkies, Medan has lots of confusing public transport to conquer.

History

Medan has had several major incarnations. The plains were once used as a battlefield between the kingdoms of Aceh and Deli (the word *medan* translates as 'field' or 'battlefield') from the end of the 16th century to the early 17th century.

But more importantly, Medan was a planter's trading post, a civilised district of tidy lanes and open-air cafés for society-deprived plantation owners. An enterprising Dutch planter named Nienhuys introduced tobacco to the area in 1865, which ushered in prosperity, imported Chinese labourers and investment in infrastructure. In 1886 the Dutch made it the capital of North Sumatra and by the end of Dutch rule the population had grown to about 80,000.

Once the Dutch were kicked out, Medan tossed off its starched uniform and grew as it pleased. A wealthy merchant class, mainly of ethnic Chinese, dominates the cosmopolitan side of town, while a handful of ethnic tribes from all over Sumatra make do in the run-down remainder. Animosity towards the Chinese erupted into violent rioting on Medan's streets on several occasions during the 1990s.

Orientation

The sprawling city of Medan radiates from the confluence of the Sungai Deli and Babura. Most backpackers head to the

neighbourhood surrounding Mesjid Raya on Jl Sisingamangaraja (often abbreviated as 'SM Raja') for accommodation. North of this area is the city centre, organised around Jl Pandu and Jl Pemuda. The historic district occupies Jl Ahmad Yani around Lapangan Merdeka (Freedom Square). The manicured part of town is Polonia, west of Sungai Deli following the spine of Jl Imam Bonjol. Little India is sandwiched between Jl H Zainal Arifin, Jl Imam Bonjol and Jl Cik Ditiro.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Finding English reading material in Sumatra is a hassle and Medan's slim pickings is a bumper crop compared to other stops on the road.

Gramedia bookshop Medan Mall (Jl Gajah Mada): Sun Plaza (Jl H Zainul Arifin) Good for maps and paperbacks.

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access is available at most of the large shopping plazas and costs 5000Rp per hour.

Nusa Net (Jl SM Raja) Basement of Yuki Plaza.
Indo.net (Jl RH Juanda)

MEDICAL SERVICES

For an ambulance, dial % 118.

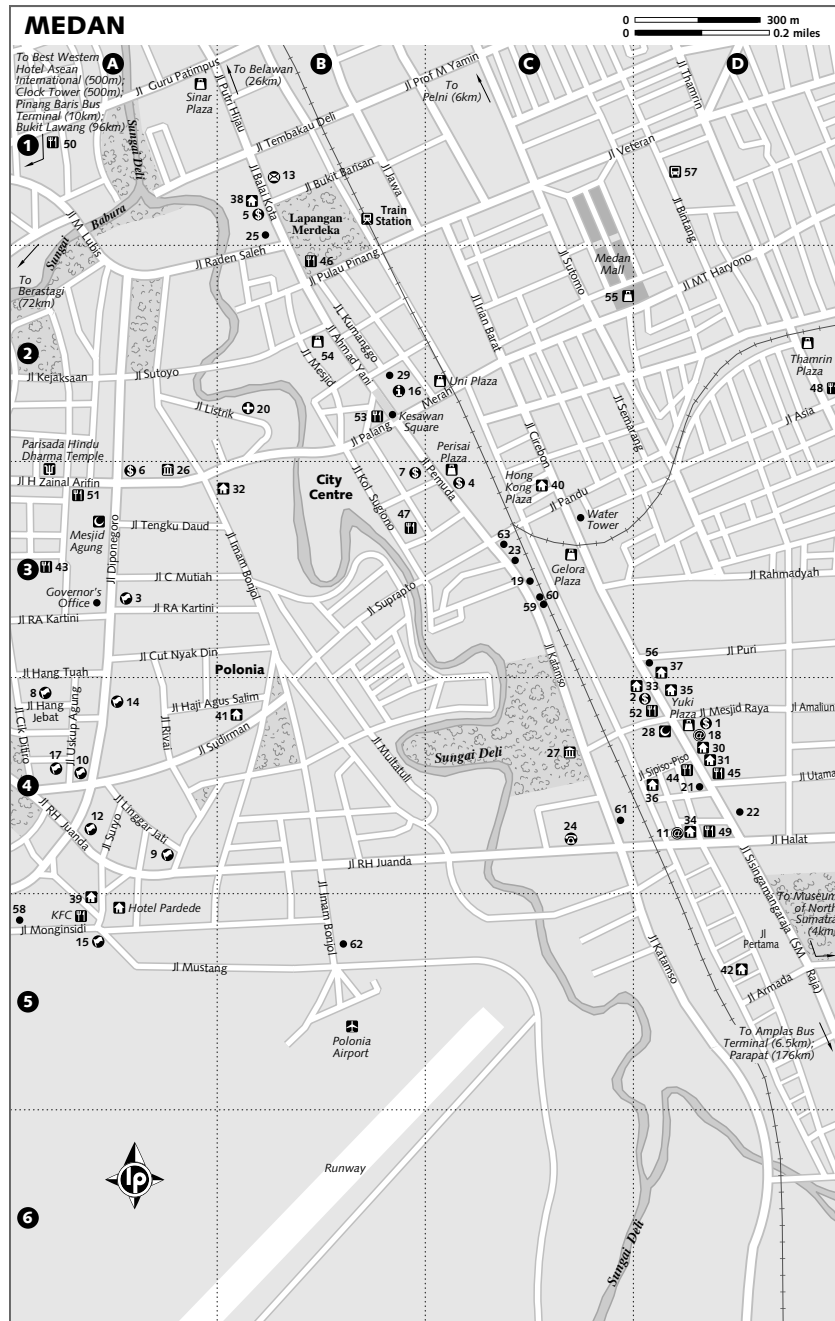
Rumah Sakit Gleneagles (% 4566368; Jl Listrik 6) The best hospital in the city, with a 24-hour walk-in clinic and pharmacy, as well as English-speaking doctors and specialists.

MONEY

Medan has branches of just about every bank operating in Indonesia. Most banks are headquartered along the junction of Jl Diponegoro and Jl H Zainal Arifin.

SUMATRA IS BURNING

Every year smoke and haze from fires used to clear farmland and plantations choke the skies over the island and its neighbours, sometimes downing planes and closing schools as far away as Kuala Lumpur. Malaysia complains bitterly about its inconsiderate neighbour and promises are made by Indonesian officials that next year won't be as bad, until next year comes. As for Sumatra, fires are part of the family. In the evening, backyard burn piles are most communities' solution to a lack of municipal garbage collection. Mini fires follow people throughout the day as most Sumatrans, men and women, are chain smokers. These clove-smoking dragons are so comfortable with a cigarette that it often looks like an extra digit. Cigarettes are so much more than a habit or a hobby: they are a social lubricant, the accepted payment for a medicine man and an offering to the deceased. Perhaps it is the influence of the smoking volcanoes that encourages the Sumatrans to light up.



INFORMATION		SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
ATM Complex.....	1 D4	Balai Kota.....	25 B1
ATM Complex.....	2 D4	Bukit Barisan Military Museum.....	26 A3
Australian Consulate.....	3 A3	BCA Bank.....	6 A3
Bank.....	4 C3	BNI Bank.....	7 B3
Bank Indonesia.....	5 B1	Denmark Consulate.....	8 A4
BCA Bank.....	6 A3	Finland Consulate.....	(see 8)
BNI Bank.....	7 B3	German Consulate.....	9 A4
Denmark Consulate.....	8 A4	Gramedia Bookshop.....	(see 55)
Finland Consulate.....	(see 8)	Gramedia Bookshop.....	(see 51)
German Consulate.....	9 A4	Hotel Danau Toba.....	32 B3
Gramedia Bookshop.....	(see 55)	Hotel Danau Toba International.....	32 B3
Gramedia Bookshop.....	(see 51)	International.....	(see 32)
Hotel Danau Toba.....	32 B3	Indian Consulate.....	10 A4
Hotel Danau Toba International.....	32 B3	Indo.net.....	11 D4
International.....	(see 32)	Japanese Consulate.....	12 A4
Indian Consulate.....	10 A4	Main Post Office.....	13 B1
Indo.net.....	11 D4	Malaysian Consulate.....	14 A4
Japanese Consulate.....	12 A4	Netherlands Consulate.....	15 A5
Main Post Office.....	13 B1	North Sumatra Tourist Office.....	16 B2
Malaysian Consulate.....	14 A4	Norwegian Consulate.....	17 A4
Netherlands Consulate.....	15 A5	Novotel Soechi Medan.....	(see 40)
North Sumatra Tourist Office.....	16 B2	Nusa Net.....	18 D4
Norwegian Consulate.....	17 A4	Perdana Express.....	19 C3
Novotel Soechi Medan.....	(see 40)	Rumah Sakit Gleneagles.....	20 B2
Nusa Net.....	18 D4	Sukma Medan.....	21 D4
Perdana Express.....	19 C3	Tobali Tour & Travel.....	22 D4
Rumah Sakit Gleneagles.....	20 B2	Trophy Tours.....	23 C3
Sukma Medan.....	21 D4	Wartel.....	24 C4
Tobali Tour & Travel.....	22 D4		

Bank Danamon (Jl Pemuda)
Bank Indonesia (Jl Balai Kota)
BCA bank (Bank Central Asia; Jl H Zainal Arifin)
BNI bank (Bank Negara Indonesia; Jl Pemuda)

There are ATMs all over the city. Try the following:
ATM (Yuki Plaza, Jl SM Raja)
ATM (Hotel Garuda Plaza, Jl SM Raja)

Shop around, as exchange rates can differ significantly from bank to bank. Medan typically offers the best rates on the island.
 Outside of banking hours (see p845), there are moneychangers on the corner of Jl Sipiso-Piso and Jl SM Raja, as well as at travel agencies on Jl Katamso.

POST
Main post office (Jl Bukit Barisan; 8am-6pm)
 Located in an old Dutch building on the main square; fax, photocopy and parcel services are available.

TELEPHONE
 International calls can be made at several wartel around town. The following have Home Country Direct phones:
Hotel Danau Toba International (% 4157000; Jl Imam Bonjol 17)
Novotel Soechi Medan (% 4561234; Jl Cirebon 76A)

TOURIST INFORMATION
 There is an information desk at the domestic arrivals terminal at the airport.
North Sumatra Tourist Office (% 4528436; Jl Ahmad Yani 107; 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) Brochures, maps and basic information.

TRAVEL AGENCIES
Jl Katamso is packed with travel agencies that handle air tickets and ferry tickets.
Perdana Express (% 4566222; Jl Katamso 35C) Sells Pelni and Penang ferry tickets.
Sukma Medan (% 7325418; Jl SM Raja 92A) Sells Penang ferry tickets.
Tobali Tour & Travel (% 7324472; Jl SM Raja 79C) For tourist buses to Danau Toba.
Trophy Tours (% 4155666; fax 451 1243; Jl Katamso 33D) Ticket agent for most of the airlines (1st floor), and tour operator (2nd floor).

Dangers & Annoyances
 Use big-city common sense in Medan. Watch your bags, as snatch thieves are prevalent. To keep your sanity, remember that you don't have to speak to everyone who speaks to you. It is common practice in Indonesia for becak drivers to call out to pedestrians to solicit business. You'll get a 'Hello mister' or even a 'Hello, you like cigarette?' every few feet, but not responding is perfectly acceptable if you don't want to go

SUMATRA

SUMATRA

anywhere. Although this may seem rude, in Sumatra a response is an invitation.

Sights

ISTANA MAIMOON

The crumbling **Maimoon Palace** (Jl Katamsor; admission by donation; 11 8am-5pm) was built by the sultan of Deli in 1888. The building is badly in need of restoration and is a good introduction to what all of Sumatra looks like.

MESJID RAYA

Just around the corner from the palace is the unusual black-domed **Grand Mosque** (cnr Jl Mesjid Raya & SM Raja; admission by donation; 11 9am-5pm, except prayer times), which was commissioned by the sultan in 1906. The Moroccan-style building has ornate carvings, Italian marble and stained glass from China.

Dress modestly when visiting the mosque – women are asked to cover their heads with the scarves provided.

MUSEUMS

The **Museum of North Sumatra** (% 7716792; Jl HM Joni 51; admission 1000Rp; 11 8.30am-noon & 1.30-5pm Tue-Sun) has an extensive collection of dog-eared artefacts covering North Sumatran history and culture and some fine stone carvings from Nias.

Bukit Barisan Military Museum (Jl H Zainal Arifin 8; admission by donation; 11 8am-1pm Mon-Thu & Sat), near the Hotel Danau Toba International, has a small collection of weapons, photos and memorabilia from WWII, the War of Independence and the Sumatran rebellion of 1958.

COLONIAL MEDAN

Ghosts of Medan's colonial mercantile past are still visible along Jl Ahmad Yani from Jl Palang Merah north to Lapangan Merdeka. Some are still stately relics, while others have been gutted and turned into parking garages, demonstrating the enduring friendship between Indonesia and its former coloniser.

Tjong A Fie Mansion (closed to public) is the former residence of a famous Chinese merchant; his home, which mixes Victorian and Chinese styles, is intentionally similar to his cousin's (Cheong Fatt Tze) home in Penang. Across the street is Tip Top Restaurant (see opposite), an historic spot for sipping colonial nostalgia. Further north is Lapangan Merdeka, a former parade

ground surrounded by handsome Art Deco buildings, such as the Bank Indonesia, Balai Kota (Town Hall) and the post office.

For more information about Medan's colonial architecture, check out *Tours Through Historic Medan and its Surroundings* by Dirk A Buiscool, a longtime Medan resident. The author also operates **Tri Jaya Tour & Travel** (% 7032967; www.trijaya-travel.com), which offers historic city tours.

Sleeping

Medan's budget options aren't the best value in Sumatra and you'll get more for your money in the midrange category. The majority of accommodation is on or near Jl SM Raja.

BUDGET

Sarah's Guest House (% 7358729; Jl Pertama 12; d from 30,000Rp) A friendly, family-run place, tucked away on a quiet road.

Hotel Zakia (% 7322413; Jl Sipiso-Piso 12; d 40,000-45,000Rp) Most backpackers' default choice, Zakia seems great until you've been feasted on by bedbugs.

Hotel Alamanda (% 7343507; Jl SM Raja 59/81A; d 40,000-60,000Rp) Not much going for it but location.

Hotel Raya (% 7366601; Jl RH Juanda 53; d 45,000-75,000Rp; a) A bit of an improvement from the other SM Raja cheapies.

JJ's Guesthouse (% 4578411; www.guesthousemedan.com; Jl Suryo 18; s/d 75,000/145,000) In an old Dutch villa, JJ's has tidy boarding-house-style rooms run by a mannerly Indonesian woman. The guesthouse is a quick becak ride to/from the airport (5000Rp), but they have a terrible time finding the place. It's across the street from the KFC and behind Hotel Pardele. Rates include breakfast and lots of chitchat.

MIDRANGE

Hotel tax and breakfast are included in the quoted rates.

Ibunda Hotel (% 7345555; fax 7358989; Jl SM Raja 31; d 150,000-200,000Rp; a) A cheery spot, with minty green walls and new tiled baths.

Hotel Sumatera (% 7321551; Jl SM Raja 35; d 180,000-200,000Rp; a) Add another zero to the price tag and rooms in Medan start to look a lot better.

Hotel Garuda Citra (% 7367733; fax 7360564; Jl SM Raja 27; d 200,000Rp; a) The rooms are better than the common space would suggest.

Hotel Danau Toba International (% 4157000; fax 4530553; Jl Imam Bonjol 17; d 269,000/300,000Rp; a s) A mini resort near the airport, Danau Toba International is starting to show its age, but Sumatra isn't youth-obsessed.

TOP END

Medan's best hotels all have the standard top-end facilities you'd expect such as fitness centres, swimming pools and 24-hour room service.

Hotel Garuda Plaza (% 7361111; fax 7364411; Jl SM Raja 18; r 300,000-900,000Rp; a s) Almost hip, Garuda Plaza is Medan's homage to Jakarta, with modern, corporate accents.

Hotel Deli River (% 7032965; Jl Raya Namorambe 129; r 400,000Rp; a) Outside the city chaos, this family-run hotel is shaded by fruit trees and overlooks the Deli River. The hotel provides free transfers from the airport and rates include breakfast.

Polonia Hotel (% 4142222; fax 4538870; Jl Jend Sudirman 14; d from 400,000-500,000Rp; a s) Close to the airport, in the aristocratic section of Medan.

Some other international-standard hotels are:

Novotel Soechi Medan (% 4561234; Jl Cirebon 76A; a s)

Best Western Hotel Asean International (% 575 888; cnr Jl Gatot Subroto & Glugur bypass; a s)

Inna Dharma Deli (% 7744; Jl Balai Kota 2; r from 475,000; a s) Occupies the site of a colonial hotel, supposedly where Mata Hari was once bedded.

Eating

Medan has the most varied selection of cuisines in Sumatra, from basic Malay-style *mie* (noodle) and *nasi* (rice) joints, to top-class hotel restaurants.

For Chinese food, let your tummy do a tour of Medan's **night market** (Pasar Malam; Jl Semarang), east of the railway line, off Jl Pandu. Lots of simple warungs occupy the front courtyards of the houses in the little lanes around Mesjid Raya; the menu is on display with a few pre-made curries, coffee, tea and sometimes juices.

Majestik Bakery & Cafe (Jl SM Raja 71; pastries 2000Rp) Keep the munchies at bay during a long bus ride with sweets from this super-sized bakery.

Rumah Makan Famili (Jl SM Raja 31; dishes from 6000Rp) A well-known Padang spot, on the ground floor of Ibunda Hotel, for beef ren-

dang with duck egg. The restaurant is a refreshing space drowning out traffic with an indoor waterfall and lots of high-flying businessmen meeting over lunch. You can also get the wacky meats: bowel, brain or heart simmered in coconut milk.

Rumah Makan Sibolga (Jl RH Juanda 65; dishes from 6000Rp) Near the travellers haunt, Sibolga can take good care of timid foreigners who pull up a chair.

Taman Rekreasi Seri Deli (Jl SM Raja; dishes from 8000Rp; 11 evening only) For basic Malay food, this venue, opposite the Mesjid Raya, is a slightly upmarket approach to stall dining. But the *keropak* (cracker) sellers, blind beggars and spoon players might find you more of an oddity than vice versa.

Bollywood Food Centre (% 4536494; Jl Muara Takus 7; dishes from 10,000Rp) Lip-smacking Indian-style curries are a family affair at this blindingly bright restaurant in Little India (Kampung Keling). It also serves cold Bintang. Malay-Indian roti shops are located nearby.

Sumatera Vegetarian Restaurant (Jl Gatot Subroto 35; mains 10,000Rp) For vegetarians, this is the place to go when you just can't face another *gado gado* (dish with mixed vegetables and coconut sauce).

Tip Top Restaurant (Jl Ahmad Yani 92; dishes 10,000-15,000Rp) Only the prices have changed at this old colonial relic, great for a drink of bygone imperialism. The menu, with type-writer font and 1950s dishes, should be enshrined in a museum rather than used to sate hunger.

Merdeka Walk (Lapangan Merdeka, Jl Balai Kota; dishes 10,000-15,000Rp; 11 5-11pm) Inspired by Singapore's alfresco dining, this collection of outdoor cafés occupies Lapangan Merdeka and is anchored by one of the shiniest McDonald's you'll see outside the Soviet bloc.

Corner Café Raya (cnr Jl SM Raja & Sipiso-Piso 1; dishes 12,000-18,000Rp; 11 24hrs) A Western expat and his Indonesian wife run this home-away-from-home café, complete with breakfast fry-ups, cold beer, international TV and travellers' advice. There's talk of opening up some of the upstairs rooms for rent.

Pasar Ramai (Ramani Market; Jl Thamrin) The main fruit market, next to Thamrin Plaza, is a profusion of colour and smells, and has an impressive selection of local and imported tropical fruit.

Pasar Buah Berastagi (Berastagi Fruit Market; Jl Kol Sugiono) An upmarket, air-con shop more conveniently located to fruit lovers.

Sun Plaza (cnr Jl Ainul Arifin & Diponegoro) The whole city have flipped their wristwatches over this shiny new shopping centre, where there's a, get this, Starbucks, pan-Asian food court, European-style restaurants and a startling amount of affluence.

Shopping

Medan has a number of interesting arts and crafts shops, particularly along Jl Ahmad Yani. **Toko Asli** (No 62), **Toko Rufino** (No 56) and **Toko Bali Arts** (No 68) all have selections of antique weaving, Dutch pottery and carvings.

Clothes, shoes, jewellery, electrical goods and cosmetics can be found at any of Medan's multilevel shopping centres. Most also have well-stocked supermarkets.

Getting There & Away

Medan is Sumatra's main international arrival and departure point.

AIR

Medan's Polonia Airport is 2km south of the city centre. Remember that there is an airport tax for departing flights (see the boxed text on p871).

There are daily international flights from Medan to Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Penang. Domestic flights connect Medan to Jakarta, Banda Aceh, Pekanbaru, Padang, Batam, Pontianak and Gunung Sitoli. See the Sumatra Airfares map (p380) for sample fares.

The following airlines have offices in Medan and serve the destinations as listed:

Adam Air (% 734999; www.flyadamair.com; Hotel Garuda Plaza, Jl SM Raja 18) Banda Aceh, Jakarta, Penang.
Air Asia (% 7331988; www.airasia.com; Jl SM Raja 19) Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur.

Garuda (Garuda Indonesia; % 4147744) Jl Monginsidi 340 (Jl Monginsidi 340); Jl Balai Kota 2 (Inna Dharma Deli, Jl Balai Kota 2) Jakarta, Banda Aceh.

Jatayu Airlines (% 4528988; www.jatayuairlines.co.id; Jl Katamso 62A) Banda Aceh, Ipoh, Jakarta, Lhokseumawe, Padang, Penang, Surabaya.

Karitika Air (% 4522433; Jl Katamso 37) Banda Aceh, Batam.

Malaysian Airlines (% 4519333; www.malaysiaairlines.com; Hotel Danau Toba International, Jl Imam Bonjol 17) Kuala Lumpur, Penang.

Merpati (Merpati Nusantara Airlines; % 321888; www.merpati.co.id; Jl Katamso 219) Batam, Gunung Sitoli, Jakarta, Palembang, Pekanbaru, Pontianak.

Silk Air (% 4537744; www.silkair.com; Hotel Polonia, Jl Sudirman 14) Singapore.

SMAC (% 4551888; Jl Imam Bonjol 59) Simeulue, Gunung Sitoli.

Sriwijaya Air (% 4552111; Jl Katamso 29) Pekanbaru.

BOAT

High-speed ferries (140/210 Malaysian ringgit one way/return; five hours; 10am daily) depart from the port of Belawan, 26km from Medan, to the Malaysian city of Penang.

There is a 30,000Rp surcharge for harbour tax and a bus transfer to Belawan from Medan; see the boxed text on below about transfer in the opposite direction. Tickets

can be bought from agents on Jl Katamso or Jl SM Raja (see p385). Buses depart Medan at 8am.

Pelni ships sail to Jakarta and Batam. The **Pelni office** (% 6622526; Jl Krakatau 17A) is 8km north of the city centre, but it is much easier to buy tickets and check schedules from the agencies on Jl Katamso.

BUS

There are two major bus terminals in Medan: Amplas, serving southern destinations, and Pinang Baris, serving northern destinations. For long-distance travel, most people deal directly with the bus ticketing offices located outside of the terminals.

Amplas bus terminal is 6.5km south of the city centre along Jl SM Raja. Almost any *opelet* heading south on Jl SM Raja will get you to Amplas (3000Rp). Bus ticket offices line the street nearby at Km 6 and include the following:

ANS (% 7867603) Serves Bukittinggi (air-con/executive 110,000/190,000Rp, 20 hours).

ALS (% 7866685) Also serves Bukittinggi – same details as ANS.

Pelangi (% 7863026) Runs buses to Pekanbaru (air-con/super-executive 120,000/160,000Rp, 12 hours) and Banda Aceh (air-con/executive 100,000/170,000Rp, 13 hours).

Kurnia (% 7016417; Jl SM Raja, Km 6) Runs buses to Jambi (air-con 220,000Rp, 24 hours) and Palembang (250,000Rp, 36 hours).

There are frequent public buses to Parapat (30,000Rp, five hours), the jumping-off point to Danau Toba. Minibuses (80,000Rp) also leave from **Tobali Tour & Travel** (% 7324472; Jl SM Raja 79C).

Pinang Baris bus terminal (Jl Gatot Subroto), 10km west of the city centre, serves northern destinations. Get there by taxi (25,000Rp) or by *opelet* 24, 37 or 64 (5000Rp).

There are frequent public buses to both Bukit Lawang (8000Rp, three hours) and Berastagi (7000Rp, two hours) every half-hour between 5.30am and 6pm.

Although there are buses to Banda Aceh from here, it is easier to get to the Pelangi ticket agent near Amplas.

A minibus departs at 8pm daily for Singkil (70,000Rp, 10 hours), the departure point for boats to the Banyak Islands. Buses depart from **Singkil Raya** (% 081 26560739; Jl Bintan), past the caged bird warehouses. Take *opelet* 53 from Jl SM Raja to Medal Mall.

CAR

Chauffeur-driven car rental can be arranged through most of the major hotels. **National Car Rental** (% 4157744, ext 766; Deli Raya Hotel, Jl Balai Kota 2) rents self-drive cars for 100,000Rp per day within Medan city limits.

TRAIN

Rail services are very limited, with just two trains a day to Tanjung Balai (business class only, 30,000Rp). There are four trains daily to Rantauparapat (business/executive 50,000/70,000Rp).

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

It is cheaper and less of a hassle to sail past the throng of taxi drivers to the becak queue at the airport gate (becak aren't allowed inside the airport). It should cost 7000Rp to 10,000Rp to reach the hotel district on Jl SM Raja. But if you like to haggle, a taxi ride should cost 20,000Rp.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Medan's got more *opelet* than you can shake a spoon player at. They cost 2500Rp for most in-town destinations. Here are a few helpful routes: white Mr X from Jl SM Raja to Kesawan Square, Lapangan Merdeka and train station; and yellow 64 from Maimmon Palace to Sun Plaza.

For becak, reckon on paying about 5000Rp for most destinations. But they'll ask you to pay more than double that.

BUKIT LAWANG

% 061 / pop 30,000

Imagine yourself a little hairier and better with your toes and you've got Bukit Lawang's main attraction: the orang-utan.

Bukit Lawang is one of the most accessible places to spot this reclusive primate, thanks to an orang-utan conservation programme that has been operating on the eastern edge of the Gunung Leuser National Park (p427) since the 1970s. The national park is one of the orang-utan's last remaining strongholds, with more than 5000 animals thought to be living in the wild.

Since the village is only 96km northwest of Medan, Bukit Lawang is also one of the easiest places from which to make the leap into the jungle, a diverse and rugged forest crisscrossed by clear, fast-flowing rivers.

THE WATERS OF FORGETTING: PENANG TO MEDAN

It must be difficult to mark time when each day looks the same. Every day tourists get off the boat at Belawan convinced that they've already paid for land transport to Medan and every day the same characters tell them that they are mistaken. Didn't we ask in Penang, the travellers ask each other? Shrugs, convictions, indifference. Tomorrow will be a repeat of today.

You see, the bus transfer to Medan, like all the great philosophical matters, is relative. In Malaysia, transfer from port to city is included. But cross the ocean and the answer is different.

That is, unless you have the key to uniformity: a separate bus ticket. If you received this crucial slip, then hold on to it until you're comfortably seated in a bus going somewhere within Medan's city limits.

Most buses picking up tourists are run by ticket agents in Medan and will deposit everyone at their office somewhere within the city limits. (Different agents, different buses, different offices.) All of this equals lots of potential for ripping off tourists.

If you want to skip all this nonsense, green *opelet* 81 runs between Belawan and Medan (7000Rp).

RED-HEADED COUSINS

Orang-utans, the world's largest arboreal mammal, once swung through the forest canopy throughout all of Southeast Asia, but are now found only in Sumatra and Borneo. Researchers fear that the few that do remain will not survive the continued loss of habitat to logging and agriculture.

While orang-utans are extremely intelligent animals, their way of life isn't compatible with a shrinking forest. Orang-utans are mostly vegetarians; they get big and strong (some males weigh up to 90kg) from a diet that would make a Californian hippie proud: fruit, shoots, leaves, nuts and tree bark, which they grind up with their powerful jaws and teeth. They occasionally also eat insects, eggs and small mammals.

All and all of the forest is their pantry, requiring them to migrate through a large territory following the fruit season. But they aren't social creatures; they prefer a solitary existence foraging during the day and building a new nest every night high up in the trees away from predators.

Orang-utans have a long life span, often living up to 30 to 40 years old in the wild. They breed slowly and have few young. Females reach sexual maturity at about the age of 10 and remain fertile until about the age of 30, on average having only one baby every six years. Only the females raise the young, which stay with their mothers until reaching sexual maturity.

The 'orang hutan' (a Malay word for 'person of the forest') has an extremely expressive face that has often suggested a very close kinship with the hairless ape (humans). But of all the great apes, the orang-utans are considered to be the most distantly related to humans.

Many tourists slip-slide through the mud and undergrowth on multi-day treks and hobble back to the village to recuperate.

Bukit Lawang was extensively damaged by a flash flood in November 2003, which killed 280 people and destroyed much of the riverfront development. The essentials of the town and tourist infrastructure have been rebuilt but the community is still grieving for lost relatives and livelihoods.

Orientation & Information

The nearby village of Gotong Royong, 2km east of the river, has effectively become the new town centre. About a kilometre north of the bus stop begins the stretch of river-side accommodation.

There are no banks, but a local travel agent will change money. There is no post office here, but you can buy stamps from the shops and use a local post box. There is a market on Friday and on Sunday in Bohorok town, 15km away, where you will also find the nearest police station and clinic.

Bukit Lawang Visitors Centre (17 8am-3pm) Displays of flora and fauna found in Gunung Leuser National Park, plus a book of medicinal plants and their uses, and fashion shots of some of the rehabilitated orang-utans. Exhibits are decidedly faded but it is still worth a look. Past visitors often record reviews of guides in the sign-in book.

PHKA ranger station (17 7am-3pm) This office isn't too eager to receive visitors, although its sign suggests otherwise.

PHKA permit office (park entrance) Timed with the orang-utan feedings, the rangers open up this office to collect permit fees; don't bother arranging permits in town. **Bukit Lawang Guide Association** (hours vary) Located across the street from the visitors centre, this place distributes a rate sheet for hikes and its touits will follow you around town until you sign up for a hike.

Dangers & Annoyances

The guide harangue starts on the bus before you've even left Medan. A friendly stranger hops aboard and makes a beeline to the nearest available seat. They are full of Bukit Lawang tidbits and just so happen to be going in the same direction or, imagine that, they are guides. Then they'll escort you to a guesthouse, sit you down and sign you up for a trek. If you resist, the Indonesian fish boil begins: everyone starts to apply the pressure, and every greeting in the town is 'Are you trekking tomorrow?' It's enough to make you hop back on the bus and seek refuge in Medan, of all places. Before leaving in a huff, give Bukit Lawang a day or two to grow on you. After the initial blitz, the place can be quite charming.

Sights & Activities

ORANG-UTAN FEEDING CENTRE

Bukit Lawang's famous orang-utan centre was set up in 1973 to help primates read-just to the wild after captivity or displace-

ment through land clearing. Much of the original duties of the centre have been moved to more-remote locations, but twice-daily feedings are still provided to semi-dependent orang-utans. These events are open to the public (no guide required) and provide one of the closest views of the forest ape outside the confines of a zoo.

During the centre's decades-long career, it has introduced 200 orang-utans into the jungle and many of them have successfully mated with the wild population. Before releasing the animals into the jungle, the centre teaches the orang-utans, many of whom have been kept as caged pets, how to forage for food in the wild, build nests, climb trees, and other essentials for survival. The orang-utans are also treated for diseases that they contracted during contact with humans.

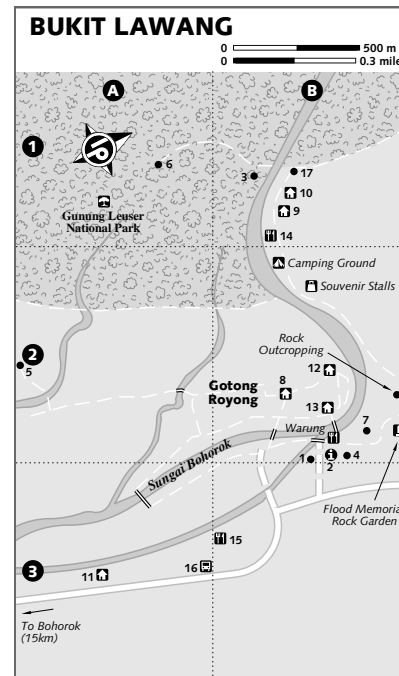
Once the apes are on their own in the wild, the centre still provides feedings to supplement awkward transitions or demanding circumstances. The feedings provided by the centre consist of milk and bananas and are considered a fairly bland

diet compared with the diversity of food found in the forest. The semi-wild apes who appear at the centre's 'welfare' platform are typically nursing or pregnant females in need of an extra source of nutrition.

There are two feeding times a day: 8.30am to 9.30am and 3pm to 4pm. These are the only times visitors are allowed to enter the national park without a guide.

The feeding platform is located on the west bank of Sungai Bohorok within the park boundaries, about a 20-minute walk from the village. The river crossing to the park office is made by dugout canoe. Perlindungan Hutan dan Konservasi Alam (PHKA; Directorate General of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation) permits are required to enter the park (20,000Rp, plus 500Rp insurance) and are available from the office at the foot of the trail to the platform.

Since 1996 the centre has been closed to new arrivals, as the park is considered saturated with orang-utans. A replacement quarantine centre, just outside Medan, opened in 2002 to carry on the rehabilitation efforts, but it is not open to the public. Originally funded by World Wildlife Fund and Frankfurt Zoological Society, the centre now falls under the management of the Indonesian government, which does not provide adequate budgetary resources.



INFORMATION

Bukit Lawang Guide Association.....	1	B2
Bukit Lawang Visitors Centre.....	2	B2
PHKA Permit Office & Park Entrance.....	3	B1
PHKA Ranger Station.....	4	B2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Bat Cave.....	5	A2
Orang-Utan Feeding Centre.....	6	A1
Tubing Rental.....	7	B2

SLEEPING

Bukit Lawang Eco Lodge.....	8	B2
Garden Inn.....	9	B1
Indrah Valley.....	(see 9)	
Jungle Inn.....	10	B1
Nora's Homestay & Restaurant.....	11	A3
Wisma Bukit Lawang Indah.....	12	B2
Wisma Leuser Sibayak.....	13	B2

EATING

Open Air Cafe.....	14	B1
Tony's Restaurant.....	15	B3

TRANSPORT

Bus Station.....	16	A3
Canoe to Park Entrance.....	17	B1

MONKEY BUSINESS

When out on a trek in Bukit Lawang, spotting an orang-utan won't be hard. In fact, some of the semi-wild apes will find you first in the hope of getting a hand-out. In the past, guides regularly broke park regulations and maintained their own feeding sites in the forests to ensure an orang spotting, but with the decline in tourism that practice seems to have subsided. What does remain are a few human-friendly apes that will follow trekking groups until a meal is delivered. Guides don't actively encourage the illegal feeding, but they don't discourage it either.

The obvious problems with these unsanctioned feedings are that the orang-utans often learn aggressive behaviour, which can range from shoving their outstretched hands in tourists' faces or grabbing backpacks. Touching an orang-utan is more dangerous for the animal than for you because human diseases can be passed through contact and then affect the whole orang community.

Park rangers are not paid in a timely fashion and permit money is sent directly to Jakarta. Despite having these problems, the rangers are dedicated to their jobs and often supplement their incomes and their hands-on experience by working with foreign researchers.

Outside Gunung Leuser National Park, orang-utans can be found in the Tanjung Puting and Kutai National Parks, in the Gunung Palung and Bukit Raja Reserves in Kalimantan, as well as in neighbouring Sarawak and Sabah in Malaysia.

For more information about Sumatran orang-utans try the Sumatran Orangutan Society (www.orangutans-sos.org) and the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme (www.sumatranorangutan.com).

TREKKING

Treks into the Gunung Leuser National Park require a guide and can last anywhere from three hours to two days. Most people opt for two days so that they can spend the night in the jungle, which increases the likelihood of seeing orang-utans and other critters in the wild.

Despite the pressure, take your time in choosing a guide. Talk to returning trekkers and decide how much jungle time you really need.

If you've got serious flora or fauna curiosities, you should arrange a trek with one of the park rangers who often collaborate with foreign researchers.

If you just want a few souvenir pictures and stories, find a guide you like. People who trekked with guides from the village have mainly positive feedback, with the greatest kudos going to the nightly meals

and campfire socials. Common complaints range from guides who don't know enough about the flora and fauna, bunching of treks together, and feeding of the orang-utans.

For experienced jungle hikers the trails around Bukit Lawang are overtrekked; you're better off to be based at Gurah (p428).

It is best to hike in a small group and to leave as early as possible, as this increases your chances of seeing wildlife. See the boxed text on opposite for packing instructions.

Guide rates are fixed by the Sumatra Guide Association: they are US\$10 for a three-hour trek; US\$25 for a day trek; and US\$45 for a two-day trek, including overnight camping in the jungle and rafting back to town. Prices include basic meals, guide fees, camping equipment and the park permit.

SHORT WALKS

There are a number of short walks around Bukit Lawang that don't require guides or permits, but you'll be lucky to escape town alone.

The canal that runs alongside the river is an easy stroll through the village. In the evening everything gets washed in the rushing waters: frolicking kids, soiled bums, dirty laundry. Activities usually considered private are social in the communal waters.

The most interesting is a 20-minute walk, signposted from the Bukit Lawang Eco Lodge, to a bat cave. This 2km walk passes through rubber plantations and patches of forest. A lot of the trees are durian, so take care in late June and July, when the spiked fruits crash to the ground (there are signs

warning people not to linger). You'll need a torch (flashlight) to explore the cave.

TUBING

A shed along the river en route to the orang-utan centre rents inflated truck inner tubes (7000Rp per day), which can be used to ride the Sungai Bohorok rapids. Don't underestimate the river though; currents are extremely strong and when the water is high, tubing is officially off limits, though few will tell you this. People have got into difficulties on the river, and life jackets aren't available.

Sleeping

The flood wiped out many of Bukit Lawang's family-run lodges and only a few have decided to rebuild. The following are listed in geographic order from south to north.

Nora's Homestay & Restaurant (% 081 3620706561; d from 20,000Rp) Big Mama Nora has a brood of bamboo huts built in a quiet corner between the main road and the rice fields. Ask the bus driver to drop you off 3km before the river.

On the western bank of the river are the following:

Bukit Lawang Eco Lodge (% 081 26079983; r 80,000-165,000Rp) The village's most upmarket

lodging. Eco Lodge has a range of hotel-style rooms set back in the forest. There are many commendable attempts at ecofriendly business: an organic garden provides produce for the restaurant, a medicinal plant garden preserves the pharmaceutical aspects of the jungle and there is recycling.

Wisma Leuser Sibayak (% 4150576; r from 30,000Rp) Only a few rooms are open, while others are empty shells from the flood.

Wisma Bukit Lawang Indah (% 088 28643; d 30,000Rp) A little further upstream is this stereotypical budget spot.

On the eastern bank, another 10 minutes' walk from the visitors centre, are several peaceful riverine guesthouses.

Indrah Valley (d 20,000Rp) Two bamboo huts squat beside the river, with small balconies facing the forest and gangs of monkeys scampering across the rocks.

Garden Inn (d 30,000-50,000Rp) Immediately behind Indrah, Garden has basic rooms in a nondescript building.

Jungle Inn (d from 50,000Rp) Kitty-cornered to the park entrance, Jungle Inn has got personality. One room overlooks a cascading waterfall, while another incorporates the hill's rock face and the bathroom sprouts a shower from living ferns. Local woodworkers

JUNGLE KNOW-HOW

The Sumatran jungle is legendary for its terrain: steep slippery pitches and precipitous drops. The trails can be well-worn paths or barely visible breaks in the underbrush. This is no stroll through the park, you'll need to be responsibly fit, and well prepared, for any jungle wander.

Trekking Checklist

Bring along mosquito and leech repellent, sunscreen and lots of water. Wear long sleeves and long pants to protect against bugs and thorns, and sturdy shoes with good grip to combat gravity. A dry change of clothes and sandals for camp are a good idea.

The difference between the rainy season and the dry season is wishful thinking; paths are always slippery and rain is usually likely. Monsoon storms usually creep up in the afternoons and will undoubtedly unleash torrents on you. Travel with a lightweight rain jacket and a water-resistant bag that will keep electronics and passports dry (a plastic bag isn't going to work). A sarong is useful as a sleeping sheet or as a towel.

Responsible Trekking

Although the jungle seems indestructible, seemingly benign human activities can disturb the vulnerable communities who call this place home. Here are a few tips for being considerate in the forest.

Collect your trash, even fruit rubbish, and carry it out of the jungle with you for proper disposal.

Don't feed the animals. Giving away food to wild creatures robs them of their independence and creates aggressive behaviour.

designed much of the carved railings and furniture from driftwood.

Eating

Most of the guesthouses have restaurants, where the guides camp out for new arrivals.

Tony's Restaurant (mains 15,000Rp) Although it looks closed, Tony's is still firing up pizzas. It is located directly behind the bus terminal.

Several open-air cafés along the river en route to the park entrance serve fruit salads, nasi goreng and a chill ambience.

Durian trees are abundant in and around Bukit Lawang. The fruit is as fresh and as cheap as you'll find anywhere and perfumes the whole place with its distinctive scent.

Getting There & Away

What should be a quick trip into the country is a four-hour rover mission on the surface of the moon. The road has crater-sized potholes, and buses have to yield to heavy vehicles overloaded with palm oil bundles from the local plantations.

There are direct buses to Medan's Pinang Baris bus terminal every half-hour between 5.30am and 5pm (8000Rp). Public minivans (10,000Rp) also leave for Medan throughout the day.

If you catch the first bus out of Bukit Lawang at 5.30am, you might be able to return to Medan in time to catch the boat to Penang, but the flexibility of time in Indonesia is unreliable in a crunch.

BERASTAGI

☎ 0628 / pop 600,000

You might have to pinch yourself upon arriving in Berastagi: the town is too busy with daily life to pounce on tourists. What a blissful relief from the guide overload you'll find elsewhere in Sumatra.

Berastagi has a healthy economy based on something other than tourism. As an agricultural trade centre, the town's markets are always humming with activity, and modern-day snake oil hawkers fill the sidewalks with 'big-city' amusements for isolated country folk. On sale are jungle miracle cures, second-hand shoes, and 20-years-behind pop music. On Sunday, the largely Christian community takes the babies and bibles out for worship.

Beyond the town are the lush green fields of the Karo Highlands, dominated by two volcanoes: Gunung Sinabung to the west and the smoking Gunung Sibayak to the north. These volcanoes are a day hike apiece, making them two of Sumatra's most accessible volcanoes, and the primary reason why tourists get off the bus in the first place.

Berastagi is at an altitude of 1300m, and the climate is deliciously cool, sometimes even cold.

Orientation

Berastagi is essentially a one-street town spread along Jl Veteran. The colourful Tugu Perjuangan (Combat Memorial), com-

memorating the Bataks' struggle against the Dutch in the 1800s, marks the centre of town. The hill to the northwest of town is Bukit Gundaling, a popular picnic spot.

Information

BNI bank (Bank Negara Indonesia; Jl Veteran) With ATMs.

BRI bank (Bank Rakyat Indonesia; Jl Veteran) With ATMs.

Post office (Jl Veteran) Near the memorial at the northern end of the street.

PT Pesiar Tour & Travel (Jl Veteran) Can book plane tickets.

Telkom wartel (Jl Veteran) Near the memorial at the northern end of the street is a 24-hour Telkom wartel, which has a Home Country Direct phone and internet.

Sights & Activities

Berastagi is under-utilised as an escape from Indonesia's intensity. Most people spend a couple of days here hiking and then tramp south to Danau Toba. But there is a lot of unhindered wandering you can do on foot and motorbike.

Because there aren't specific attractions within the town, the surrounding sights are listed here and can be found on the Karo Highlands map (p394).

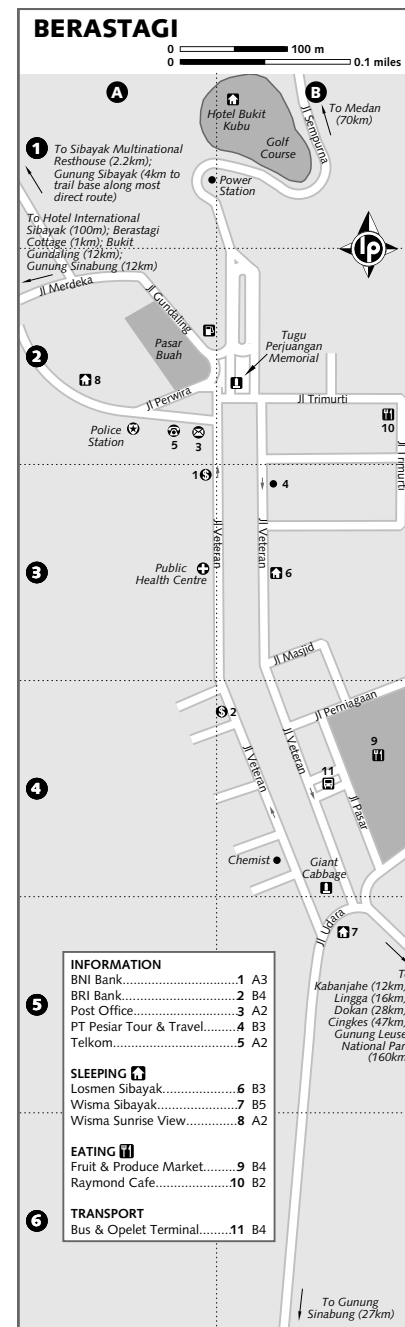
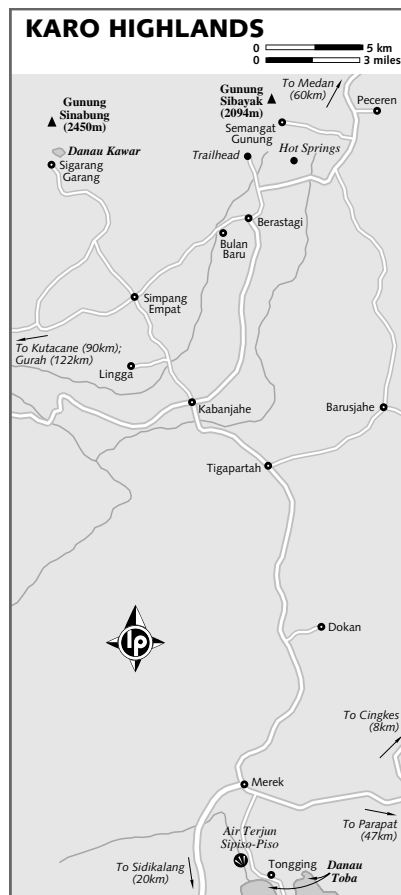
Trails on both volcanoes are neither clearly marked nor well maintained and it is easy to get lost or lose your footing. During the wet season, paths can be extremely slippery or even washed out. The weather is variable and views from either mountain are far from guaranteed. Be prepared for abrupt weather changes (fog, cold temperatures and rain can sneak up during a clear day). Bring supplies such as food, drink, rain gear and a torch, in case you get caught out after dark. See the boxed text on p393 for other hiking necessities.

GUNUNG SIBAYAK

At 2094m, Gunung Sibayak is probably the most accessible of Indonesia's volcanoes.

If you've got a companion, the hike can be done without a guide. If travelling alone, it is recommended to hire a guide through the guesthouses; typical rates are 100,000Rp to 150,000Rp. The hike can be done in five hours and you should set out as early as possible.

There are three ways to tackle the climb, depending on your energy level. The easiest way is to take the track that starts to the northwest of town, a 10-minute walk past



the Sibayak Multinational Resthouse. Take the left-hand path beside the entrance fee hut (2000Rp). From here it's 7km (about three hours) to the top and fairly easy to follow. Finding the path down is a little tricky. When you reach the crater, turn 90 degrees to the right (anticlockwise), climb up to the rim and start looking for the stone steps down the other side of the mountain. If you can't find the steps, you can also go back the way you came.

On the descent you can stop off at the hot springs (admission 3000Rp), a short ride from Semangat Gunung on the road back to Berastagi.

Alternatively, you can catch a local bus (2000Rp) to Semangat Gunung at the base of the volcano, from where it's a two-hour climb to the summit. There are steps part of the way but the track is narrower and in poorer condition than the one from Berastagi.

The longest option is to trek through the jungle from Air Terjun Panorama; this waterfall is on the Medan road, about 5km north of Berastagi. Allow at least five hours for this walk.

On weekends, day-trippers from Medan huff and puff their way to the top. If Asian hikers amuse you, then you'll be in for a treat.

Before setting out, pick up a map from Wisma Sibayak (opposite) in Berastagi and peruse the guestbook for comments and warnings about the hike.

GUNUNG SINABUNG

This peak, at 2450m, is considerably higher than Sibayak, with even more-stunning views from the top. Be warned, though, that the clouds love mingling with the summit and can often obscure the vista.

Most guesthouses recommend taking a guide, as hikers have gotten lost and died. The path up the mountain from Danau Kawar is fairly well trodden by locals, but relying on a guide takes the guesswork out of timing your return to town or reading changing weather conditions. The climb takes six to eight hours depending on your skill and the descent route.

To reach the trailhead, take an *opelet* to Danau Kawar (6000Rp, one hour). The entrance fee is 2000Rp. There is a scenic campground surrounding Danau Kawar if you're travelling with gear.

TRADITIONAL VILLAGES

There are some fine examples of traditional Karo Batak architecture in the villages around Berastagi. Most of the houses are no more than 60 years old – or possibly 100, but certainly not 400, as claimed by some guides.

Guesthouses in Berastagi can arrange guides who will be able to give cultural overviews of the Karo.

Kampung Peceren

On the northern outskirts of Berastagi, this village has a cluster of traditional houses, which are still occupied. Any *opelet* heading north can drop you there (2000Rp). There's a 2000Rp entry fee to the village.

Lingga

The best-known and most visited of these villages is Lingga (admission 2000Rp), a few kilometres northwest of Kabanjahe. There are about a dozen traditional houses with characteristic horned roofs. Some, such as the *rumah rajah* (king's house), are occupied and in good condition; others, including

the *sapo ganjang* (the house for unmarried, young men), have almost collapsed.

There are regular *opelet* to Lingga from Kabanjahe (2000Rp).

Dokan

The charming little village of Dokan is approximately 16km south of Kabanjahe. Traditional houses are still in the majority and most are in good condition. Entry is by donation and you can get here by the occasional direct *opelet* from Kabanjahe (4000Rp).

AIR TERJUN SIPISO-PISO

These narrow but impressive falls cascade 120m down to the north end of Danau Toba, 24km from Kabanjahe and about 300m from the main road. It is fairly easy to get here by yourself; take a bus from Kabanjahe to Merek (8000Rp) and then walk or hitch a ride on a motorbike.

Sleeping

Jl Veteran sees extremely heavy traffic and many rooms in the centre of town are very noisy. Berastagi's best options are all sister properties of the Sibayak empire. Keep in mind that a hot shower might be a happy splurge after a long hike.

BUDGET

Wisma Sibayak (☎ 91104; Jl Udara 1; d 25,000-50,000Rp) Tidy and spacious rooms in the two-storey building have great views but lots of street noise. The restaurant is the closest Berastagi comes to a travellers haunt, with ageing comment books and knowledgeable staff.

Losmen Sibayak Guesthouse (☎ 91122; Jl Veteran 119; d 35,000-40,000Rp) Nice cheapies with a lot of Indonesian personality comprise the Sibayak enterprise's budget place.

Wisma Sunrise View (☎ 92404; Jl Kaliaga; d 50,000Rp) Perched on a little hill, Sunrise earns its namesake view and is just far enough outside of town to be a convenient stroll. Alternatively, you can catch a blue 'Bayu' *opelet* (1500Rp).

Sibayak Multinational Resthouse (☎ 91031; Jl Pendidikan 93; d 50,000-75,000Rp) Away from the town centre, Multinational has a manicured garden and straightforward rooms with hot shower. On weekends, Indonesian families stretch their lungs in the serene setting. The

hotel is a short *opelet* ride north of town on the road to Gunung Sibayak.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

A number of three- and four-star hotels appeal to out-of-towners, but their price tags don't match their standards.

Berastagi Cottages (Jl Gundaling; d from 300,000Rp) Another quiet, out-of-town possibility with a range of stylish rooms. There are great garden views.

Hotel International Sibayak (☎ 91301; www.hotelsibayak.com; Jl Merdeka; d 700,000-900,000Rp; Ⓢ) Wooden floors, generous beds, read-the-newspaper toilets: there's a lot right about the International, except the price. If you can eek out a discount, then you'll earn a shiny frugal star. The hotel is on the road to Bukit Gundaling.

Eating & Drinking

The rich volcanic soils of the surrounding countryside supply much of North Sumatra's produce, which passes through Berastagi's colourful produce and fruit markets. Passionfruit is a local speciality, as is *marquisa Bandung*, a large, sweet, yellow-skinned fruit; and the *marquisa asam manis*, a purple-skinned fruit, makes delicious drinks.

Most of the budget hotels have restaurants, but head into town for more diversity. Along Jl Veteran there are a variety of evening food stalls, as well as simple restaurants specialising in *tionghoa* (Chinese food). Because this is a Christian community, you'll see a lot of *babi* (pork) on the menu. Another local favourite is *pisang goreng* (fried banana).

Cafe Raymond (Jl Veteran 49; h 8am-midnight) Berastagi's local bohemians hang out at Café Raymond, a roots-reggae homage, serving fruit juices, beer and Western food.

Getting There & Away

The bus terminal (Jl Veteran) is conveniently located near the centre of town. You can also catch buses to Medan (8000Rp, 2½ hours), anywhere along the main street; buses run to and from Medan between 6am and 8pm.

To reach Danau Toba without backtracking through Medan, catch an *opelet* to Kabanjahe (2500Rp, 20 minutes) and change to a bus for Pematangsiantar

WHAT SPOCK WON'T TELL YOU ABOUT VOLCANOLOGY

There's nothing like an exhausting hike up a volcano and a nervous peek into the pit to ignite an interest in earth science.

Inside both Sibayak and Sinabung are fumaroles, vents through which gases escape. Sulphur is the most pungent of the steaming vapours and causes difficulty in breathing if you get too close. Sulphur also lends its brilliant yellow colour to some of the surrounding rocks.

Volcanic rocks are classified on how much silica they contain. The easiest types to identify within a volcanic crater are the subsets of rhyolite: pumice and obsidian. The black glassy obsidian is formed when lava cools quickly, typically a result of effusive lava flows. The white porous material that gives way when you walk on it is pumice, which is the solidified version of a frothy, gas-filled lava eruption.

(12,000Rp, three hours), then connect with a Parapat-bound bus (10,000Rp, 1½ hours). It is a little bit of a pain but gets there in time.

Berastagi is the southern approach for visits to Gunung Leuser National Park. To reach the park, catch a bus to Kutacane (40,000Rp, five hours).

Getting Around

Opelet to the surrounding villages leave from the bus terminal. They run every few minutes between Berastagi and Kabanjahe (2500Rp), the major population and transport centre of the highlands. Local *opelet* are most easily waved down from the clock tower in town.

PARAPAT

☎ 0625

The mainland departure point for Danau Toba, Parapat has everything a transiting tourist needs: transport, lodging and supplies.

The commercial sector of the town clumps together along the Trans-Sumatran Hwy (Jl Sisingamangaraja, aka SM Raja). Branching southwest towards the pier, Jl Pulau Samosir passes most of Parapat's hotels. After 1km, a right fork (Jl Haranggao) leads to the pier, another kilometre southwest. The bus terminal is 2km east of town, but most buses pick up and drop off passengers from ticket agents along the highway or at the pier.

Information

There is a string of moneychangers and a wartel along Jl Haranggao.

BRI bank (Bank Rakyat Indonesia; Jl SM Raja) Has an ATM.

Planet Wisata (Jl Haranggao) Internet access for 10,000Rp per hour.

Post office (Jl SM Raja)

Sleeping

You'll have to crash for the night if your bus gets in after the last boat to Samosir. Here are a few options:

Hotel Singgalang (☎ 41260; Jl SM Raja 52; r 25,000-50,000Rp) A big Chinese-run place with basic rooms and a downstairs restaurant.

Charlie's Guesthouse (☎ 41277; Jl Tiga Raya 7; d 30,000Rp) Beside the ferry dock, Charlie's is cheap and close; it's run by a local Toba music legend.

Mars Family Hotel (☎ 41459; Jl Kebudayaan 1; d 50,000-150,000Rp) On a quiet street near the waterfront, this place has a variety of unremarkable rooms from windowless boxes to more-expensive options with lake views.

Hotel Toba (☎ 41073; Jl Pulau Samosir 10; d 150,000-200,000Rp) If you're not in a hurry to get out of Parapat, Hotel Toba has breezy common spaces, a sandy beach and solid rooms.

Eating

The highway strip (Jl SM Raja) is well equipped to feed the passing traveller, with every variety of Indonesian cuisine. Mr Diamond is the entertaining and enterpris-

ing proprietor of **Blue Monday Coffee Shop** (Jl SM Raja; mains from 15,000Rp). In addition to a cup of coffee, he'll sell you a tour to the outlying countryside, sing a few old Western pop songs, book a bus ticket and, if you need accommodation, he's even got rooms (20,000Rp). Many of the ANS buses drop off foreigners here.

Getting There & Away

BOAT

For details of ferries to Samosir, see p406.

BUS

The **bus terminal** (Trans-Sumatran Hwy) is about 2km east of town on the way to Bukittinggi, but is not frequently used (so say the travel agents). Prices are highly negotiable, so shop around at the different ticket agents.

Buses to Medan (30,000Rp, five hours) are frequent, although services taper off in the afternoon. There are also minibuses (50,000Rp) that deliver passengers to Jl SM Raja in Medan. Other destinations include Sibolga (60,000Rp, six hours), Bukittinggi (economy/super-executive 160,000/200,000Rp, 15 hours) and Padang (economy/super-executive 170,000/200,000Rp, 17 hours).

If you're heading south to Bukittinggi, you get to experience the hazing ritual of travelling the Trans-Sumatran Hwy. The highway is more like a back road and the trip akin to the spin cycle. Now you know how your socks feel.

Getting Around

Opelet shuttle constantly between the ferry dock and the bus terminal (2000Rp).

DANAU TOBA

☎ 0625 / pop 517, 000

Toba gets touted as Sumatra's prettiest volcanic lake, a claim that detracts from its real appeal: the Batak people. Sure there is a backdrop of mountains and a cool, clear lake, but Toba's relaxed atmosphere remains intact even when the day is hazy or the shorefront overgrown with weeds. And the Batak culture has modernised with grace despite tinkering from missionaries and tourists.

A lot has changed in Toba since its heyday, when Bataks and backpackers found that their common interests of having a

good time made a nice little cottage industry. The spring break-style partiers now howl at the moon in Thailand instead of Toba. On weekends money from Medan and Aceh comes to call and a few travellers still pop in with great expectations. But the numbers aren't enough to hide the obvious: tourism in Toba is almost dead.

This is all the more reason to come, not out of some sort of travelling philanthropy, but because the beaten trail is now off the beaten track. Nice hotel rooms go for a song, the outgoing Batak are genuinely glad to see you and the crowds that make travelling feel like child's play are being babysat somewhere else.

'*Horas*' is the traditional Batak greeting and it's delivered with great gusto, as are a few glasses of jungle juice (most Toba Batak are Christians) to warm up the pipes for the music-loving Batak.

Orientation

Danau Toba is the largest lake in Southeast Asia, covering a massive 1707 sq km. In the middle of this huge expanse is Pulau Samosir, a wedge-shaped island almost as big as Singapore that was created by an eruption between 30,000 and 75,000 years ago. Well, Bahasa Indonesia calls it an island, but those visiting the west of Toba will discover that Samosir isn't actually an island at all. It's linked to the mainland by a narrow isthmus at the town of Pangururan – and then cut again by a canal.

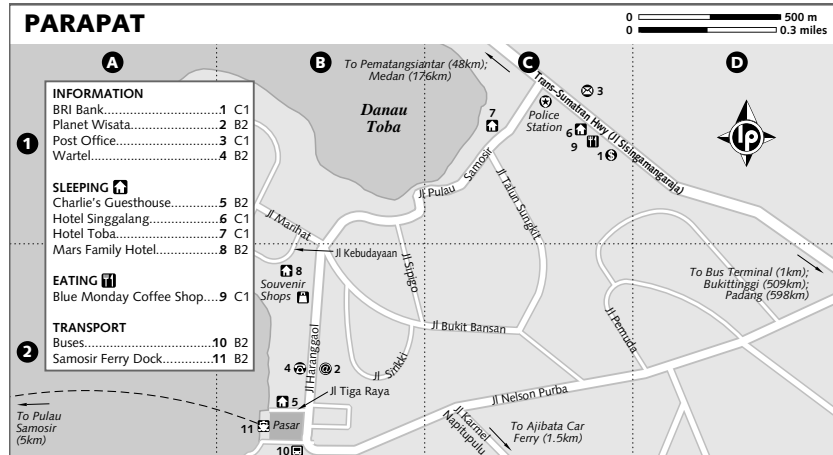
Directly facing Parapat is another peninsula occupied by the village of Tuk Tuk, which has Samosir's greatest concentration of tourist facilities. Tomok, a few kilometres south of Tuk Tuk, is the main village on the east coast of the island; Pangururan is the largest town on the west coast.

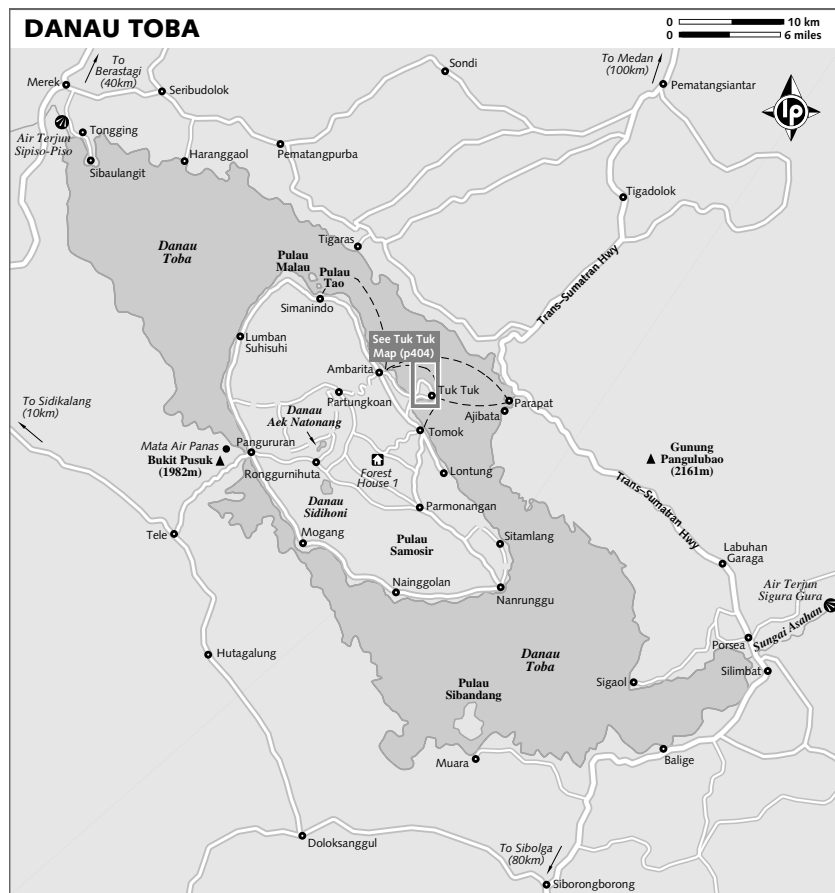
Information

The following facilities are all located in Tuk Tuk (p404). There is a small police station at the top of the road leading to the Carolina Hotel (p405).

BOOKSHOPS

Better load up on reading material in Toba, because the rest of Sumatra is a desert for the printed word. **Gokhon Library** and several other sundries shops nearby have used and rental books.





INTERNET ACCESS & TELEPHONE

Internet access (25,000Rp per hour) is available at Samosir Cottages (p404). A wartel is located across the street from Rumba Pizzeria & Homestay.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Health centre (☎ 451075) Small 24-hour place close to the turn-off to Carolina Hotel, at the southern end of the peninsula; is equipped to cope with cuts and bruises and other minor problems.

MONEY

Be sure to change your money before you get to Samosir. Exchange rates at the island's hotels and moneychangers are pretty awful.

POST

Samosir's only post office is in Ambarita, but several shops in Tuk Tuk sell stamps and have postboxes.

Sights & Activities

In Tuk Tuk, **Sunshine Beauty & Wellness** (☎ 451108, Tuk Tuk; 10am-6pm) will turn beasts into beauties with affordable haircuts, facials, after-sun treatment and traditional massages.

You'll see more Christian paraphernalia in Toba than you will in the American Bible Belt. In Batak communities, homes are typically decorated with tapestries of a long-haired Jesus and gold cross necklaces adorn cleavage. The rice paddies and

villages are cultivated around sober Protestant-style churches and tombs merging traditional Batak architecture and Christian crosses.

This was once the 'heart of darkness' from the perspective of the European and American missionaries and the first evangelists met their makers by the tips of spears. Good timing brought survival and fame to a German missionary named Nommenson. His arrival preceded a bumper crop and in return the Batak king traded in a few animistic beliefs for the lucky charm of Christianity.

The resulting blend of traditional culture and imported religion, observable in the Batak countryside, puts a realistic face to those exotic tales of mannered missionaries and cannibalistic natives.

The following sights and activities are located around Danau Toba (p400).

KING SIDABUTAR GRAVE

The Batak king who adopted Christianity is buried in Tomok, a village southeast of Tuk Tuk. The king's image is carved on his tombstone, along with those of his bodyguard and Anteng Melila Senega, the woman the king is said to have loved for many years without fulfilment. The tomb is also decorated with carvings of *singa*, mythical creatures with grotesque three-horned heads and bulging eyes. Next door in death is the missionary who converted the tribe, the career equivalent of boy band stardom. Next in the row is an older Batak royal tomb, which is used as a multilingual fertility shrine for childless couples, according to souvenir vendors.

The tombs are 500m up a narrow lane lined with souvenir stalls. Tomok is only 5km from Tuk Tuk and is an easy bike ride.

STONE CHAIRS

More traditional Batak artistry and legend is on view in Ambarita, 5km north of Tanjung Tuk Tuk.

The 300-year-old **stone chairs** (admission 2000Rp; 10am-6pm) is where village matters were discussed and wrongdoers were tried. A second set of megaliths in an adjoining courtyard was where the accused were bound, blindfolded, sliced and rubbed with chilli and garlic before being beheaded.

Guides love to play up the story and ask for volunteers to demonstrate the process. It is customary to pay a small fee for the tale, or risk meeting a savoury death (just kidding).

There is a small market in Ambarita on Thursday (7am to 10am) to the right of the T-junction.

MUSEUM HUTA BOLON SIMANINDO

At the northern tip of the island, in Simanindo, there's a fine old traditional house that has been restored and now functions as a **museum** (admission 5000Rp; 10am-5pm). It was formerly the home of Rajah Simalungun, a Batak king, and his 14 wives. Originally, the roof was decorated with 10 buffalo horns, which represented the 10 generations of the dynasty.

The museum has a small but interesting collection of brass cooking utensils, weapons, Dutch and Chinese crockery, sculptures and Batak carvings.

Displays of traditional Batak dancing are performed at 10.30am from Monday to Saturday (30,000Rp), if enough tourists show up.

The village of Simanindo is 15km from Tuk Tuk and is accessible with a hired motorbike.

SIMANINDO TO PANGURURAN

The road that follows the northern rind of Samosir between Simanindo and the town of Pangururan is a scenic ride through the Bataks' embrace of life and death. In the midst of the fertile rice fields are large multi-storey graves decorated with the distinctive Batak-style house and a simple white cross. Reminiscent of Thai spirit houses, Batak graves reflect much of the animistic attitudes of sheltering the dead. Cigarettes and cakes are offered to the deceased as memorials or as petitions for favours. Typical Christian holidays, such as Christmas, dictate special attention to the graves.

In Pangururan, a simple **warung** (Jl Danau Toba; mains 10,000Rp), across from the police station, looks more like a bus stop than a restaurant, but it does a busy lunch-time trade of Batak dishes, such as *sassang* (stewed pork) and *nila* (fish stew).

SWIMMING

Danau Toba reaches a depth of 450m deep in places and is refreshingly cool. But only

THE BATAKS

British traveller William Marsden astonished the 'civilised' world in 1783 when he returned to London with an account of a cannibalistic kingdom in the interior of Sumatra that, nevertheless, had a highly developed culture and a system of writing. The Bataks have been a subject of fascination ever since.

The Bataks are a Proto-Malay people descended from Neolithic mountain tribes from northern Thailand and Myanmar (Burma) who were driven out by migrating Mongolian and Siamese tribes.

When the Bataks arrived in Sumatra they trekked inland, making their first settlements around Danau Toba, where the surrounding mountains provided a natural protective barrier. They lived in virtual isolation for centuries.

The Bataks were among the most warlike peoples in Sumatra, and villages were constantly feuding. They were so mistrustful that they did not build or maintain natural paths between villages, or construct bridges. The practice of ritual cannibalism, involving eating the flesh of a slain enemy or a person found guilty of a serious breach of *adat* (traditional law), survived among the Toba Bataks until 1816.

Today there are more than six million Bataks, divided into six main linguistic groups, and their lands extend 200km north and 300km south of Danau Toba.

The origins of the name 'Batak' are unclear; one theory suggests it could come from a derogatory Malay term for robber or blackmailer. Another claims that it was an abusive nickname, coined by Muslims, meaning 'pig eater'.

The Bataks are primarily an agricultural people and the rich farmlands of the Karo Highlands supply vegetables for much of North Sumatra, as well as for export.

Religion & Mythology

The Bataks have long been squeezed between the Islamic strongholds of Aceh and West Sumatra and, despite several Acehnese attempts to conquer and convert, it was the European missionaries who finally quelled the waters with Christianity.

The majority of today's Bataks are Protestant Christians, however, many still practise elements of traditional animist belief and ritual. Traditional beliefs combine cosmology, ancestor and spirit worship and *tondi* – the concept of the soul that exists near the body and from time to time takes its leave, which causes illness. It is essential for Bataks to make sacrifices to their *tondi* to keep it in good humour.

The Bataks believe the banyan to be the tree of life; they tell a legend of their omnipotent god Ompung, who created all living creatures by dislodging decayed branches of a huge banyan into the sea.

Architecture

The most distinctive element of Batak culture is traditional architecture. Batak houses are built on stilts, up to 2m from the ground with a hipped (Karo) or saddleback (Toba) roof ending in sharp rising points said to resemble buffalo horns. Houses are traditionally made of wood (slotted and bound together without nails) and roofed with sugar-palm fibre or, more often these days, rusting corrugated iron. The gables are usually extravagantly embellished with carvings of serpents, spirals, lizards and monster heads complete with bulbous eyes.

TREKKING

If you don't fully succumb to Samosir's anaesthetising atmosphere, there are a couple of interesting treks across the island. The trails aren't well marked and can be difficult to find, but ask any of the guest-houses for a map. In the wet season (December to March) the steep inclines are

a few of the hotels in Tuk Tuk maintain weed-free swimming spots.

Across the isthmus, just before Panjururan, there are some *mata air panas* (hot springs) that the locals are extremely proud of. Most foreigners look around at the litter and decide that the waters are too hot.

The space under the main structure is used for rearing domestic animals such as cows, pigs and goats. The living area, or middle section, is large and open with no fixed internal walls. A traditional village is made up of a number of such houses, similar to the villages of the Toraja people of central Sulawesi.

Culture

The strong Indian influence running through Batak culture is evident in the cultivation of wet-field rice, the type of houses, chess, cotton and even the type of spinning wheel.

A purely Batak tradition is the *sigalegale* puppet dance, once performed at funerals, but now more often a part of wedding ceremonies. The life-sized puppet, carved from the wood of a banyan tree, is dressed in the traditional costume of red turban, loose shirt and blue sarong. The *sigalegale* stand up on long, wooden boxes where the operator makes them dance to gamelan (percussion orchestra) music accompanied by flute and drums.

One story of the origin of the *sigalegale* puppet concerns a widow who lived on Samosir. Bereft and lonely after the death of her husband, she made a wooden image of him and whenever she felt lonely hired a *dalang* (puppeteer-storyteller) to make the puppet dance and a *dukun* (mystic) to communicate with the soul of her husband.

Whatever its origins, the *sigalegale* soon became part of Batak culture and was used at funeral ceremonies to revive the souls of the dead and to communicate with them. Personal possessions of the deceased were used to decorate the puppet, and the *dukun* would invite the deceased's soul to enter the wooden puppet as it danced on top of the grave.

Arts & Crafts

Traditionally, the Bataks are skilled metalworkers and woodcarvers; other materials they use are shells, bark, bone and horn. Their work is decorated with fertility symbols, magic signs and animals.

One particularly idiosyncratic art form developed by the Toba Bataks is the magic augury book, *pustaha*. These books comprise the most significant part of their written history. Usually carved out of bark or bamboo, the books are important religious records that explain the established verbal rituals and responses of priests and mourners. Other books, inscribed on bone or bamboo and ornately decorated at each end, document Batak myths.

Porhalaan are divining calendars – 12 months of 30 days each – engraved on a cylinder of bamboo. They are used to determine auspicious days on which to embark on certain activities, such as marriage or the planting of the fields.

Music

Music is as important to the Bataks as it is to most societies, but traditionally it was played as part of religious ceremonies rather than for everyday pleasure. Today the Bataks are famous for their powerful and emotive hymn singing.

Most of their musical instruments are similar to those found elsewhere in Indonesia – cloth-covered copper gongs in varying sizes struck with wooden hammers; a small two-stringed violin, which makes a pure but harsh sound; and a kind of reedy clarinet.

very muddy and slippery and can be quite dangerous.

The central highlands of Samosir are about 700m above the lake and afford stunning views of mist-cloaked mountains on a clear day. The top of the escarpment forms a large plateau and at its heart is a small lake, Danau Sidihoni. Samosir's vast tracts

of jungle have long since vanished and the only forest you will pass through on either walk is pine, and even this is only in small areas. However, there are many interesting cinnamon, clove and coffee plantations and some beautiful waterfalls.

Most people opt for the short trek from Ambarita to Panjururan. It can be done in a

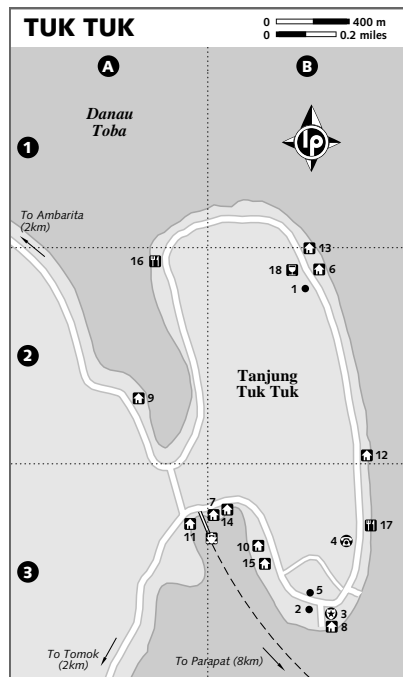
day if you're fit and in a hurry, though it's best to stay overnight in one of the villages. The path starts opposite the bank in Ambarita. Keep walking straight at the escarpment and take the path to the right of the graveyard. The three-hour climb to the top is hard and steep. The path then leads to Partungkaon village (also called Dolok); here you can stay at Jenny's Guest House or John's Losmen. From Partungkaon, it's about five hours' walk to Pangururan via Danau Sidihoni.

The road between Tomok and Forest House 1, an interior guesthouse, is now paved and many visitors steer motorbikes up the escarpment to Danau Sidihoni.

Bring along wet-weather gear and some snacks. There are no warung along the way but you should be able to buy cups of coffee or even arrange accommodation at villages en route.

Festivals & Events

The week-long Danau Toba Festival is held every year in mid-June. Canoe races are a highlight of the festival, but there are also Batak cultural performances.



Sleeping

The eastward-facing coast of the Tuk Tuk peninsula is chock-a-block with more multi-storey hotels than there is demand, creating a near ghost town. Some people visit temple ruins, others prefer the solitude of tourism ruins. But if emptiness equals eeriness for you, you'll be better off on the north and south coasts, where little guesthouses are tucked in between village chores: washing the laundry on the rocks and collecting the news from neighbours.

All of the places listed here are located in Tuk Tuk (p404).

Vandu (d 10,000-20,000Rp) One of the cheapest on Tuk Tuk, and it shows.

Horas Chill Out Café & Homestay (d from 15,000Rp) A half-dozen birdhouse bungalows are perched on the cliff, with good views and a steep descent to the water below.

Christina's Guesthouse (% 451027; d 15,000-35,000Rp) Cheap and laid-back, Christina's is comfortable like a well-worn pair of jeans.

Bagus Bay & Restaurant (% 451287; dm 10,000Rp, d 20,000-50,000Rp) Next door to Tabo Cottages, Bagus is the recovering professional's choice, a bit more hip for midlife wanderers. Rooms in traditional Batak houses overlook avocado trees and a children's playground.

Samosir Cottages (% 451050; d from 25,000Rp) Travellers who get stranded in Parapat over-

night typically get escorted to Samosir Cottages, a package-type hotel that discounts its rooms to suit budget tastes. A nice sun and swim area keeps those travellers put.

Liberta Homestay (% 451035; d 25,000-50,000Rp) A chill universe is created here by a lazy-day garden and arty versions of traditional Batak houses. Crawling around the balconies and shortened doors of the rooms feels like being a deck hand on a Chinese junk. In the evening, Liberta is a local hot spot for guides and guitars.

Tabo Cottages & Vegetarian Restaurant (% 451318; d 40,000-145,000Rp) The professionals' choice, Tabo Cottages has modern rooms set in a beautiful garden. Lots of expats from Jakarta and Aceh bring the family here for a weekend getaway.

Carolina Hotel (% 41520; d 40,000-60,000Rp) Considered Tuk Tuk's swankiest (a relative term), Carolina is neat and orderly, perhaps too much so for dishevelled types. But its economy rooms are an eagle's eyrie with a hilltop perch in a polished Batak-style building. Carolina's swimming area is the best on the island.

Feel free to poke around what is not listed here, as there are often deep discounts for pioneers. If you've come for swimming, take a good look at the hotel's water access; everyone claims that they have great swimming holes but fail to mention the docking boats or drown-able weeds. Touts from various guesthouses often scoop up travellers at the Parapat pier, taking the guesswork out of the shelter search.

Some other perfectly comfortable options include:

Anju Cottages Waterfront complex.
Romlan (d 40,000Rp) Popular with a German clientele.

Eating

There are dozens of half-open restaurants, so surprised to see a customer that the neighbourhood kids have to fetch the proprietor. Vegetarian menus prevail, with homemade bread and *tempe sambal* (tofu with chilli sauce). We entrust you with the task of foraging for yourself in this wilderness.

The guesthouses tend to mix eating and entertainment in the evening. Most restaurants serve the Batak speciality of barbecued carp (often appearing as 'goldfish' on menus), sometimes accompanied by traditional dance performances.

PERFECT PHRASING

Phrasebooks will tell you that 'please' and 'thank you' are the most important passwords into a foreign culture. But phrasebooks get compiled in classrooms not bar rooms. In Toba Batak, the best phrase for ingratiating yourself is the foolproof '*Na sigaretori*' ('Please have a cigarette').

The following restaurants are all located in Tuk Tuk (p404).

Bamboo Restaurant & Bar (% 451236; mains 10,000-25,000Rp) A stylish place to watch the sun sink away, Bamboo has cosy cushion seating, a down-tempo mood and a reliable menu.

Rumba Pizzeria & Homestay (% 451310; mains 10,000-25,000Rp) Sometimes Rumba's is full of energy cranking out Toba music and side dishes of cheerfulness. But even if it's deserted, the pizzas are divine after the monotony of nasi Padang.

Drinking

Brando's Blues Bar (Tuk Tuk) There are a handful of foreigner-oriented bars, such as this one in between the local jungle-juice cafés. The local tittle is palm wine, known as *tuak*.

Entertainment

Today the parties are all local – celebrating a wedding, new addition on a house or the return of a Toba expat. Invitations are gladly given and should be cordially accepted. On most nights, music and spirits fill the night air with the kind of camaraderie that only grows in small villages. The Toba Bataks are extremely musical and passionate choruses erupt from invisible corners.

Check around Tuk Tuk to see if any of the tourist restaurants are hosting Batak dancing.

Shopping

Samosir's souvenir shops carry a huge range of cheap and tacky cotton T-shirts. For something slightly more original, local Gayo embroidery is made into a range of bags, cushion covers and place mats.

Around Tuk Tuk there are numerous woodcarvers selling a variety of figures, masks, boxes and *porhalaan*, as well as some traditional musical instruments.

INFORMATION	
Gokhon Library.....	1 B2
Health Centre.....	2 B3
Police Station.....	3 B3
Wartel.....	4 B3
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Sunshine Beauty & Wellness.....	5 B3
SLEEPING	
Anju Cottages.....	6 B2
Bagus Bay & Restaurant.....	7 B3
Carolina Hotel.....	8 B3
Christina's Guesthouse.....	9 A2
Horas Chill Out Café & Homestay.....	10 B3
Liberta Homestay.....	11 A3
Romlan.....	12 B2
Samosir Cottages.....	13 B2
Tabo Cottages & Vegetarian Restaurant.....	14 B3
Vandu.....	15 B3
EATING	
Bamboo Restaurant & Bar.....	16 A2
Rumba Pizzeria & Homestay.....	17 B3
DRINKING	
Brando's Blues Bar.....	18 B2

Getting There & Away

BOAT

Ferries between Parapat and Tuk Tuk (7000Rp) operate about every two hours from 9.30am to 7.30pm. Ferries stop at Bagus Bay; other stops are by request. The first and last ferries from Samosir leave at about 8.30am and 4.30pm; check exact times with your hotel. When leaving for Parapat, stand on your hotel jetty and wave a ferry down.

Five ferries a day shuttle vehicles and people between Ajibata, just south of Parapat, and Tomok. There are five departures per day between 8.30am and 8.30pm. The passenger fare is 3000Rp. Cars cost 150,000Rp, and places can be booked in advance at the **Ajibata office** (% 41194) or **Tomok office** (% 41157).

BUS

See Parapat (p399), the mainland transit point, for information on bus travel to/from Danau Toba.

On Samosir, Pangururan has a daily buses to Berastagi (30,000Rp) via Sidikalang, which is also a transfer point to Kutacane and Tapaktuan (on the west coast).

Getting Around

Local buses serve the whole of Samosir *except* Tanjung Tuk Tuk. A helpful service is the regular minibuses between Tomok and Ambarita (2000Rp), continuing to Simanindo (3000Rp) and Pangururan (10,000Rp). The road between the neck of the peninsula is a good spot to flag down these minibuses. Services dry up after 3pm.

You can rent motorcycles in Tuk Tuk for 70,000Rp a day. Bicycle hire costs from 25,000Rp a day.

SIBOLGA

% 0631 / pop 90,000

The departure point for boats to Nias, Sibolga is a west-coast port town with a reputation for hustling tourists. As tourist numbers decline, the hassles have diminished to a fish boil of touts when you step off the bus/boat – the usual port town bad manners. Watch your money, know how much things cost and have a healthy scepticism for unsolicited advice.

Information

BNI bank (Bank Negara Indonesia; Jl Katamsa) It is advisable to change money here or use the ATM, as options are limited on Nias.

Post office (Jl Tobing; 𠄎 8am–6pm) Internet access available (5000Rp per hour).

Telkom wartel (Jl A Yani 35) International phone calls can be made from here.

Dangers & Annoyances

Dragging around surf gear will invite inflated prices: either be willing to bargain hard or accept a degree of extra 'service'.

A more serious scam involves being detained on suspicion of carrying drugs. Some travellers have reported being searched and intimidated by groups of uniformed officials demanding exorbitant bribes before releasing travellers. Don't leave your bags unattended or with a 'helpful' guide.

Sights

Pantai Pandan is a popular white-sand beach at the village of Pandan, 11km north of Sibolga. A few hundred metres further on is **Pantai Kalangan** (admission 2000Rp). Both beaches get very crowded at weekends, but are good places to pass the time while you're waiting to catch a boat from Sibolga. *Opelet* run to the beaches all day (3000Rp).

Sleeping & Eating

If you get stuck overnight in Sibolga, try the following:

Hotel Pasar Baru (% 22167; cnr Jl Imam Bonjol & Raja Junjungan; d with fan/air-con 75,000/100,000Rp; 𠄎) A decent enough place to sleep in a pinch.

Hotel Wisata Indah (% 23688; Jl Katamsa 51; d from 180,000Rp; 𠄎) The only upmarket hotel in town, Wisata Indah has a pool, comfortable rooms and sea views. It even has a day-use fee for the pool and showers.

There are plenty of Padang restaurants and coffee shops directly across the street from the harbour for pre- or post-departure nibbles.

Getting There & Away

BOAT

Ferries to Nias leave from the harbour at the end of Jl Horas. There are two port options for Nias: the capital city of Gunung Sitoli, which is in the north of the island and a three-hour bus ride from the surf break; or Teluk Dalam, which is in the south and a 15-minute ride away.

Boats to Teluk Dalam are the obvious choice but they don't run every day. **PT Simeulue** (% 21497; Jl Sultan Bustani) runs a

ferry to Teluk Dalam (economy/cabin bed 60,000/90,000Rp, 11 hours), departing at 8pm on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday. Economy class is two tiers of pallets in the hold of the boat; if you opt for this class, try to get a spot on the top level where it will be less claustrophobic. Cabin class at least affords privacy and a mattress, if not a higher degree of cleanliness.

If you arrive in Sibolga on any other day of the week, catch a Gunung Sitoli-bound boat (economy/air-con/cabin 43,000/63,000/120,000Rp, eight to 10 hours), which departs at 8pm every day but Sunday). **ASDP** (% 21752), in front of the harbour, runs a modern passenger and car ferry. The air-con class is the best value: seats recline, the room is fairly cool and generally quiet.

Ferries generally leave one to two hours late. If you arrive in Sibolga and are told you have just missed the boat it is often worth going to the harbour yourself to verify this.

You don't have to pay extra for surfboards on either service but you'll be lucky to get away without coughing up any cash to the local heavies.

BUS

Sibolga is a bit of a backwater as far as bus services are concerned and the route is windy and inordinately slow. The bus terminal is on Jl Sisingamangaraja, 2km from the harbour. You can ask the bus driver to drop you off at the harbour. A becak between the two should be 5000Rp.

There are frequent departures for Bukittinggi (70,000Rp, 12 hours), Padang (72,000Rp, 14 hours), Medan (70,000Rp, 11 hours) and Parapat (60,000Rp, six hours).

There are also minivan services that shuttle folks between Sibolga and Medan (80,000Rp) – prices are highly negotiable.

PULAU NIAS

As myth busters, we've got good and bad news about Nias. The 'wave' is superb and has deservedly kept this far-flung island on the international surfing circuit. The ancient megalithic monuments and traditional architecture are also incredible for cultural tourists.

But the island ambience is as razor sharp as the coral break. Maybe it is the surfers' fault; maybe it is the vast economic disparity between the islanders and the visitors; maybe it is Nias' warrior past or the devastating earthquake. Who knows. But one thing is certain, this is not laid-back island living.

Before launching into a laundry list of hassles, let's put things in perspective. Nias is almost the size of Bali but gets a whole lot less attention from the government. Development, economic opportunity and basic nutrition are sorely lacking. The tourist economy started drying up several years ago, and then the island got socked by the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, which killed 122 people and destroyed rice crops. Three months later, the 28 March earthquake levelled the capital city and killed an estimated 400 to 500 people. Recovery efforts and aid have been slow and scattershot and temporary tents are still visible across the island. It would take the patience of Job to embrace wealthy visitors without expectations.

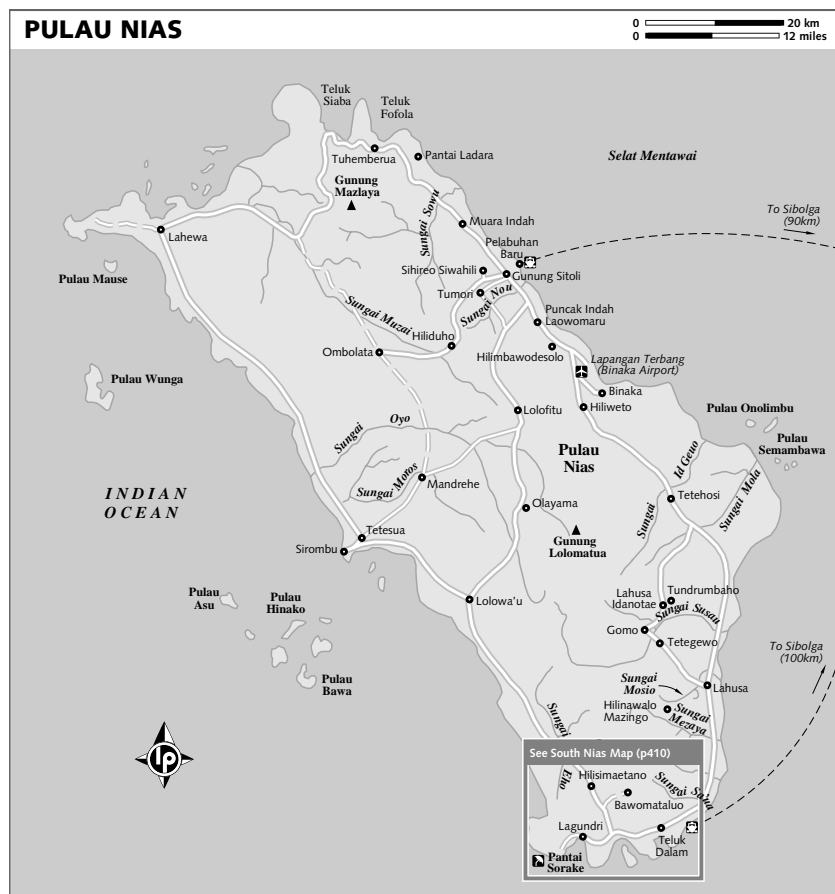
History

Local legend tells it that Niassans are the descendants of six gods who came to earth and settled in the central highlands. Anthropologists link them to just about everyone: the Bataks of Sumatra, the Naga of Assam in India, the aborigines of Taiwan and various Dayak groups in Kalimantan.

Nias history is the stuff of campfire tales in which an exotic people practised head-hunting and human sacrifice long after the rest of the world started fainting at the sight of blood.

Traditionally, Niassan villages were presided over by a village chief, heading a council of elders. Beneath the aristocratic upper caste were the common people, and below them the slaves, who were often traded. Until the first years of the 19th century Nias' only connection with the outside world was through the slave trade.

Sometimes villages would band together to form federations, which often fought each other. Prior to the Dutch conquest, and the arrival of the missionaries, intervillage warfare was fast and furious, spurred on by the desire for revenge, slaves or human heads. Heads were needed for stately burials, wedding dowries and the construction of new villages.



When they weren't warring, they were farming, a tradition that continues today. They cultivated yams, rice, maize and taro, despite the thick jungle, and raised pigs as a source of food and a symbol of wealth and prestige; the more pigs you had, the higher your status in the village. Gold and copper work, as well as woodcarving, were important industries.

The indigenous religion was thought to have been a combination of animism and ancestor worship, with some Hindu influences. Today the dominant religions on Nias are Christianity and Islam – overlaid with traditional beliefs.

The island did not come under full Dutch control until 1914. Today's population of

about 639,000 is spread through more than 650 villages, most inaccessible by road.

Orientation & Information

For a place known to the outside world, Nias is surprisingly underdeveloped and the earthquake undid any minor steps forward. Don't expect rapid transport across the island, internet connection or reliable mobile phone coverage.

Gunung Sitoli, the island's biggest town, and Binaka, the only airport, are both in the north. The famous surf break is in the south at Pantai Sorake, accessible via the port town of Teluk Dalam. Some might refer to the surfing area as Teluk Lagundri, which is the bay that the waves barrel into.

Gunung Sitoli has two working ATMs, and there is one moneychanger in Teluk Dalam.

Dangers & Annoyances

Chloroquine-resistant malaria has been reported on Nias, so be sure you take appropriate precautions.

GUNUNG SITOLI

☎ 0639

Gunung Sitoli, on the northeastern coast of Nias, is the island's main town. It was badly destroyed by the 28 March 2005 earthquake and rebuilding has stalled at piling up rubble.

Orientation & Information

The port is about 2km north of the centre of town, and the bus terminal about 1.5km south, beyond the bridge. Businesses are clustered around the parade ground in the centre of town.

Bank Sumut (Jl Hatta) MasterCard-accessible ATM.

BRI bank (Bank Rakyat Indonesia; ☎ 21946; Jl Imam Bonjol; 8am–4pm Mon–Fri) ATM available.

Post office (cnr Jl Gomo & Hatta) Opposite the parade ground.

Public hospital (☎ 21271; Jl Cipto M Kusomo) For dealing with minor emergencies.

Sights

Museum Pusaka Nias (☎ 21920; Jl Yos Sudarso 134A; admission 2000Rp; 8am–noon & 1–5pm Tue–Sat, 2–5pm Sun) has a good collection of woodcarvings, stone sculptures and ceremonial objects. The garden has an interesting display of local plants and herbs and some models of traditional Niassan architecture.

If you're curious about viewing more examples of Nias' cultural heritage, see p411.

Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation options in Gunung Sitoli have not been rebuilt since the earthquake. If you need to stay on the north coast to catch a departing flight, try these options outside the town centre:

Wisma Soliga (☎ 21815; d with fan/air-con from 50,000/100,000Rp; ☎) Located 4km south of town, this is a friendly, well-managed place with clean and spacious rooms.

Miga Beach Bungalows (☎ 21460; d from 150,000–200,000Rp; ☎) Nearby, Miga sits right on a small beach with comfortable rooms.

To get to either hotel take an *opelet* from the bus terminal (2000Rp). A *becak* will cost about 10,000Rp. These hotels are 14km from the airport and can arrange transport for 50,000Rp per person.

There are lots of small restaurants along the main streets in Gunung Sitoli. **Bintang Terang** (Jl Sira'o 10; mains 10,000Rp) has good seafood fried noodles.

TELUK DALAM

☎ 0631

The average European would practically tower over this squat port town, which is as loud and chaotic as much larger cities. You'll need to pass through Teluk Dalam for transit connections to the beach or to pick up provisions.

The **post office** (Jl Ahmad Yani) and **Telkom wartel** (Jl Ahmad Yani) are both near the harbour. There are lots of Indonesian banks, but none exchanges foreign currency. A **moneychanger** is across the street from the BRI bank.

PANTAI SORAKE & TELUK LAGUNDRI

☎ 0630

A fish-hook piece of land creates the perfect horseshoe bay of Lagundri and the surf break at Sorake, which is said to be the best right-hander in the world. The main surfing season is June to October, and in July and August waves can be more than 4m high. Folks refer to this area interchangeably as Sorake or Lagundri.

The Boxing Day tsunami destroyed many of the family-run guesthouses and restaurants on the beach. The businesses that could afford to rebuild are all located on Pantai Sorake, which is considered to be more protected from future disasters.

Dangers & Annoyances

Times are tough here – not that hardship is an annoyance, but it creates disparity between a tourist's expectations for a holiday and the locals' economic concerns. Many generous people who have had the means and relationship with Nias have sponsored the rebuilding of local houses and bungalows destroyed by the tsunami, ostensibly in exchange for free accommodation, but more importantly as true grassroots giving. By circumventing bloated aid organisations, many people can see tangible

results from their disaster donations. The downside to this is that some locals view every new arrival here as a possible donor and the sales pitch can come from your losmen or from a stranger you meet on the beach, blurring the line between charity and con game. Unless you have a relationship with a family, it is not advisable to expect that your donation will be spent as promised.

Before the tsunami, many visitors left the island cursing about petty theft and incessant scams. In 2002, beach businesses had formed an association that had managed to curtail some of the bad behaviour: local kids are no longer torturing turtles so that tourists will pay a ransom.

Renting surf gear on the island is still a source of unexpected headaches. Be sure you pay a fair price; if it is too cheap, you'll pay for it at the end with inflated damage costs. There is still the usual gang of guys who hang out on the beach looking for the next greenhorn. Remember that trustworthy people are usually too busy during the day to meet and greet the tourists. It may

sound alarmist, but single women should be cautious in accepting invitations to drink with the locals.

In general, you'll enjoy Nias a lot more if you choose your losmen carefully and keep a low profile.

Activities

SURFING NIAS

Sorake's famous right consistently unrolls between June and October. Access to the wave is a quick paddle from the Keyhole, a break in the coral reef that lies between the beach and the bay.

The March 2005 earthquake lifted the Sorake reef up by about 1m, a shift that has improved the wave, so they say.

Folks also claim that the off-season waves are good for beginners, a term frequently misinterpreted by nonsurfers. If you've never surfed before, you're better off learning in a place that is easier to get to and on a break with a sandy beach.

Most surfers arrive with their own gear, but you can rent equipment from Key Hole Surf Camp, in front of the Keyhole.

OFFSHORE SURFING

Popular surfing destinations off Nias include the islands of Asu, Bawa and Hinako. More exposed than Nias itself, the islands see bigger and more-consistent waves. With a left-hander at Asu and a strong right-hander at Bawa, good surf is almost guaranteed regardless of wind direction.

The risk of malaria is high on these islands, particularly Bawa, which has a large swamp in its interior. Visitors should take proper precautions.

Sirombu on Nias' west coast is the jumping-off point for the islands. There might be a public bus from Gunung Sitoli – no-one could say for sure; otherwise you can charter transport for about 500,000Rp.

From Sirombu there are cargo boats (50,000Rp). You can also charter boats (500,000Rp, maximum of 10 people) from local fishermen at Teluk Dalam and save yourself the hassle of getting to Sirombu.

Bawa has several simple losmen (50,000Rp per night), including one run by an Indonesian named German. Bring your own food.

Surfers on Nias are saying that the earthquake adversely affected the waves on Asu. Now the ride is good only if the swell is high. Tours can be organised through **Sumatran Surf Adventures** (www.sumatransurfadventures.com).

Pulau Tello, further south towards the Mentawai Islands, is another destination that can be reached by charter boat.

There are also other breaks within the bay under certain conditions and a few rides elsewhere on the island. Visit Surfing Sumatra (www.surfingsumatra.com) for a quick wave profile for Nias and nearby.

SWIMMING

A wide sandy beach starts just north of JJ Losmen and rounds the horseshoe bay all the way to the southeastern tip. A rind of dead coral separates Pantai Sorake from the water and swimming possibilities.

Sleeping & Eating

The western part of the bay, known as Pantai Sorake, is the primary location for lodging since the tsunami destroyed much of the construction elsewhere on the bay. Most surfers stay on the northern end so they can watch the waves. Accommodation is in basic beach bungalows run by local families and usually costs between 25,000Rp and 50,000Rp. Choose your losmen carefully as some families are extremely sweet and others will act hurt if you spend your money elsewhere or have their children begging for pens.

It is expected that you eat your meals, especially dinner, at your losmen, and inquiries of where you've eaten can range from curiosity to accusation. In general, the more expensive the lodging, the less likely your hosts will care where you spend your

money. Food is quite expensive on the island, with dinner prices averaging between 35,000Rp to 50,000Rp for a plate of fish or chicken.

The following guesthouses run south to north:

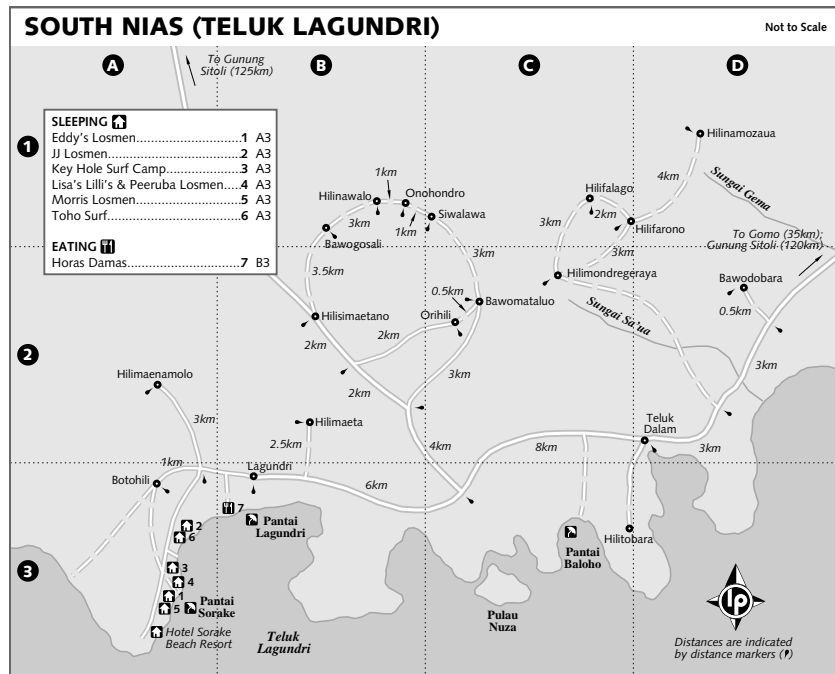
Morris Losmen and **Eddy's Losmen** are next door to each other, a few minutes walk from the waves. **Lisa's**, **Lili's** and **Peeruba Losmen** are clumped together on a sunny patch of sand just on the edge of the action.

Key Hole Surf Camp (75,000Rp), right in the thick of things, charges a little more, giving you freedom to eat where you please. Next in line is **Toho Surf**, which has nice beachfront balconies. **JJ Losmen** is the last in the row, with freshly varnished wooden rooms.

The only development on this side of the bay is **Horas Damas**, an open-air restaurant with a view of the deep blue.

TRADITIONAL VILLAGES

For hundreds of years, Nias residents built elaborate villages around cobblestoned streets lined with rows of shiplike wooden houses. The traditional homes were balanced on tall wooden pylons and topped by a steep, thatched roof. Some say the boat motif was inspired by Dutch spice ships. Constructed from local teak and held together with hand-hewn wooden pegs, the houses are adorned with symbolic wooden



carvings. The technology of traditional architecture proved quite absorbent and these structures fared better in the 2005 earthquake than modern concrete buildings.

Reflecting the island's defensive strategies, villages were typically built on high ground reached by dozens of stone steps. A stone wall for protection usually encircled the village. Stone was also used to carve bathing pools, staircases, benches, chairs and memorials.

Within the island there is geographic diversity in the traditional house building. In northern Nias, homes are freestanding, oblong structures on stilts, while in the south they are built shoulder to shoulder on either side of a long, paved courtyard. Emphasising the roof as the primary feature, southern Niassan houses are constructed using pylons and crossbeams slotted together without the use of bindings or nails.

Gomo & Around

The villages around Gomo, in the central highlands, contain some of the island's best examples of stone carvings and *menhirs* (single standing stones), some thought to be 3000 years old. Such examples can be found in the village of *Tundrubaho*, 5km from Gomo, *Lahusa Idanotae*, halfway between Gomo and *Tundrubaho*, and at *Tetegewo*, 7km south of Gomo.

Unfortunately, Gomo is virtually inaccessible. Getting to *Tundrubaho* involves a tough two-hour uphill slog through the steamy jungle. From *Lagundri*, negotiate with the losmen owners for someone to take you there and back by motorcycle, or catch a bus to *Lahusa* and then hitch a ride. Getting to *Tetegewo* is possible, but it's a long trip – it's probably only worthwhile if you're interested in this type of architecture.

Hilinawalo Mazingo

One of only five such surviving buildings on the island, the *Omo Hada* (chieftain's house) is situated in the prestigious 'upstream' direction of the remote village, garnering the first rays of morning light. It still serves its traditional purpose as a meeting hall for seven neighbouring villages and is currently undergoing restoration work by a local conservation group,

North Sumatra Heritage, with funding from World Monuments Fund and corporate sponsors. In order to repair damages from age and climate, villagers have been trained in traditional carpentry skills, in turn preserving crafts that were nearing extinction.

The area is known as *Eri Mazino* and is 18km from *Lagundri* between *Teluk Dalam* and *Lahusa* district. You can take a public bus to *Simpang Oge* and then hire an *ojek* (motorcycle that takes passengers) from there or arrange transport directly from *Lagundri*. The last 8km of the trip is arduous due to poor road conditions.

Bawomataluo

This is the most famous, and the most accessible, of the southern villages. It is also the setting for *lompat batu* (stone jumping), featured on Indonesia's 1000Rp note.

Bawomataluo (literally 'sun hill') is perched on a hill about 400m above sea level. The final approach is up 88 steep stone steps. Houses are arranged along two main stone-paved avenues that meet opposite the impressive chief's house, thought to be the oldest and largest on Nias. Outside are stone tables where dead bodies were once left to decay.

Although *Bawomataluo* is still worth exploring, tourism is in full swing here, with lots of eager knick-knack sellers.

There are also cultural displays of war dances, traditionally performed by young, single males, and stone jumping. The latter was once a form of war training; the jumpers had to leap over a 1.8m-high stone wall traditionally topped with pointed sticks. These days the sticks are left off – and the motivation is financial.

From *Bawomataluo*, you can see the rooftops of nearby *Orihill*. A stone staircase and trail lead downhill to the village.

Bawomataluo is 15km from *Teluk Dalam* and is accessible by public bus (5000Rp).

Hilisimaetano

There are more than 100 traditional houses in this large village, 16km northwest of *Teluk Dalam*. Stone jumping and traditional dancing are performed here during special events. *Hilisimaetano* can be reached by public transport from *Teluk Dalam* (5000Rp).

Botohili & Hilimaeta

Botohili is a small village on the hillside above the peninsula of *Pantai Lagundri*. It has two rows of traditional houses, with a number of new houses breaking up the skyline. The remains of the original entrance, stone chairs and paving can still be seen.

Hilimaeta is similar to *Botohili* and is also within easy walking distance of *Lagundri*. The stone-jumping pylon can still be seen and there are a number of stone monuments, including a 2m-high stone penis. A long pathway of stone steps leads uphill to the village.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

SMAC (☎ 0639-21010; Jl Sudirman, Gunung Sitoli) has flights from Medan to Binaka airport, 17km south of Gunung Sitoli, several times a week (556,000Rp). Surfboards cost an extra 30,000Rp. Flights usually leave in the morning. *SMAC* operates a minibus between Binaka airport and Gunung Sitoli (30,000Rp). Ask a local travel agent if *Merpati* is operating flights from Binaka to Padang, a service that was in question at the time of writing.

Boat

There are boats every night except Sunday from Gunung Sitoli to *Sibolga*. In theory, all services leave at 8pm, but in practice

they seldom set sail before 10pm. Ticket prices are 43,000/63,000/120,000Rp for economy/air-con/cabin. *ASDP* (☎ 0639-21554; Jl Yos Sudarso) has an office at the harbour in Gunung Sitoli.

Boats to *Sibolga* also leave from *Teluk Dalam* every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Boat tickets to *Sibolga* can be bought at *PT Simeulue* (☎ 081 2167033; Jl Saunigaho). Tickets cost 60,000/90,000Rp for economy/cabin class.

GETTING AROUND

Getting around Nias can be slow. In Gunung Sitoli, the bus terminal is 1.5km south of the centre of town; an *opelet* from the pier costs 2000Rp.

From Gunung Sitoli, there are minibuses to the southern market town of *Teluk Dalam* (50,000Rp, three hours), which has transport to *Lagundri*, 13km away. You can also arrange transport directly to *Sorake* (75,000Rp). You will probably be charged extra to take a surfboard but always whittle the initial quote as low as a smile can get. Services dry up in the afternoon, so aim to leave before noon.

To get to *Sorake* and/or *Lagundri* from *Teluk Dalam*, catch a local bus from the town centre (5000Rp). Losmen will also hunt the town looking for new arrivals and usually charge 10,000Rp for motorbike transfer.

SUMATRAN SUPERPOWER

As a global contender for the notorious title of 'superpower', Sumatra has as much control over world events as your average lawn vole. That is, until you tally up all the times that violent natural disasters on the island have literally shook the planet.

Take for instance the 1883 eruption of *Krakatau* in southern Sumatra. This volcanic explosion equalled the equivalent of 200 megatons of TNT and makes the A-bomb dropped on *Hiroshima* look like backyard fireworks. So much ash was hurled into the atmosphere that the sky was darkened for days and global temperatures were reduced by an average of 1.2 degrees Celsius for several years.

It is said that the blast that created *Danau Toba* some 100,000 years ago – before scientists were around to measure such rumblings – would have made *Krakatau* look like an after-dinner belch.

Then there was the 2004 Boxing Day earthquake, the world's second-largest recorded earthquake (recently upgraded from magnitude 9 to 9.3). The resulting tsunami hit more than a dozen countries around the Indian Ocean, leaving more than 300,000 people dead or missing and millions displaced. The force of the event is said to have caused the earth to wobble on its axis and shifted surrounding landmasses southwest by up to 36m.

In terms of movers and shakers, the same cannot be said for Bollywood's pop stars or even US foreign policy.

ACEH

Guess what, boys and girls: Aceh is the next best spot. Forget Laos, Cambodia and even beachy Thailand. Those are *so* 2002 and overrun by folks who would get spooked in the produce department back home. Aceh has white sands, coffee-growing highlands and minority tribes – all in one province. The best part is that you can earn your intrepid stripes: the name 'Aceh' will put a few worry lines on loved ones' faces, but the reality is a lot tamer than Saturday-night pub crawls.

After years of conflict with the Indonesian military and the devastating effects of the Boxing Day tsunami, Aceh is truly poised for a great regeneration. The province has a wealth of natural resources (gas, gold, copper and silver) and it has brokered enough autonomy to ensure that profits aren't entirely siphoned off by Jakarta. The presence of international aid organisations and accompanying charitable donations, even if partially squandered by corruption, is rebuilding what was lost and helping foster an already intelligent and ambitious workforce. About 40% of Acehnese live in poverty, but many are hopeful that the new-found peace and attention from the outside world will rebuild a stronger future.

The only thing missing in this devout Muslim land is hard-core boozing. But if your trip is timed with the Lenten season, you can abstain with a purpose or just sniff out the quiet pockets of appreciation.

Do remember though to monitor the news about the stability of the peace in Aceh. Indonesia is mercurial.

TRAVELLING TO ACEH

No special permit or permission is required to visit Aceh province. At one time foreign visitors were limited but since the 2004 tsunami these restrictions have been eased at the entry points into Aceh. Confusion does arise if you inquire with Indonesian embassies or outside of the island of Sumatra, as the Indonesian government has not yet disseminated an official decision on the matter.

History

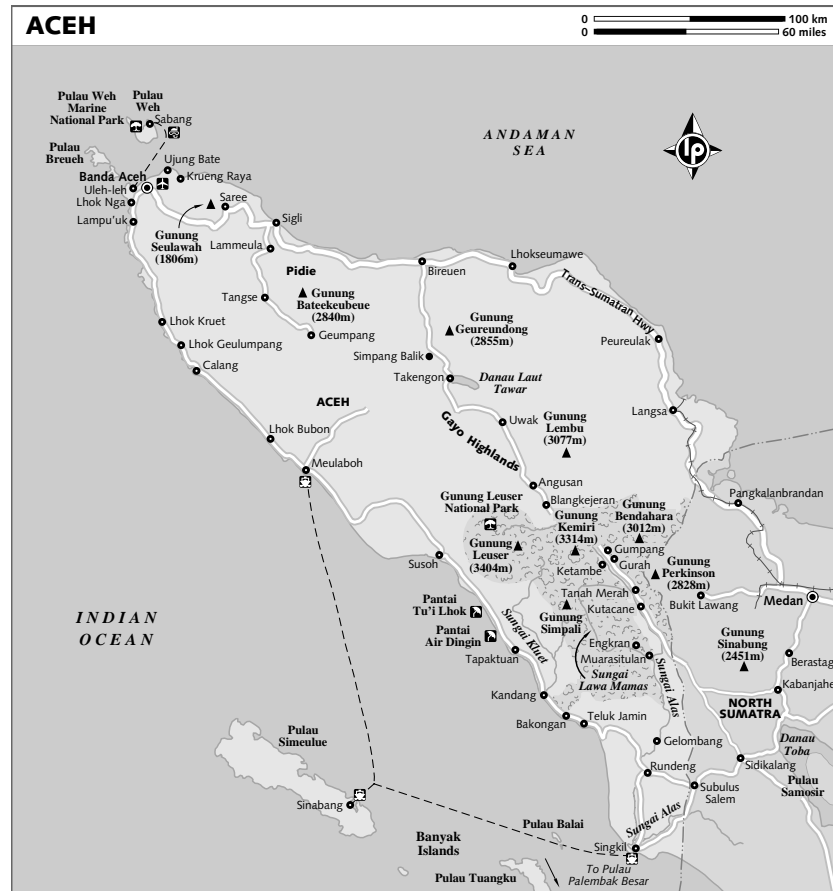
In the days of sailing ships, Aceh competed with Melaka on the Malay Peninsula for control of the important spice trade route. Aceh was also the entryway into the archipelago for Islam, and Banda Aceh, the capital, was an important centre of Islamic learning and a gateway for Muslims making the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The influx of traders and immigrants and the province's strategic position contributed to Aceh's wealth and importance. The main exports were pepper and gold; others included ivory, tin, tortoiseshell, camphor, aloe wood, sandalwood and spices. Though Aceh's power began to decline towards the end of the 17th century, the province remained independent of the Dutch until war was declared in 1871. It was 35 years before the fighting stopped and the last of the sultans, Tuanku Muhamat Dawot, surrendered.

In 1951 the Indonesian government incorporated Aceh's territory into the province of North Sumatra. However, the prominent Islamic Party was angered at being lumped together with the Christian Batak, and proclaimed Aceh an independent Islamic Republic in September 1953. Prolonged conflict ensued and in 1959 the government was forced to give Aceh 'special district' status, granting a high degree of autonomy in religious, cultural and educational matters. Despite this special status the government strengthened its grip on Aceh's huge natural gas reserves, pocketing the majority of profits and leaving the locals impoverished.

In December 1976 Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM; Free Aceh Movement) was formed and began fighting for independence. In the early years of the struggle fighting was limited, but by 1989 GAM had gathered strength and launched a renewed attack on the Indonesian government.

By 1990 the area had been designated a 'special combat zone' and eight years of near-military rule followed. Years of army atrocities and human rights abuses perpetrated during this time only emerged after the fall of Soeharto in 1998. In the following years army massacres continued while GAM intimidated whole villages into giving the rebel forces support. Deaths, tortures, disappearances and arbitrary arrests



occurred on a daily basis, with each side blaming the other. The ordinary people of Aceh were the real losers: tens of thousands of them were displaced and living in fear of both sides.

At the turn of the millennium, several steps towards peace were made: a brief cease-fire was declared in 2000, and in 2002 Jakarta granted a 'special autonomy' law allowing the province to keep up to 70% of oil and gas revenues and implement Islamic (sharia) law. Peace talks were also initiated for the first time since the conflict began and progressed for a year and a half before crumbling. For two years afterwards, all of the progress toward normalcy was quickly reversed. Martial law was declared in 2003,

paving the way for a full-scale military assault on the separatists – the biggest military operation in Indonesia since the 1975 invasion of East Timor.

The 2004 tsunami provided the necessary counterpoint to open up the sealed province to relief organisations and renew peace talks between Jakarta and the rebels. On 15 August 2005, a peace accord was signed in Helsinki and many of the important steps of the agreement have been met: GAM rebels successfully surrendered their weapons and the Indonesian troops have withdrawn from the province. On 11 July 2006, the Indonesian government ratified the political end of the bargain with legislation that allows Aceh to have local political

parties participate in elections (an exception to the country-wide law of national parties only), enforce sharia law, and keep 70% of its oil and gas revenues. Although optimism for a stable Aceh is tangible, some fear that the biggest obstacle to a lasting peace is steering the former GAM rebels into lives as productive citizens rather than low-level criminals. Other concerns are the fate of the peace once the European Union monitoring group pulls out in September 2006.

BANDA ACEH

☎ 0651 / pop 210,000

The provincial capital of Banda Aceh is not frequently paired in the international press with good times. The city was close enough

to the sea and the epicentre of the earthquake to have suffered a double punch from the 2004 Boxing Day disaster. The earthquake toppled most of the buildings taller than three storeys and the tsunami gobbled up coastal development across middle-class suburbs. In Banda Aceh alone, 61,000 people were killed and development outside of the city centre was reduced to a wasteland in a matter of a few hours. This scale of destruction usually takes humans years of warfare to match.

However, Banda Aceh is on the mend. The usual hustle and bustle of an Indonesian town is up to full volume now and enough aid workers have arrived to kick-start an economy catering to non-governmental

organisations (NGOs). Prices have swollen to soak up spendthrift per diems and bilingual Acehnese are finding handsome work as drivers and interpreters.

There is still grief and an obliterated landscape, but the city residents are blessed with courage. If at times being a tourist feels superficial, viewing the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami provides a necessary grounding in history and human drama. Residents will share their stories of loss and ask for nothing in return but an open heart.

What will Banda Aceh look like in a few years' time? After one year, the city had passed through the initial disaster phase: debris had been removed, the dead buried, and some businesses reopened. But rebuilding homes and infrastructure was moving at an imperceptible pace. Aid organisations anticipate being in the area until 2008, but no-one is sure if this is a realistic timeline.

What's certain, though, is that Banda Aceh will challenge any stereotypes you may have about Islam. In this devoutly Muslim city, the hassles are few and the people are friendly and easy-going. You'll see headscarfed policemen directing traffic or sit next to a well-educated Muslim woman travelling without a male companion. Even when the city shuts down for important prayer times, locals use the afternoon break to visit with friends while the sermons are broadcast in the background.

Orientation

Banda Aceh is split in two by Sungai Krueng Aceh. In the southern part of the city is its best-known landmark, the Mesjid Raya Baiturrahman. Behind the mosque is the huge Pasar Aceh Central (central market), and adjoining the market is the main *opel* terminal. Southwest of these landmarks are empty lots and rubble piles due to the earthquake. Rebuilding has been slow in this part of town.

The residential neighbourhoods in the southeast corner were largely unaffected by the disaster and many of the NGOs have rented the houses for their offices. The area is referred to as Geuceu Komplek.

North of the river is the city centre and where much of the rebuilding has been concentrated. The commercial spine is Jl Panglima Polem.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS & POST

The presence of internet-savvy NGOs means that Banda Aceh is firmly planted in the 21st century, unlike the rest of Sumatra. Rates are 5000Rp/hour.

Country Steakhouse Off Jl Sri Ratu Safiatuddin. This restaurant also has wireless access for laptops.

Jumbo Internet (Jl Panglima Polem 2)

Metropolis Internet (Jl Panglima Polem 8)

Post office (Jl Teuku Angkasah; 7-8am-6pm) A short walk from the centre, there are also internet facilities here.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Rumah Sakit Dr Zainal Abidin (☎ 26090, 22606; Jl Nyak Arief) One of the best hospitals in town.

MONEY

There are lots of ATMs around town, mainly on Jl Panglima Polem and on Jl Sri Ratu Safiatuddin.

BCA bank (Bank Central Asia; Jl Panglima Polem)

BIl bank (Bank Internasional Indonesia; Jl Panglima Polem)

Bank Danamon (Jl Sri Ratu Safiatuddin)

TELEPHONE

Telkom wartel (Jl Daud Beureeh) Home Country Direct phone.

Wartel (Jl Panglima Polem)

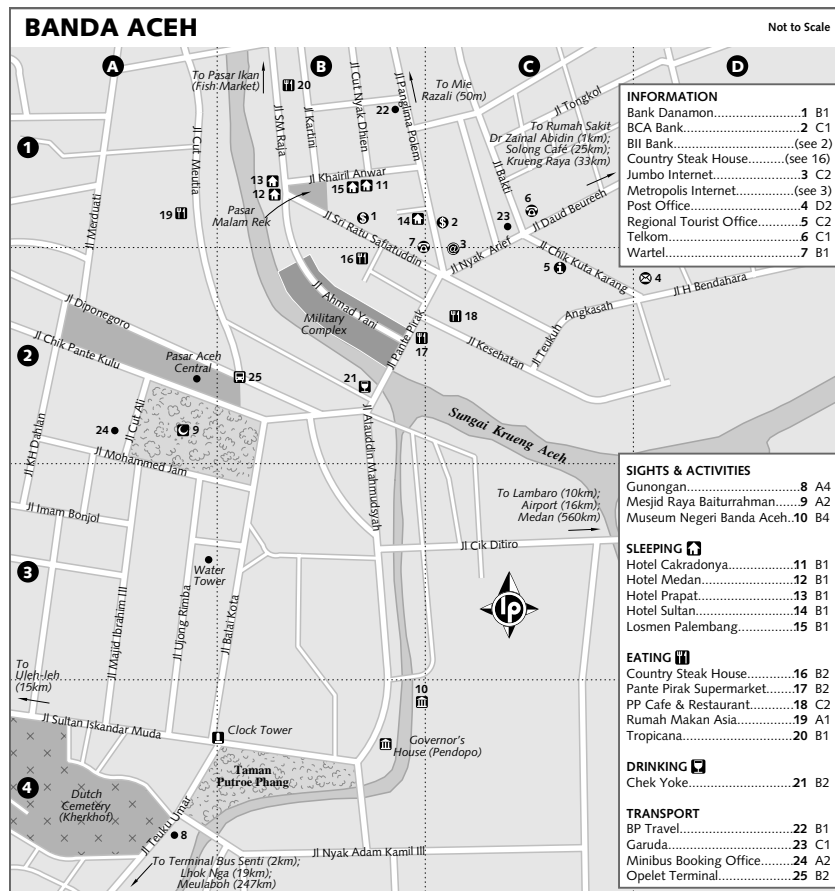
TOURIST INFORMATION

Regional tourist office (Dinas Parawisata; ☎ 23692; Jl Chik Kuta Karang 3) The regional tourist office is at the back of a government building. The staff are friendly and have free copies of an excellent guidebook to the province.

Sights & Activities

MESJID RAYA BAITURRAHMAN

With its brilliant white walls and liquorice-black domes, the Mesjid Raya Baiturrahman (admission by donation, headscarf required; 7-11am & 1.30-4pm) is a dazzling sight on a sunny day. The first section of the mosque was built by the Dutch in 1879 as a conciliatory gesture towards the Acehnese after the original one had been burnt down. Two more domes – one on either side of the first – were added by the Dutch in 1936 and another two by the Indonesian government in 1957. The mosque survived intact after the 2004 earthquake and tsunami, a sign interpreted by many residents as direct intervention from the divine. The best time to catch the mosque is during Friday afternoon prayers,



THE ACEHNESE

Sitting at the far northern tip of Sumatra, Aceh was a gatekeeper for the Strait of Melaka, an important trade-winds route between India and China. So many nations passed within reach that modern-day Aceh is an ethnic blend of Indonesian, Arab, Tamil, Chinese and indigenous groups. Curiously, some of the tallest people in Indonesia live in the province. Ethnic groups include the Gayo and Alas in the mountains, the Minangkabau on the west coast, the Kluetin in the south, and Javanese and Chinese throughout.

Religion

Aceh is the most staunchly Muslim part of Sumatra, with Christians and Buddhists comprising only a small percentage of the population. In Banda Aceh, billboards remind visitors to travel globally, dress locally. Sharia law has been in place in the province since 2003.

Nevertheless, animism is also part of the everyday fabric of Acehnese life and there is a popular belief in the existence of spirits who dwell in old trees, wells, rocks and stones. Ghosts and evil spirits are said to be particularly malicious around dusk, when they can wreak havoc on all they come in contact with. *Dukun* are still called in to help solve grievances, cure illnesses, interpret dreams and omens and cast spells on enemies.

At significant times of the agricultural year, such as harvest, age-old rituals are still observed and, in some parts of Sumatra, pilgrimages are made to the tombs of Acehnese scholars and religious leaders.

Weapons

Metallurgy was learned early from Arab and Persian traders and, because of Aceh's continued involvement in wars, weapon-making became a highly developed skill. Acehnese blades can have both edges sharpened or just one, and can be straight, concave or convex. The handles of weapons are usually made of buffalo horn, wood or bone. They are carved in the form of a crocodile's mouth, a horse's hoof or a duck's tail and embellished with gold or silver. The sheaths are made of rattan, silver or wood and fastened with bands of sosa, a mixture of gold, brass and copper.

when the entire building and yard are filled with people.

GUNONGAN & KHERKHOF

All that remains today of Aceh's powerful sultanates are on view at Gunongan (Jl Teuku Umar). Built by Sultan Iskandar Muda (r 1607–36) as a gift for his Malay princess wife, it was intended as a private playground and bathing place. The building consists of a series of frosty peaks with narrow stairways and a walkway leading to ridges, which represent the hills of the princess' native land.

Directly across from the Gunongan is a low, vaulted gate, in the traditional Pintu Aceh style, which gave access to the sultan's palace – supposedly for the use of royalty only.

To reach Gunongan, take a *labi labi* (open) bound for Jl Kota Alam (3000Rp).

Not far from the Gunongan is the Kherkhof (Dutch Cemetery), the last resting

place of more than 2000 Dutch and Indonesian soldiers who died fighting the Acehnese. The entrance is about 250m from the clock tower on the road to Uleh-leh. Tablets set into the walls by the entrance gate are inscribed with the names of the dead soldiers. The cemetery suffered some flooding from the tsunami.

To reach the Kherkhof take *labi labi* 9 or 10.

MUSEUM NEGERI BANDA ACEH

Take a tour of the province's treasured keepsakes at Museum Negeri Banda Aceh (Jl Alaudin Mahmudsyah 12; admission 1500Rp; 8.30am–4pm Tue–Thu, 8.30am–noon Fri & Sat). The museum has displays of Acehnese weaponry, household furnishings, ceremonial costumes, everyday clothing, gold jewellery and calligraphy.

In the same compound as the museum is the *Rumah Aceh* – a fine example of traditional Acehnese architecture, built without nails and held together with cord and pegs.

The best example of this art form is the *rencong*, a dagger that has a convex iron and *damascene* (etched or inlaid) blade with one sharpened edge. Less well-known Acehnese weapons are the *siwah* (knife) and *pedang* (pointed sword).

Jewellery

While there is a long tradition of fine gold and silver jewellery craft – stemming from the early days of the sultanate – there is almost no antique jewellery to be found in Aceh today. Much of it was sold to raise money for the war against the Dutch. Excellent gold and silver jewellery is still produced, but there is not much variation in design.

Weaving & Embroidery

Despite its long history and prominent reputation, Acehnese weaving is rapidly disappearing. On the other hand, embroidery is a vital art form. Areas around Sigli, Meulaboh and Banda Aceh are renowned for embroidery using *soedjoe* (gold-coloured metallic thread) on tapestry, cushions, fans and wall hangings. The main motifs are flowers, foliage and geometric designs. The finished work is decorated with mirrors, golden paillettes, sequins and beads, in an effect known as *blet blot*.

Mendjot beboengo is a kind of embroidery from the Gayo and Alas regions south of Takengon, traditionally done only by men. Stylised motifs of geometric flowers in red, white, yellow and green are embroidered on a black background.

Music

Typical instruments used by the Acehnese include the *arbab*, a three-stringed zither made from the wood of the jackfruit tree, with strings of bamboo, rattan or horsetail hair; and bamboo flutes (*buloh merindu*, *bangsi*, *tritit* and *soeling*). Gongs made of brass (sometimes dried goatskin) are also common, and come in three sizes: *gong*, *canang* and *mong-mong*, and are struck with padded wooden hammers.

It contains more Acehnese artefacts and war memorabilia. In front of it is a huge cast-iron bell, the *Cakra Donya*, said to have been a gift from a 15th-century Chinese emperor.

MARKETS

Market lovers will enjoy the colourful Pasar Aceh Central, which is just north of the Mesjid Raya between Jl Chik Pante Kulu and Jl Diponegoro.

Pasar Ikan (fish market; Jl SM Raja) defines freshness. Boats ease into the river and unload their cargoes of shark, tuna and prawns onto the vendor carts.

Tsunami Landmarks

It doesn't make for sunny postcard fodder, but travelling over oceans to mourn the dead is a profound gesture of sympathy. Seeing the place with your own eyes allows for personal and sacred memorials and helps feeble imaginations understand the scale of a disaster. Many of the most moving images of the

tsunami will be erased in the coming years: the freighter ships deposited miles inland will be disassembled, the empty landscape will be rebuilt, the amputated families will form new connections. But what will remain is an ancient human custom: housing the dead so the living can remember.

There are four mass graves in and around Banda Aceh where the dead in the province were buried. The largest site is Lambaro, located on the road to the airport, where 46,000 unidentified bodies were buried. Other grave sites include Meuraxa, Lhok Nga and Darusalam, where another 54,000 bodies were interred. Families who wish to mourn the loss of unlocated relatives choose one of the mass graves based on possible geographic proximity; they have no other evidence of where to lay their prayers.

VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

More than 1000 schools in Aceh were destroyed or damaged by the tsunami.

Libraries were ruined, sports equipment swept out to sea, computer equipment lost. And then there's the human toll: some estimates claim that 2500 teachers were killed and a third of the tsunami deaths were children. Rebuilding lives in Aceh also means rebuilding educational facilities. The leading Indonesian organisation working with the schools is the philanthropic arm of the Sampoerna cigarette company. **Sampoerna Foundation** (☎ 636097; www.sampoernafoundation.org) has several projects working to restore classrooms, supplies and provide scholar-

ships for orphaned children. The foundation is happy to meet with part-time volunteers and introduce them to partner schools.

Forum Bangum Aceh (FBA; ☎ 45204; www.fba.or.id) is the leading local NGO formed by Aceh residents to work directly and effectively with affected communities. The group has two ongoing projects: microeconomic packages to get businesses up and running, and educational outreach. Because FBA is a small organisation, it is more responsive to short-term volunteers than the larger

NGOs. Whatever your area of expertise, FBA will find a place for you.

Sleeping

Only a few of Banda Aceh's hotels have reopened since the tsunami. Those that have are usually filled with aid workers and have increased their rates, but not their standards.

Losmen Palembang (☎ 22044; Jl Khairil Anwar 49; d with fan/air-con 50,000/150,000Rp; a) A basic place with dark and depressing rooms.

Hotel Prapat (☎ 22159; Jl Ahmad Yani 19; d with fan/air-con 100,000/200,000Rp; a) One of the more affordable spots, Prapat has motel-style rooms with Western toilet and clean sheets.

Hotel Medan (☎ 21501; Jl Ahmad Yani 15; d 180,000-250,000Rp; a) The freighter boat has been removed from the parking lot and many of the flooded rooms have been nicely renovated.

Hotel Cakradonya (☎ 33633; Jl Khairil Anwar 10; d with fan/air-con 330,000/500,000Rp; a) Has comfortable rooms that have seen better days.

Hotel Sultan (☎ 22469; Jl Panglima Polem 1; d from 500,000Rp) When the NGOs hit town, this was one of the only functional hotels and has been packed out ever since. The rates are ridiculously overpriced and the going joke in town is that this is a two-star hotel with five-star prices.

Eating

The square at the junction of Jl Ahmad Yani and Jl Khairil Anwar is the setting for the **Pasar Malam Rek**, Banda Aceh's lively night food market.

Rumah Makan Asia (☎ 23236; Jl Cut Meutia 37/39; mains 10,000Rp) Aceh's version of *masakan Padang* (Padang dish) has an array of zesty dishes, such as *ikan panggang* (baked fish).

Mie Razali (☎ 27148; Jl Panglima Polem 85) This local rice and noodle chain spins up an avocado-chocolate shake that tastes like ice cream after a romp through a green field.

PP Cafe & Restaurant (Jl Kesehatan 115; mains 12,000Rp) Has a good selection of Indonesian and some European food.

Pante Pirak supermarket (Jl Pante Pirak; h until 10pm) Good for stocking up on supplies or just watching the buying habits of Banda Aceh's middle class.

Country Steak House (☎ 081 1680012; Jl Sri Ratu Safiatuddin 45B; mains 60,000-100,000Rp; h 10am-

midnight) Wherever there are executives, rest assured there are steaks. Psst, there's beer here too.

Tropicana (Jl SM Raja; mains from 15,000Rp) One of two seafood restaurants in town where the NGOs go. Just look for the tell-tale SUVs parked out front.

Drinking

Because of sharia law, alcohol is not available as openly here as elsewhere in Indonesia, but Chinese restaurants, the Hotel Sultan and Country Steak House serve beer. As long as it is kept quiet, most of the locals don't mind.

If you'd like to see what life is like without the fermented juice, follow the locals to the brewed replacement. The teenagers in town sip and smoke at **Chek Yoke** (Jl Chik Pante Kulu), a coffee shop on the southern banks of the river.

Aceh's most famous coffee house is nicknamed **Solong Café** (Jasa Ayah Cafeteria; Sedia Bubuk Aceh, Ulee Kareng). One-pound bags of finely ground, locally grown coffee are on sale and make a delicious post-Indo gift. You'll need to take a taxi.

Getting There & Away

AIR

There are several flights a day from Banda Aceh to Medan (250,000Rp) on Garuda, Adam Air and Lion Air. The last flight leaves Banda Aceh at 5.30pm. **BP Travel** (☎ 32325; Jl Panglima Polem 75) is a helpful air ticket agent. **Garuda** (Garuda Indonesia; ☎ 32523; Jl Daud Beureh 9) also has an office in Banda Aceh.

BOAT

After the tsunami, the port moved to Ulehleh, 15km northwest of Banda Aceh's city centre. The road to the port goes straight through the tsunami's path – once a two-car garage suburb, now an eerie, empty landscape. Bamboo barracks in places have replaced the fine homes, but otherwise there is very little evidence of the former communities: no roads, streetlights or clotheslines. See Pulau Weh for boat schedules and fare information (p424).

BUS

South of the city centre you'll find the **Terminal Bus Senti** (Jl Teuku Umar). There are numerous buses to Medan (economy/air-con

ANATOMY OF DISASTER RELIEF

Even in a climate of competing fashionable causes, no other natural disaster has galvanized the world's attention and support like the 2004 tsunami. Money poured in from all corners of the globe and every international aid organisation rushed to help and be seen helping. Both the disaster and the response were chaotic, causing public opinion to sour towards the well-known agencies, believing that their donations were better placed under the pillow for the disaster fairy.

With a few years under the bridge, what did the relief groups do right and what did they bungle?

The tsunami was an unprecedented disaster and in Aceh alone even a decades-long separatist movement couldn't achieve the level of destruction that the ocean accomplished in a few hours. According to figures from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Aceh was in a state of emergency from January to May 2005. During that time, basic shelter and nutrition were provided, families reunited, dead bodies were recovered and buried, 70,000 cubic metres of debris were removed and used in reconstruction efforts, and possible water-borne health epidemics were averted. Those could all be claimed as successes.

Now for the sore spots. Rebuilding of homes has been slow. By February 2006, the UN-managed construction teams had only completed 20,000 homes and, according to estimates, a total of 160,000 new or refurbished homes are needed. Access to materials is part of the problem: agencies bound by international standards can only use harvests from sustainable sources of timber. That's good news for Sumatra's protected forests, but being ecofriendly is a crummy consolation prize for someone stuck in a tent. Bricks are a possible alternative but the brick-making facilities in Aceh are not mechanised. An average worker can produce only 500 bricks per day. There's also a labour shortage: in 2006, Aceh needed 200,000 construction workers but only 40,000 were registered. Then there's the question of where to rebuild. Many land deeds were washed away, some property is now underwater, and disputes over ownership and inheritance are common.

The UNDP has targeted 2007 as the year that all displaced people will have housing. If reconstruction continues at the current rate, 2010 is a more likely target.

But what the aid organisations botched most was the public relations game. Banda Aceh is filled with sealed-off SUVs stamped with agency logos looking like princely chariots. Many communities are reluctant to cooperate with relief workers because of too many unfulfilled promises by inexperienced organisations, or cultural misunderstandings. The uniform of the relief workers, an agency badge and a memory stick in a breast pocket, has become something of a local joke. Then there's the counterattack. Aid workers complain that locals only work if they're paid and that they always want more. Casual observers, from a safe café distance away, accuse NGOs of being bloated bureaucracies, pointing to anecdotes about overpaid executives whose résumés comprise car washing. And everyone assumes that all that money is being poured down someone else's gullet. In reality, a portion might be wetting fat cats' whistles, and the rest of the money that was promised was never delivered. Natural disasters, like weddings, often bring out the worst and best in people.

120,000/150,000Rp, nine to 13 hours). As long as the peace agreement holds, overland travel between Banda Aceh and Medan is safer now than in the past.

The west coast road from Banda Aceh to Meulaboh was destroyed by the 2004 tsunami. When land transport does resume, you'll have the option of public buses that depart from the bus terminal or minibuses that depart from offices behind the mosque on Jl Mohammad Jam.

South of Meulaboh, the road is in working order and can be accessed via the interior road through Aceh or from Medan.

Getting Around

Airport taxi charge 60,000Rp to 70,000Rp for the 16km ride into town. Rates have increased with the NGO presence. The unlikely bargaining chip of being a tourist and not an NGO can get you a cheaper price. A taxi from the airport to Uleh-leh port will cost 100,000Rp.

Labi labi are the main form of transport around town and cost 1500Rp. The *opelet terminal* (Jl Diponegoro) is that special breed of Indonesian mayhem.

For Uleh-leh (5000Rp, 30 minutes), take the blue *labi labi* signed 'Uleh-leh'. You can also reach Lhok Nga and Lampu'uk (15,000Rp).

Bekac around town should cost between 5000Rp and 10,000Rp, depending on your destination. From the centre of town to Geuceu Komplek, a bekac should cost about 10,000Rp.

PULAU WEH

☎ 0652 / pop 25,000

You are in for a real treat at Pulau Weh. The island's fingers grasp at the mighty Indian Ocean, forming vistas of alternating land and sea. Like the terrestrial landscape, the underwater geography is rugged and varied, creating the scuba version of hiking. Divers describe great walls of languid sea fans, deep canyons and rock pinnacles, plus a lot of big fish.

Hardly on the international radar of beach scenes, Weh is mellow and unconcerned with tourist dollars. Along the muddy island road are little villages with underwear-only kids playing in the yard, lazy cows tied up to a green patch of grass and scrappy goats looking for garden victims. The shops

cater to the locals with communal TVs and coffee instead of souvenir kitsch.

Pulau Weh is shaped roughly like a horseshoe. On the northeastern leg is the port town of Sabang, where most of Weh's population lives. The primary tourist beaches are Gapang and Iboih, which are about 20km away heading towards the northwestern leg.

It's always a little rainy on Weh, with two monsoon seasons. November to January are the wettest, coolest months but are also the best times to see whale sharks.

Malaria has been reported on the island, so take the proper precautions.

The tsunami did give Weh a minor licking, but the island fared better than the mainland. Many of the coastal businesses that were bashed up have since rebuilt and the villagers banded together to repair roads, replant trees and fill in washed-out pockets of the beach.

Sabang

The island's main township is an interesting mix of traditional fishing village and old colonial villas. During Dutch rule, Sabang was a major coal and water depot for steamships, but with the arrival of diesel power after WWII it went into decline.

During the 1970s it was a duty-free port, but this status was eliminated in 1986 and Sabang once again became a sleepy fishing town. Today the only industry – other than fishing – is rattan furniture.

Most people pass through Sabang fairly quickly en route to the tourist beaches, but return to town for provisions.

The **post office** (Jl Perdagangan 66) is next door to the **telephone office** (☎ 24hr), which has a Home Country Direct phone.

BRI bank (Bank Rakyat Indonesia; Jl Perdagangan) changes travellers cheques and US dollars at terrible rates. It also has an ATM that only accepts MasterCard.

Alternatively, try your negotiating skills with the Chinese moneychangers scattered about town.

Sabang is surrounded by beautiful beaches. Just 10 minutes' walk away is **Pantai Paradiso**, a white-sand beach shaded by coconut palms. A little further on is **Pantai Kasih** (Lover's Beach), and about 30 minutes from town is **Pantai Sumur Tiga**, a popular picnic spot.

Other attractions around Sabang include **Danau Anak Laut**, a serene freshwater lake that supplies the island's water, and **Gunung Merapi**, a semi-active volcano, which holds boiling water in its caldera and occasionally puffs smoke.

SLEEPING & EATING

Few people choose to stay in town unless they get stuck.

Losmen Irma (☎ 21148; Jl Teuku Umar 3; s/d 40,000/60,000Rp) A local boarding house.

Losmen Merapi (☎ 21344; Jl Teuku Umar 17; d 60,000-75,000Rp; a) Another cheap spot across the road.

Hotel Holiday (☎ 21131; Jl Perdagangan 1; d 60,000-150,000Rp; a) A marked step up, **Hotel Holiday** is a Chinese-run hotel with solid, if not fashion-plate, rooms.

Samudera Hotel (☎ 21503; Jl Diponegoro; d with fan/air-con 60,000/150,000Rp; a) This old Dutch villa in a peaceful area up the hill is full of worn charm. Cheaper rooms are fairly simple but the more expensive options are bright and spacious.

There are plenty of restaurants along the main street, Jl Perdagangan, serving cheap Padang food. There's also a fruit market near the BRI bank.

Gapang

Occupying a sandy cove, Gapang is more social than Iboih, with little beachside cafés and front-door swimming. Some may try to argue that one beach is better than the other, but both have their charms.

SLEEPING & EATING

Gapang has the greatest variety of accommodation on the island, from pseudo resorts to cheapie huts. On the weekends, rates often increase by double or more because of short-term business from the NGOs based in Aceh. If you're staying longer than two days or arrive mid-week, you should be able to get the rates quoted here or cheaper. The hotels are listed here in geographical order from west to east.

Leguna Resort (☎ 22799; d 175,000-380,000Rp; a) A garden of generous-sized chalets, a handful of which have sea views. There is a small enclosed beach but the resort is a little weatherworn.

Flamboyan (☎ 081 360272720; d 250,000-400,000Rp; a) A large resort-type outfit with

pleasant traditional-style rooms and a restaurant built on top of the rocky point.

Following the small road around the headland will lead you to Gapang's main hang-out.

Ohana (80,000Rp) Three basic wooden bungalows with *mandis* (common Indonesian bath, consisting of a large water tank from which water is ladled over the body) are planted on the hillside.

No-name Bungalows (20,000-40,000Rp) This bamboo barrack had just been built when we arrived and had not yet been christened. The rooms are basic and are a shoe-less stumble to the waves.

Ramadilla (50,000Rp) Past everything else, **Ramadilla's** cabins climb up the hill with a longhouse or two that commands a chief-tain's view of the sea.

Beachside cafés, serving Western food, absorb the evening breezes and post-dive appetites. For lunch, head out to the main road, where a small warung does delicious *nasi bungus* (rice and curry served for take-away in a banana leaf).

Iboih

More rustic than Gapang, Iboih follows a rocky headland with a string of simple bungalows along a woody footpath. The almost castaway feel is a foolproof backpacker magnet.

A small path leads through a stone gateway past the village well and up and over a small hill to the bungalow strip.

Opposite Iboih, 100m offshore, is **Pulau Rubiah**, a densely forested island surrounded by spectacular coral reefs known as the **Sea Garden**. It is a favourite snorkelling and diving spot. The coral has been destroyed in places but there is still plenty to see including turtles, manta ray, lion fish, tigerfish and occasional sharks.

If you are a strong swimmer it is possible to make your own way there. Beware of strong currents, especially at the southern tip of the island.

Adjacent to the **Sea Garden** is the **Iboih Forest nature reserve**. It has some good walks and coastal caves that can be explored by boat.

SLEEPING & EATING

Simple palm-thatch bungalows, many built on stilts and overhanging crystal-clear

water, make up the majority of the accommodation here.

Most places are very similar, but do a wander before declaring a winner. If you arrive mid-week and stay for several days, you can negotiate 30,000Rp a night. If you're near the weekend when the NGOs arrive expect to pay 50,000Rp or more depending on how long you stay. Most places have shared bathroom facilities.

The following losmen are listed in geographic order as you'll approach them: Arina, Fatimah, Oong's and Yulia's.

Just off the main road are a few shops selling sundries, Indonesian lunches and coffee in front of a small beach. If you speak Bahasa Indonesia, this is where you can scoop up the village gossip.

Next door to Rubiah Tirta Divers is Chill Out Café, serving all three meals and a view of a small beach. Norma's, the restaurant portion of Oong's Guesthouse, does a nightly seafood dinner around a communal table and serves beer. Further down, Yulia's has shakes and light fare. Prices at these places tend to be around 25,000Rp for mains.

Long Angen

This secluded beach on the western side of the island is ideally located for spectacular sunsets. The beach itself only exists for six months of the year – the sand is swept away by the sea from November to May.

Activities

DIVING & SNORKELLING

People don't come to Weh for the nightlife or the bikinis. They come for the diving, which is considered some of the best the Indian Ocean has to offer. On an average day, you're likely to spot morays, manta rays, lionfish, and stingrays. During plankton blooms, whale sharks come to graze. Unlike other dive sites, the coral fields take a back seat to the sea life and landscapes. There are close to 20 dive sites around the island, most in and around Iboih and Gapang.

There are two dive operators on the island. At Iboih, Rubiah Tirta Divers (☎ 081 534020050; info@rubiahdivers.com) is the oldest dive operation on the island and charges US\$30/54/72 for one/two/three dives.

At Gapang, Lumba Lumba Diving Centre (☎ 331133; www.lumbalumba.com) is the centre of activity with the comings and goings of

wet-suit creatures. Ton and Marjan Egbers maintain a helpful website with detailed descriptions of dives and other need-to-know information. Rates are quoted in euros and start at €25/45/65 for one/two/three; you can pay with plastic. Padi diving courses are also available. The centre's shop has internet access (20,000Rp per hour).

Snorkelling gear can be hired almost anywhere for around 15,000Rp per day.

Getting There & Away

Sabang is the port town on Pulau Weh. Fast ferries to Sabang leave the mainland from Uleh-leh, 15km northwest of Banda Aceh, at 9.30am and 4pm (economy/cabin 60,000/70,000, two hours). Slow ferries leave at 2pm (12,000Rp, three hours). In the opposite direction, the slow ferry leaves at 8am and the fast ferry at 8.30am and 4pm. You should get to the port at least an hour before departure to get a ticket.

Getting Around

From the port, there are regular buses to Sabang (10,000Rp, 15 minutes), and Gapang and Iboih (50,000Rp, 45 minutes). *Labi labi* run from Jl Perdagangan in Sabang to Gapang and Iboih (30,000Rp). The road from Sabang to the beaches is rough in patches, like all roads in Sumatra.

ACEH'S WEST COAST

Rounding the northwestern tip of Sumatra's finger of land is a string of little villages and endless beaches backed by densely forested hills. This is the perfect recipe for paradise, but several factors have conspired to keep the sands free of beach blankets: the unstable safety situation during the military occupation of Aceh, and the 2004 tsunami.

Lhok Nga & Lampu'uk

☎ 0656 / pop Lhok Nga 200, Lampu'uk 1000
These coastal weekend spots, only 17km from Banda Aceh, were levelled by the tsunami. In Lampu'uk the wave travelled some 7km inland, killing four out of every five people. One elementary school in the area went from a student population of 300 children to 35; nearly a generation wiped out. Many of the villagers are still living in temporary shelters.

Somewhat cruelly, the beach and ocean are just as beautiful as ever, perhaps more

so. None of the beachside development, except for the now repaired cement company, has been rebuilt.

Joel's Beach BBQ (☎ 081 37528; per person 100,000-150,000Rp) organises group fish fries on the beach of Lampu'uk near where his beach bungalows used to be located. There are plans in the future for accommodation. Call in advance to make reservations.

Take *labi labi* 04 (15,000Rp) from the *opelet* terminal in Banda Aceh for both Lhok Nga and Lampu'uk.

Calang & Meulaboh

☎ 0655 / pop Calang 10,000, Meulaboh 80,000
Everything in the town of Calang was destroyed by the tsunami; the population was cut in half and infrastructure is gone.

Further south, Meulaboh, 240km from Banda Aceh, was the closest town to the earthquake's epicentre and is often referred to in the press as 'ground zero'. The town was completely destroyed and close to a third of the 120,000 population were killed.

The town has since been moved to a largely unaffected, northern suburb. Meuligo Hotel (Jl Iskandar Muda 35; 75,000Rp; ☎) survived the tsunami and is open for business.

Full recovery for these communities is many years away. Many survivors still remain in temporary camps and the only visitors going in and out are aid workers engaged in humanitarian relief.

Even accessing these towns to provide relief has been difficult. The west-coast road from Banda Aceh to Meulaboh was destroyed by the tsunami. USAID has contracted with Halliburton to rebuild parts of the road by 2008, but this target date had been previously moved forward due to logistical problems and may very well slide again.

There are currently no bus services to Calang or Meulaboh, but there are helicopter food missions arranged for aid workers. The airport is operational and SMAC runs twice-weekly flights between Meulaboh and Banda Aceh (281,000Rp).

There is currently a public ferry that goes from Uleh-leh to Calang (120,000Rp, six hours) four times a week.

Do also note that malaria can be a problem, so take precautions. Before going for a swim, be aware that some of the west-coast beaches have very strong currents.

Pulau Simeulue

☎ 0650 / pop 70,000
The isolated island of Simeulue, about 150km west of Tapaktuan, is a rocky volcanic outcrop blanketed in rainforest and fringed with clove and coconut plantations. Few visitors make it this far – though the surfing is said to be excellent along the west coast.

Simeulue suffered relatively minor damage from the 2004 tsunami. Many residents heeded ancestral knowledge and ran into the hills when the ocean started to recede. This resulted in a death toll of only nine people. The north coast was hit the worst, leaving villagers without homes, livestock or crops. The March 2006 earthquake also shook Simeulue, causing structural damage to concrete buildings, and three reported deaths.

The port of Sinabang and the airport are still operational. Along the main road in Sinabang is Losmen Simeuleu (30,000Rp) and Losmen Lovya (30,000Rp).

On the west coast is the surf camp Baneng Beach Retreat (☎ 081 362417692; www.simeulue.com; packages from US\$80), also called 'Willy's Place'. Reef uplift from the earthquake has flattened out some of the famous surf breaks, but new spots are being discovered.

SMAC flies to Simeulue (450,000Rp) from Medan and Banda Aceh; inquire with the Medan office (☎ 4551888) or a local travel agent for ticketing and schedules.

Ferries run from the mainland ports of Singkil and Meulaboh to Pulau Simeuleu's port town of Sinabang. Until Aceh's west-coast road is restored, land connections are best made via North Sumatra (Medan or Parapat) instead of Banda Aceh.

Tapaktuan

☎ 0656 / pop 15,000
The sleepy seaside town of Tapaktuan, 200km south of Meulaboh, is the main town in South Aceh. It's very laid-back by Sumatran standards and, although it has few specific sights, it can be a pleasant place to hang out for a couple of days. Although its location would suggest otherwise, Tapaktuan was not noticeably affected by the tsunami. Many displaced people from other parts of Aceh have sought refuge here with relatives or friends.

Most places of importance are on the main street, Jl Merdeka, which runs along

the coast. The town can be used as a base to explore the lowland Kluet region of Gunung Leuser National Park, about 45km south. Kluet's unspoilt swamp forests support the densest population of primates in Southeast Asia and are also good sites for bird-watching. It may be possible to hire guides through the national park office in Kandang, 38km south of Tapaktuan.

Pantai Tu'i Lhok and **Pantai Air Dingin**, about 18km north of Tapaktuan, are the best of several good beaches in the area. Opposite both beaches are waterfalls with natural plunge pools where you can cool off.

Gua Kelam (Dark Cave), 3km north of Tapaktuan, is a spectacular series of caves and tunnels that can be explored, but you'd be wise to take a guide. Don't worry about finding a guide – they'll find you.

Most of the places to stay are along **Jl Merdeka**. **Losmen Bukit Barisan** (☎ 21145; s/d 35,000/60,000Rp), in an old Dutch house, is a friendly place with basic rooms and a certain shabby charm; and **Hotel Panorama** (☎ 21004; d from 50,000Rp; a) is a large, modern hotel with a range of reasonable rooms.

Jl Merdeka is also a good place to find a bite to eat. Seafood is a speciality and there are several restaurants selling delicious grilled fish for about 10,000Rp. After dark, the night market by the main pier, opposite **Hotel Panorama**, kicks into action and is a lively place for a quick meal.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Until the west-coast road is repaired, Tapaktuan is better reached from Medan (90,000Rp, 10 hours) via Berastagi and Sidikalang. From Sidikalang it's possible to get a direct bus to Pangururan (40,000Rp, two hours) on the west coast of Danau Toba.

Singkil

☎ 0658 / pop 20,000

Singkil is a remote port at the mouth of Sungai Alas. It merits a mention only as the departure point for boats to the Simeulue and Banyak islands.

Catching a boat will mean spending a night at one of Singkil's very basic **losmen** (30,000Rp).

There are daily minibuses from Medan to Singkil (70,000Rp, 10 hours). If you're travelling from Berastagi, Danau Toba or

Tapaktuan, you will need to change buses at Sidikalang and Subulus Salem.

Boats leave for Pulau Balai (25,000Rp, four hours) at 1pm on Wednesday.

BANYAK ISLANDS

pop 5000

The Banyak (Many) Islands are a cluster of 99, mostly uninhabited, islands, about 30km west of Singkil. The islands are very remote and see few casual visitors. The 2004 Boxing Day earthquake and tsunami, followed by the 2005 Nias quake, destroyed many coastal dwellings and contaminated fresh-water wells. The main island of Pulau Balai was permanently sea-sawed by the quake, causing the west coast to rise by about 70cm and the east coast to drop below sea level. The main town of Balai now experiences flooding at high tide.

Malaria has been reported on the islands, so take suitable precautions.

Inquire at the pier about accommodation on Pulau Balai. Lodging may also be available on Pulau Palambak Kecil, Pulau Rangit Besar, Pulau Panjang and Pulau Ujung Batu with local families; ask about meals when arranging a room.

There is one boat a week (Wednesdays at 1pm) between Balai and the mainland port of Singkil (one way 25,000Rp, four hours).

GAYO HIGHLANDS

As long as the peace lasts, the interior of Aceh is ripe for off-the-path picking. This is coffee country, cool and mountainous with spectacular vistas and the odd spotting of wild jungle critters. The road from Takengon to Blangkejeran, the main towns of the Gayo Highlands, is astoundingly picturesque and can be used as an alternative route to or from Berastagi.

Farming is the main occupation in the highlands and the principal crops are coffee and tobacco, followed by rice and vegetables. You'll know you're in Gayo country by the number of water buffalo, which replace the hump-necked *bentang* cattle preferred in the rest of the province.

The Gayo, who number about 250,000, lived an isolated existence until the advent of modern roads and transport. Like the neighbouring Acehnese, the Gayo are strict Muslims and were renowned for their fierce resistance to Dutch rule.

Before building an itinerary around the Gayo Highlands, watch the press for any unsettling developments in the peace accord. It is probably safe to assume that no news is good news.

Takengon

☎ 0643

Takengon is the largest town in the highlands, but retains a sleepy charm, with a spectacular setting and refreshing climate. The town is built on the shores of Danau Laut Tawar, a 26km-long stretch of water, surrounded by steep hills rising to volcanic peaks. Gunung Geureundong, to the north, rises 2855m.

Much of the town centre dates from the beginning of the 20th century, when the town was used as a Dutch base.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

All of the action is in the centre of town on **Jl Lebe Kadir**. You'll find the post office, **Telkom wartel**, police station and **Mesjid Raya** here. You can change US dollars (cash and travellers cheques) at **BRI bank** (Bank Rakyat Indonesia; Jl Yos Sudarso).

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Takengon's main attractions are all natural. Admire the views, cruise around the lake in a *perahu* (dugout canoe) or explore caves, waterfalls and hot springs.

The best cave is **Loyang Koro** (Buffalo Caves), 6km from town, with some interesting stalagmites and plenty of bats. In the village of **Kebayakan**, just north of town, you can see the sole attraction made by humans in the area: the intricately carved house of the region's last traditional ruler. Further on, at **Simpang Balik**, about 15km north of Takengon, the sulphurous hot spring is said to cure skin diseases.

In the week following Independence Day (17 August), Takengon hosts a regional horse-racing carnival, held at the track to the west of town. It's a highly spirited affair, with 12-year-old jockeys from all over the highlands riding bareback in the hope of glory.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Buntu Kubu (☎ 22254; Jl Malem Dewa; d from 50,000Rp) This place has a magnificent view over the lake. The hotel has a varied history;

it was a former Dutch official residence, museum and Indonesian military post.

Hotel Renggali (☎ 21144; Jl Bintang; d from 150,000Rp) Perched on the lakeside 2km out of town, Renggali is set in beautiful gardens and has some hit-and-miss rooms.

Padang food and Chinese-style noodle dishes can be found all along **Jl Lebe Kadir**, **Jl Pasar Inpres** and around the bus terminal.

Delicious fresh Gayo coffee is available pretty much everywhere. A local speciality is *kopi telor kocok* – a raw egg and sugar creamed together in a glass and topped up with coffee.

SHOPPING

Takengon is the place to buy traditional-style Gayo/Alas tapestry, which is made into clothes, belts, purses and cushion covers. At the market, it's sometimes possible to buy highly decorated engraved pottery called *ke-unire*, which is used in wedding ceremonies.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are two buses a day to Medan: an economy bus (70,000Rp, 13 hours) and a 'deluxe' air-con bus (95,000Rp, 11 hours). Other destinations include Banda Aceh (60,000Rp, eight hours).

Heading south, there are regular buses to **Blangkejeran** (53,000Rp, seven hours) and **Gurah/Ketambe** (50,000Rp, nine hours). You would connect through these towns to reach Berastagi.

GETTING AROUND

Labi labi leave from the southern end of **Jl Baleatu**. Fares around town cost 1500Rp. *Perahu* for lake cruising can be hired at the pier at the end of **Jl Laut Tawar**.

Blangkejeran

Blangkejeran is the main town of the remote southern highlands. The area is recognised as the Gayo heartland and it's possible to hire guides to take you out to some of the smaller villages. Accommodation is available in several small guesthouses. There are regular buses north to Takengon and south to Gurah and Kutacane.

GUNUNG LEUSER NATIONAL PARK

☎ 0629

Gunung Leuser National Park is one of the world's most important and biologically

diverse conservation areas. It is often described as a complete ecosystem laboratory because of the range of forest and species types.

Within the park's boundaries live some of the planet's most endangered species – tigers, rhinoceros, elephants and orang-utans. Although your chances of seeing these celebrity animals are extremely remote, you can be sure of encountering plenty of primates. The most common is the white-breasted Thomas Leaf monkey, which sports a brilliant, crested punk hairdo.

Habitats range from the swamp forests of the west coast to the dense lowland rainforests of the interior. Much of the area around Ketambe is virgin forest. Above 1500m, the permanent mist has created moss forests rich in epiphytes and orchids. Rare flora includes two members of the rafflesia family, *Rafflesia acehensis* and *Rafflesia zippelii*, which are found along Sungai Alas.

More than 300 bird species have been recorded in the park, including the bizarre rhinoceros hornbill and the helmeted hornbill, which has a call that sounds like maniacal laughter.

The park faces a great number of challenges. Poachers have virtually wiped out the crocodile population and have severely reduced the number of tigers and rhinoceros. According to the Indonesian Forum for the Environment, a fifth of the park has been adversely affected by illegal logging and road construction. A highly controversial road project, called Ladia Galaska, has been on the government agenda for years and when completed will link the eastern and

western coasts of the province through the park. The progress of the project has been slow and embattled.

This park receives a lot of rain throughout the year, but rain showers tend to lessen in frequency and duration from December to March.

Orientation & Information

Gurah, in the heart of the Alas Valley, is one of the main access points to Gunung Leuser National Park. Directly across the river is Ketambe, home to a world-renowned conservation research station, which is off limits to tourists (see the boxed text on below). Kutacane, 43km from Gurah, is the closest town of any note and is the place to go for transport, supplies and post and telephone facilities.

You are not allowed to enter the park without a permit and a guide. Both are available from the PHKA office in Tanah Merah, about 45 minutes from Gurah, and 15 minutes from Kutacane. Permits cost 20,000Rp (plus 500Rp insurance) per day. In theory you will need three photocopies of your passport but this is rarely required. Guides can be hired from the PHKA office or from any guesthouse in Gurah. If you have a certain plant or animal objective, ask around for the guides with that speciality.

Guide prices are fixed by the Sumatran Guide Association (US\$15 for three hours, US\$20 per day, US\$40 for a two-day trek).

Trekking

For serious trekkers and jungle enthusiasts Gurah offers a much more authentic experi-

ence than the trekking near Bukit Lawang. Be prepared for hordes of leeches, swarms of stinging insects and extreme terrain. The PHKA office in Tanah Merah has information about a variety of treks, from short walks to 14-day hikes through the jungle to the tops of the park's mountains. Here are a few options; guides can also tailor a trip to specific requests:

Gurah Recreation Forest The *hutan wisata* (recreation forest) at Gurah is a park within the national park. The forest's 9200 hectares have walking tracks and viewing towers; the most popular walk involves a two-hour (5km) hike from Gurah to hot springs by Sungai Alas. There's also a 6km walk to a waterfall.

Gunung Kemiri At 3314m, this is the second-highest peak in Gunung Leuser National Park. The return trek takes five to six days, starting from the village of Gumpang, north of Gurah. It takes in some of the park's richest primate habitat, with orang-utans, macaques, siamangs and gibbons.

Gunung Perkinson Allow seven days for the return trek to the summit of Gunung Perkinson (2828m), on the eastern side of the park. There are wild orchids, lady slipper and other flowers unique to Aceh, as well as a spectacular moss forest along this route.

Gunung Simpali The trek to Gunung Simpali (3270m) is a one-week round trip starting from the village of Engkran and following the valley of Sungai Lawe Mamas. Rhinos live in this area. The Lawe Mamas is a wild, raging river that joins the Alas about 15km north of Kutacane.

Gunung Leuser The park's highest peak is, of course, Gunung Leuser (3404m). Only the fit should attempt the 14-day return trek to the summit. The walk starts from the village of Angusan, northwest of Blangkejeren.

Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation is scattered along the only road through Gurah. Each guesthouse has its own small restaurant.

Pondok Wisata Ketambe (☎ 21709; d from 60,000Rp) Coming from the south, it is the first option with forest bungalows. More-expensive rooms have hot water.

Guesthouse Sadar Wisata (d 50,000-60,000Rp) Next door, this has a range of good-value bungalows from basic older models to newer, more comfortable rooms across the road.

Gurah Bungalows (r from 85,000Rp) The only upmarket option. 4km up the road. Clean, spacious rooms are set deep in the forest, right on the bank of the river.

If you arrive in Kutacane too late to reach Gurah, you might have to spend the night at **Wisma Rindu Alam** (JI Besar; d from 50,000Rp).

Getting There & Around

SMAC flies from Kutacane to Medan and to Banda Aceh.

Long-distance buses leave from the terminal in Kutacane for Medan's Pinang Baris terminal (80,000Rp, six hours) and Berastagi (40,000Rp, five hours). Along the way there are fine views of Gunung Sinabung and the Alas Valley.

From Kutacane there are countless *labi labi* to Tanah Merah (5000Rp, 15 minutes) and Gurah (10,000Rp, one hour).

There are also buses heading north to Blangkejeren and beyond.

WEST SUMATRA

In West Sumatra the earth swells as mightily as an angry sea. Silent but deadly volcanoes stand alone on their pedestals, reminding the populous who commands the landscape. Roads daring to traverse the serpentine mountain ranges are more crooked than a politician, winding in and out of valleys sewn together by a patchwork of verdant, terraced rice paddies. Thanks to a combination of rich volcanic soil and ample rainfall the region is an excellent growing area and pockets of lush tropical rainforest survive.

The people who tamed the jungle are the Minangkabau, an ethnic group that has dominated the province's cultural and political identity. Their distinctive buffalo-horned buildings dominate West Sumatra's cities and villages, and their colourful wedding parades subdue the usual bustle of modern-day traffic.

But the Minangkabau influence isn't confined to the fertile highlands. Because of their traditional custom of *merantau* – travelling to find your fortune – the Minangkabau have filtered across Indonesia, exporting their cuisine (*nasi Padang*) and their language (a dialect of Malay which formed the basis for Bahasa Indonesia). They are regarded by their compatriots as an adaptable, intelligent people, and are one of the most economically successful ethnic groups in the country.

The hot, bustling city of Padang is the gateway to the province, but it's the pleasant hill town of Bukittinggi that headlines the tourist itinerary. An idyllic volcanic

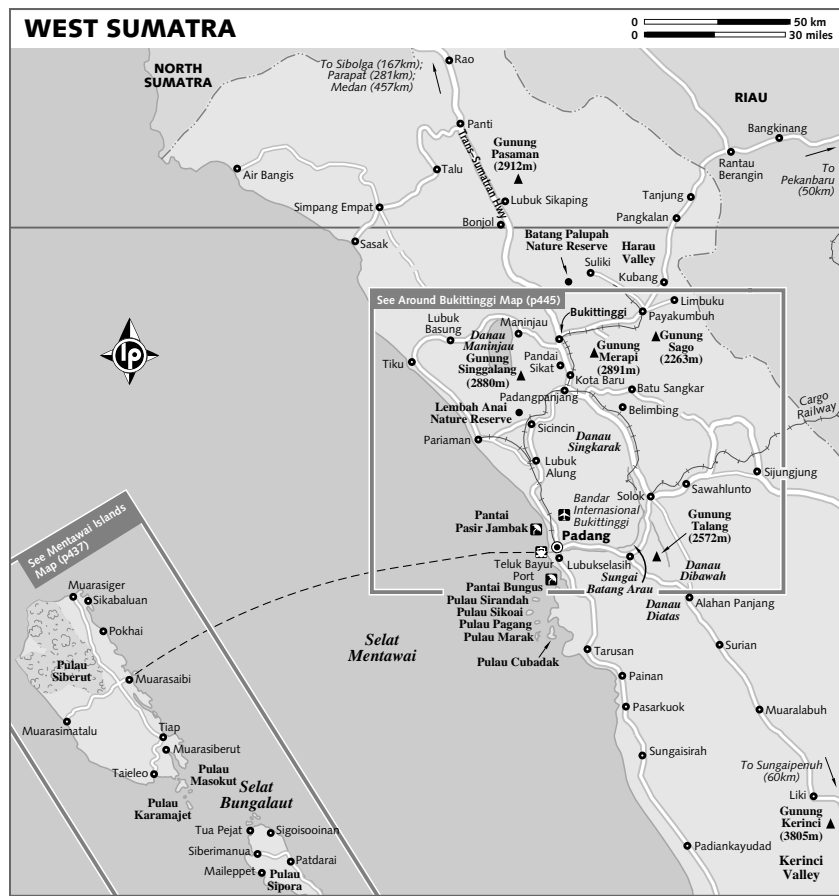
KETAMBE RESEARCH STATION

The Ketambe Research Station has been conducting extensive studies of the flora and fauna of Gunung Leuser National Park for almost 30 years.

In the early 1970s Ketambe was home to Sumatra's orang-utan rehabilitation programme, but the project was relocated to Bukit Lawang to allow researchers to study the Ketambe region without the disruption of tourists. Nowadays the station's primary concern is hard-core conservation, research and species cataloguing. Both the centre and the surrounding forest are off limits to almost everyone but the Indonesian and international researchers.

The 450-hectare protected area consists mainly of primary lowland tropical forest and is home to a large number of primates, as well as Sumatran tigers, rhinoceros, sun bears, hornbills and snakes. Despite its protected status, a third of the area has been lost to illegal logging since 1999.

For more information on Ketambe research activities, visit www.eu-ldp.co.id/16RMIDivx.htm or visit the website of the park's conservation and outreach organisation, Leuser Development Program (www.eu-ldp.co.id).



lake, Danau Maninjau resides peacefully close to perfection. Off the west coast, the Mentawai Islands, long isolated from mainland Sumatra, offer a fascinating glimpse of traditional tribal culture and rip-roaring surf breaks.

History

Little is known about the area's history until the arrival of Islam in the 14th century. However, the abundance of megalithic remains around the towns of Batu Sangkar and Payakumbuh, near Bukittinggi, suggest that the central highlands supported a sizable community some 2000 years ago.

After the arrival of Islam, the region was split into small Muslim states ruled

by sultans and it remained this way until the beginning of the 19th century, when war erupted between followers of the Islamic fundamentalist Padri movement and supporters of the local chiefs, adherents to the Minangkabau *adat*. The Padris were so named because their leaders were haji, pilgrims who had made their way to Mecca via the Acehnesse port of Pedir. They returned from the haji determined to establish a true Islamic society and stamp out the pre-Islamic ways that dominated the ruling houses.

The Padris had won control of much of the highlands by 1821 when the Dutch decided to join the fray in support of the Minangkabau traditional leaders. The fight-

ing dragged on until 1837, when the Dutch overcame the equator town of Bonjol, the stronghold of the Padri leader Imam Bonjol, whose name adorns street signs all over Indonesia. In today's Minangkabau society, a curious fusion of traditional beliefs and Islam is practised in West Sumatra.

PADANG

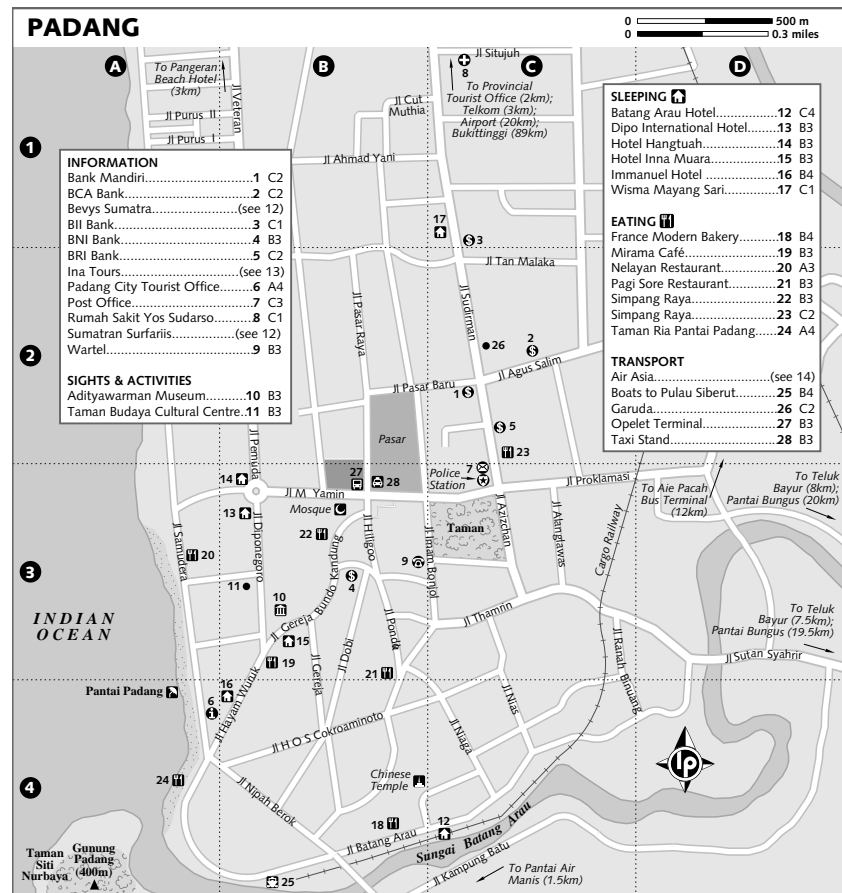
0751 / pop 880,000

Padang is typical of Sumatra's modern landscape: a sprawling noisy place circumnavigated by tripped-out *opelet* blasting squeaks-and-beeps techno music. As the capital of West Sumatra province, Padang might have once been a showpiece, but the economic depression that has followed the

1997 currency crash means that the city's infrastructure gets used but never renewed. Capital, more so than capability, feeds the modern machine.

Padang is an entry point into Sumatra to/from Jakarta, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. Arriving in Padang after the relative comfort of mainland Southeast Asia makes for a rough landing. Padang has few tourist amenities and limited English. Despite the urge to hide from the smell of kerosene and diesel exhaust, you'll find that the locals are genuinely friendly and curious about the few foreigners who find their way into town.

Savvier travellers skip the heat and humidity and migrate to the beaches around



THE MINANGKABAU

Legend has it that the Minangkabau are descended from the wandering Macedonian tyrant Alexander the Great. According to the story, the ancestors of the Minangkabau arrived in Sumatra under the leadership of King Maharjo Dirajo, the youngest son of Alexander.

Anthropologists, however, suggest that the Minangkabau arrived in West Sumatra from the Malay Peninsula some time between 1000 and 2000 BC, probably by following Sungai Batang Hari upstream from the Strait of Melaka to the highlands of the Bukit Barisan mountains.

Even if they don't have Alexander's bloodline, the Minangkabau reflect his wanderlust and love of battle, albeit in the milder form of buffalo fighting. Their success in buffalo fighting is believed to have bestowed the people with their tribal name, and the horns of the beast is the focus of their architecture and traditional costumes.

The legend of how the 'Minangkabau' named themselves begins with an imminent attack by a Javanese king. Rather than pit two armies against each other, the Minangkabau proposed a fight between two bulls. When the time came, the West Sumatrans dispatched a tiny calf to fight the enormous Javanese bull, but the half-starved beast was outfitted with sharp metal spears to its horns. Believing the Javanese bull to be its mother, the calf rushed to suckle and ripped the bull's belly to shreds. When the bull finally dropped dead, the people of West Sumatra shouted '*Minangkabau, minangkabau!*', which literally means 'The buffalo wins, the buffalo wins!'

Linguistic sticklers, though, prefer the far more prosaic explanation that Minangkabau is a combination of two words – *minanga*, meaning a 'river', and *kerbau*, meaning 'buffalo'. A third theory suggests that it comes from the archaic expression *pinang kabhu*, meaning 'original home' – Minangkabau being the cradle of Malay civilisation.

Culture

Though Muslim, Minangkabau society is still matrilineal. According to Minangkabau *adat*, property and wealth is passed down through the female line. Every Minangkabau belongs to his or her mother's clan. At the basic level of the clan is the *sapariouk*, those matri-related kin who eat together. These include the mother, grandchildren and son-in-law. The name comes from the word *periauk* (rice pot). The eldest living female is the matriarch. The most important male member of the household is the mother's eldest brother, who replaces the father in being responsible for the children's education, upbringing and marriage prospects. But consensus is at the core of the Minangkabau ruling philosophy and the division of power between the sexes is regarded as complementary – like the skin and the nail act together to form the fingertip, according to a local expression. The importance of consensus is obvious from the construction of the traditional longhouses, in which the meeting hall is the largest and most central room.

Padang sandwiched between the Indian Ocean and the Bukit Barisan range, until they've adjusted to Indonesia's frenetic pace. Or they spend a night in town and head off for surf or trekking tours on Mentawai Islands. Others plough straight through to the hill town of Bukittinggi or to Kerinci Seblat National Park.

Orientation & Information

Padang is easy to find your way around and the central area is quite compact. Jl M Yamin is the main street and most things of interest to travellers are in this general area. The main *opelot* terminal is across from the market.

Padang's Teluk Bayur port is 8km east of the city centre. The town's new airport is 20km to the north; and the Bengkulu bus terminal is somewhat inconveniently located in Aie Pacah, approximately 12km from Padang.

INTERNET ACCESS & POST

Dipo International Hotel (Jl Diponegoro; per hr 10,000Rp; 𠄎 9am-9pm)

Post office (Jl Azizchan 7) Near the corner of Jl M Yamin and has internet access (10,000Rp per hour).

MEDICAL SERVICES

Rumah Sakit Yos Sudarso (% 33230; Jl Situjuh 1) Privately owned.

Arts & Crafts

West Sumatra has a reputation for exquisite, hand-loomed *songket* cloth, and fine embroidery. *Songket* weaving uses gold and silver threads (imitation these days) to create patterns on a base of silk or cotton. The designs are usually elaborate floral motifs and geometric patterns. One of the most popular designs, used in both weaving and embroidery, incorporates stylised flowers and mountains in an ornate pattern known as *gunung batuah*, or 'magic mountain'.

Weavers use another, unusually painstaking, technique called 'needle weaving'. The process involves removing certain threads from a piece of cloth and stitching the remaining ones together to form patterns. This cloth is traditionally used for ceremonial occasions only. The Minangkabau are also renowned for their fine embroidery.

Another highly developed art found in West Sumatra is silverwork. Filigree jewellery, as fine as spider webs, is a speciality. There are many handicraft villages around Bukittinggi.

Dance & Music

Dance is an important part of Minangkabau culture. Dances include the colourful *tari payung* (umbrella dance), a welcome dance about a young man's love for his girlfriend; the dramatic *tari piring* (plate dance), which involves the dancers leaping barefoot on piles of broken china; and the dazzling *tari lilin* (candle dance), in which female dancers are required to rhythmically juggle and balance china saucers – with burning candles attached to them – while simultaneously clicking castanets.

The most popular of the Minangkabau dances is the *randai*, a dance-drama performed at weddings, harvest festivals and other celebrations. The steps and movements for the *randai* developed from *pencak silat*, a self-defence routine, combined with themes from literature and *gamelan* music. Every village in West Sumatra has at least one all-male *randai* group of 20 performers. The traditional version tells the story of a woman so wilful and wicked that she is driven out of her village before she brings complete disaster on the community.

It is the custom for Minangkabau youths to spend some time in a *surau* (prayer house), where they are taught, among other things, how to look after themselves. This includes learning *pencak silat*. The style of *pencak silat* most often performed is the Mudo, a mock battle that leads the two protagonists to the brink of violence before it is concluded. It is a dramatic dance involving skilled technique, fancy footwork and deliberate pauses which follow each movement and serve to heighten the tension.

The percussion instruments used to accompany most of the dances are similar to those of the Javanese *gamelan* and are collectively called the *telempong* in West Sumatra. Two other instruments frequently played are the *puput* and *salung*, kinds of flute that are usually made out of bamboo, reed or rice stalks.

MONEY

Padang has branches of all the major Indonesian banks and there are ATMs all over town, including one at the post office. There's a 24-hour moneychanging service with reasonable rates at the Dipo International Hotel.

Bank Mandiri (Jl Bagindo)

BCA bank (Bank Central Asia; Jl Agus Salim)

BII bank (Bank Internasional Indonesia; Jl Sudirman)

BNI bank (Bank Negara Indonesia; Jl Bundo Kandung)

BRI bank (Bank Rakyat Indonesia; Jl Sudirman)

TELEPHONE

Telkom wartel (cnr Jl Ahmad Dahlan & Khatib Sulaiman; 𠄎 24hr) Huge Minangkabau-style building located north of the city centre.

Wartel (Jl Imam Bonjol 15H; 𠄎 24hr) It is much easier to use this wartel in the town centre to make international or collect calls.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Padang city tourist office (% 34186; Jl Hayam Wuruk 51; 𠄎 7.30am-4.30pm Mon-Thu, 7.30-11.30am Fri) Tucked into a government office, busy with smoking and socialising, is a desk for basic tourist information.

West Sumatra provincial tourist office (% 55231; Jl Khatib Sulaiman 22) Located outside the centre of town.

Sights & Activities

Padang's old quarter along Jl Batang Arau is filled with old Dutch and Chinese warehouses overlooking the hardworking

fishing boats eased into harbour for a day's rest. The beachside promenade along Jl Samudera is where locals go for sunset strolls or morning workouts.

Adityawarman Museum (Jl Diponegoro; admission 1500Rp; 11am-4pm Tue-Sun), built in the Minangkabau tradition, offers some less-appealing insights into Padang's past and has a small collection of antiques and objects of historical and cultural interest.

Taman Budaya Cultural Centre (Jl Diponegoro) stages sporadic dance performances as well as poetry readings, plays and exhibitions of paintings and carvings. Ask at the tourist office for details.

Tours

Padang is used as the mainland launching point for tours of the offshore Mentawai Islands, which are famous for a hunter-gatherer culture and world-class surfing. The various islands of the Mentawai chain are starting to sprout reclusive resorts if you're hunting for a holiday away from the crowds. See p440 for more information.

Festivals & Events

A colourful annual boat race is held in Padang to commemorate Independence Day (17 August).

The highlight of the West Sumatran cultural calendar is the Islamic festival of Tabut, held at the seaside town of Pariaman, 36km north of Padang. It takes place at the beginning of the month of Muharam (based on the Islamic lunar calendar, usually January or February) to honour the martyrdom of Mohammed's grandchildren, Hassan and Hussein, at the battle of Kerbala.

Central to the festival is the *bouraq*, a winged horse-like creature with the head of a woman, which is believed to have descended to earth to collect the souls of dead heroes and take them to heaven.

Nearby villages create painted effigies of *bouraq* and adorn them with gold necklaces and other paraphernalia. The effigies are carried through the streets with much merriment, dancing and music, and are finally tossed into the sea. Spectators and participants then dive into the water and grab whatever remains of the *bouraq*, preferably the gold necklaces.

Padang hosts at least one major horse-riding event a year. Horses are ridden bare-

back and jockeys are dressed in the traditional costume of their region or village – the aim is to gain prestige for the district where the horse is bred and raised.

Sleeping

You are better off coughing up a few more rupiah for the midrange hotels than suffering in the budget holes. All quoted rates include breakfast and tax.

MIDRANGE

Wisma Mayang Sari (9% 22647; Jl Sudirman 19; d from 86,500Rp; a) Clean and acceptable economy rooms hang out in this modern villa in the north of town.

Immanuel Hotel (9% 28560; Jl Hayam Wuruk 43; d from 125,000Rp; a) As sweet as a tall glass of Fanta, Immanuel is a small, friendly place with comfortable air-con rooms and a cast of outgoing long-term boarders.

Hotel Hangtuh (9% 26556; Jl Pemuda 1; d from 194,000Rp) Unchanged from the days of pill-box hats, Hangtuh is pleasantly retro, if a little noisy.

Dipo International Hotel (9% 34261; dipo@pdg.vision.net.id; Jl Diponegoro 13; s/d 260,000/220,000Rp) Dipo has some handy tourist facilities with a 24-hour restaurant, moneychanger, a Home Country Direct phone and internet facilities. Oh yeah, and the rooms are overpriced.

TOP END

Batang Arau Hotel (9% 27400; Jl Batang Arau 33; batangarau@yahoo.com; s/d 375,000/475,000Rp) If you've got the loot to spare, you'll like Padang a whole lot more from the vantage point of this refurbished Dutch bank building in the old colonial quarter. The four rooms are artfully decorated with black-and-white tiled floors, spa-sized baths and shady balconies overlooking the river and a shaggy hill.

Hotel Inna Muara (9% 35600; natour-muara@padang_wasantara.net.id; Jl Gereja 34; d from 574,000Rp) Recently rehabilitated from sloppy to swanky, Inna Muara will tickle the bargain-hunters when promotional discounts are in full effect.

Eating

Padang is the birth mother of the cuisine that migrated across Indonesia. Even though everyone swears that Padang cuisine tastes better outside of Padang, pay homage to the native cooks with a visit to

MEET BREAKFAST, LUNCH & DINNER: PADANG CUISINE

Eating in a foreign land just got a whole lot easier thanks to Padang cuisine. Forget about pointing at a pot or snooping at your neighbour's meal. With Padang cuisine, you sit down and the whole kit and caboodle gets laid out in front of you. You decide which ones look tasty and push the others aside. You pay for what you eat – nibbling, sniffing and fondling included.

The drawback is that you never really know what you're eating, since there's no menu. If the dish contains liquid, it is usually a coconut milk curry, a major component of Padang cuisine. The meaty dishes are most likely beef or buffalo, occasionally offal or, less likely, even dog. Some of the fun of Padang-ing is identifying the mystery meat. Because most dishes are cooked slowly and thoroughly, the difference between chicken and certain types of fish isn't so obvious.

The most famous Padang dish is *rendang*, in which chunks of beef or buffalo are simmered slowly in coconut milk until the sauce is reduced to a rich paste and the meat becomes dark and dried. Other popular dishes include *telor balado* (egg dusted with red chilli), *ikan panggang* (fish baked in coconut and chilli) and *gulai merah kambing* (red mutton curry).

Most couples pick one or two meat dishes and a vegetable, usually *kangkong* (water spinach), and load up with a plate or two of rice. Carbs are manna in Padang cuisine. Vegetarians should ask for *tempe* or *tahu* (tofu), which comes doctored up in a spicy sambal. The orphan dishes are collected and returned to the display window protected from curious flies by a lacy curtain.

Before digging into the meal – and we mean this literally, as your right hand is your utensil – wash up in the provided bowl of water. Food and sauces should be spooned onto your plate of rice, then mixed together with the fingers. The rice will be easier to handle if it is a little wet. Use your fingers to scoop up the food, and your thumb to push it into your mouth. It is messy even for people raised on it.

Padang cuisine has an earthy spiciness that might need a little sweet tea or water as a chaser. There is usually a tumbler of lukewarm water (a sign that it has been boiled for sterilisation) on the table.

After you've slurped and sucked your plate clean, wash up, let out a burp (or don't be surprised if your neighbour does), and fire up a cigarette.

one of these famous franchises: **Pagi Sore** (Jl Pondok 143; mains 8000Rp) and **Simpang Raya** (9% 27300; mains 8000Rp; Jl Bundo Kandung 3-5). There are also several Padang restaurants along Jl Samudera near Jl Purus.

France Modern Bakery (Jl Batang Arau; mains 2000Rp) If you're still easing into rice for every meal, break your fast at this local bakery within walking distance of Batang Arau Hotel.

Taman Ria Pantai Padang (Jl Samudera; mains 6000-8000Rp) After sunset this collection of stalls dishes up everyday eats and uncommonly good views of the sea.

Nelayan Restaurant (Jl Samudera; mains 25,000Rp) Further north, Nelayan is the place for serious seafood fans.

Mirama Cafe (Jl Hayam Wuruk 38; mains 25,000Rp) Padang goes stylish, so to speak, at this up-market air-con spot for tidier versions of Indonesian standards.

Jl Niaga is lined with civil servant-friendly lunch spots and a night market dominates Jl Pondok near Jl Imam Bonjol.

Getting There & Away

AIR Padang's new airport is the **Bandara Internasional Minangkabau** (off Jl Adinegoro), 20km north of the centre of town. The following airlines operate international and domestic flights – for fares see the Sumatra Airfares map (p380):

Air Asia (Hotel Huangtuh, Jl Pemuda 1) Flies daily to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Garuda (Garuda Indonesia; 9% 30737; Jl Sudirman 2) Operates daily flights to Jakarta and thrice-weekly flights to Pekanbaru and Singapore.

Mandala (9% 39737; Pangeran's Beach Hotel, Jl Veteran) Flies daily to Jakarta and Medan; located 3km outside the town centre.

Merpati (Merpati Nusantara Airlines; 9% 444831; Pangeran's Beach Hotel, Jl Veteran) Flies daily to Batam, Jakarta and Gunung Sitoli.

Other airlines serving Jakarta include **Adam Air** (9% 840999; Jl Pemuda 2), **Lion Air** (9% 446100; Pangeran's Beach Hotel, Jl Veteran) and **Batavia** (9% 28383; Jl Damar 36). **Tiger Airways** (book online at www.tigerairways.com) flies to Singapore.

BOAT

Boats to Siberut (the largest in the Mentawai Islands chain) leave from the harbour on Sungai Batang Arau, also known as Sungai Muara, just south of Padang's city centre.

The Teluk Bayar port is 8km from town and receives infrequent Pelni ships.

BUS

Padang's Bengkulu terminal is inconveniently located in Aie Pacah, about 12km from town. A purple *opelet* from the market to the terminal costs 4000Rp.

There are frequent local buses to Bukittinggi (10,000Rp, two hours), but most locals prefer the shared minivans that leave from Minang Plaza (15,000Rp). To reach Minang Plaza, take a white *opelet* (2000Rp) from Jl Hayam Wuruk.

If you're heading to Danau Toba, take a Parapat-bound bus (180,000Rp, 17 hours), which usually leaves in the evening.

Other destinations include Bengkulu (125,000Rp, 16 hours) and Sibolga (80,000Rp, 14 hours). To reach Kerinci Seblat National Park, take a Sungaipenuh-bound bus (70,000Rp, six hours).

For Medan and Jakarta, which both take a day or more travelling by land, it is cheaper and faster to fly.

Getting Around

Bandara Internasional Minangkabau airport is 20km north of the centre, on the Bukittinggi road. Airport taxis charge between 60,000Rp and 90,000Rp for the ride into town. The budget alternative is to take one of the two white Damri buses (15,000Rp) that do a loop through Padang. From the airport, tell the conductor the name of the street you're heading to and they'll sit you on the correct bus. Supposedly the Damri buses circle the city picking up passengers in time for departing flights, but locals were highly sceptical about this.

There are numerous *opelet* around town, operating out of the Pasar Raya terminal off Jl M Yamin. The standard fare is 2000Rp.

AROUND PADANG

The key to enjoying Padang is getting out of the central city and into the sunset-facing beaches.

Air Manis

The closest escape from Padang is the fishing village of Air Manis, just south of Sungai Batang Arau. Overlooking the river is a Chinese cemetery – from there it's a 10km walk to the village's dark-sand beach.

According to local mythology, the rock at the end of the beach is what remains of Malin Kundang, a seafarer who was transformed into stone when he returned to his village after making his fortune but refused to recognise his mother. His boat got the same treatment.

If Air Manis is where you'd rather bed, **Villa Puncak** (☎ 767888; www.mentawai.com; Jl Air Manis 88, Padang Selatan; s/d US\$145/190), overlooking the beach, has a jungle-hidden stone-and-timber guesthouse where the only visible neighbours are monkeys and birds.

Blue *opelet* 402 goes from Padang to the bottom of the hill (2000Rp) and from there you can hire a motorcycle (5000Rp) to Air Manis. You can also turn it into a long stroll by taking the *perahu* across the river from Jl Batang Arau.

Beaches

To the north and south of Padang are several low-key beaches for a little surf and turf. **Pantai Bungus**, 20km south of Padang, is the staging point for outings to several offshore islands – the kind of places where you just sit and wait for the coconuts to fall. Folks say great things about the underwater world around Pulau Sikoai.

Losmen Carlos (☎ 751153; Pantai Bungus; r from 75,000Rp) can arrange snorkelling trips to the offshore islands. There are other nearby losmen, if you've had enough of our recommendations.

Hotel Pusako Sikuai (☎ 36333; Pulau Sikuai; r from 500,000Rp) is a jungle-clad resort with upmarket chalets.

To reach **Pantai Bungus**, take a blue *opelet* labelled 'Kabung Bungus' (8000Rp, 45 minutes).

Further south is **Pulau Marak**, which has a gibbon rehabilitation centre and miles of undisturbed sand, coral and wilderness. The island is accessible on a tour through **Mentawai Sanctuary** (☎ 767888; www.mentawai.com).

Pasir Jambak is the best of several beaches north of Padang. You can stay at **Uncle Jack's** (r per person with meals 75,000Rp). Jack can organise snorkelling trips to nearby Pulau Sawo.

Opelet 423 will get you there for 5000Rp. When leaving, taxis can be arranged to take you directly to the airport.

MENTAWAI ISLANDS

Although the distance between the mainland and the Mentawai Islands is not great, nature contrived to keep this island chain isolated. Strong winds, unpredictable currents and razor-sharp corals thwarted navigation and trade with the mainland.

As a result, the Mentawai people had very little contact with the outside world and remained one of the 'purest' indigenous societies in Indonesia until the 19th and 20th centuries.

Siberut is the largest island in the chain and is home to the majority of the Mentawai population. It is also the most closely studied and protected island in the archipelago. About 60% of Siberut is still covered with tropical rainforest and shelters a rich biological community that has earned it a designation as a Unesco biosphere reserve. The western half of the island is protected as the Siberut National Park.

The archipelago is thought to have broken off from the rest of Sumatra about 500,000 years ago, and the separation resulted in unique flora and fauna. Mentawai is ranked alongside Madagascar in terms of endemic primate population, with 60% of terrestrial mammals recorded as endemic. Four species of primate display a variety of primitive characteristics, making them particularly important in the study of the species' evolution. Of particular interest is *Siamang kerdil*, a rare species of black-and-yellow monkey usually called *simpai Mentawai* by the locals.

Change has come in a hurry to Mentawai. Tourism, logging, *transmigrasi* (government-sponsored scheme to encourage settlers to move from overcrowded regions to sparsely populated ones) and other government-backed attempts to mainstream the culture have separated the people from the jungle and whittled the jungle into profit. It isn't what it used to be, but it is a long way from being like everywhere else. And that keeps trekkers happily braving mud and bugs to visit the remaining traditional communities. Surfers comprise the other Mentawai-bound pilgrims, many of whom rank Mentawai right alongside Nias as a



THE MENTAWAIANS

The untouched, the unbaptised and the unphotographed have long propelled Westerners to distant corners of the globe. And the Mentawaians have seen every sort of self-anointed discoverer: the colonial entrepreneurs hoping to harness the land for profit, missionaries trading medicine for souls, and the modern-day tourists eager to experience life before the machine.

Very little is known about the origins of the Mentawaians, but it is assumed that they emigrated from Sumatra to Nias and made their way to Siberut from there.

In 1864 the Mentawai archipelago was nominally made a Dutch colony, but it was not until 1901, during the Russo-Japanese War, that the Dutch placed a garrison on the islands to prevent another foreign power using them as a naval base. In subsequent years it was the missionaries who had the most influence on the Mentawai people, creating fundamental changes in their culture.

The Indonesian government enforced more changes by relocating Mentawaians to mainstream villages, encouraging transmigration from Java and opening up parts of the chain to logging. Commercial logging is a major threat to the longevity of the forest and the traditional culture. While there is only one legally permitted concession (and one pending petition) operating on the island, enforcement of conservation regulations lacks proper funding and oversight. The cessation of logging has also left a hole in the immature economy.

Culture

At the time of contact with missionaries, the Mentawaians had their own language, *adat* and religion, and were skilled boat builders. They lived a hunter-gatherer existence.

Traditional clothing was a loincloth made from the bark of the breadfruit tree for men and a bark skirt for women. They wore bands of red-coloured rattan, beads and imported brass rings. Mentawaians filed their teeth into points and decorated their bodies with tattoos.

After independence, the Indonesian government banned many of the Mentawaians' customs, such as tattoos, sharpened teeth and long hair. Although the ban has not been enforced, many villagers have adopted modern fashions.

Traditional villages are built along river banks and consist of one or more *uma* (communal house) surrounded by *lalep* (single-storey family houses). Several families live in the same building. Bachelors and widows have their own quarters, known as *rusuk*, identical to the family longhouse except they have no altar. Traditionally, the houses stand on wooden piles and are windowless.

Although essentially patriarchal, society is organised on egalitarian principles. There are no inherited titles or positions and no subordinate roles. It is the *uma*, not the village itself, that is pivotal to society. It is here that discussions affecting the community take place. Everyone is present at meetings, but the prominent men make most of the major decisions, including choosing a *rimata* (the person who leads religious affairs and is the community's spokesperson to the outside world), building an *uma*, clearing a forest or laying out a banana plantation.

On such occasions, the people of the *uma* carry out a religious festival known as *punen*. This usually involves ritual sacrifices of both pigs and chickens and, depending on the importance of the occasion, the festival can last for months, sometimes years. All kinds of everyday jobs and

activities become taboo; work in the fields is stopped and strangers are denied access to the *uma*, its isolation being marked by a cordon of palm leaves and flowers.

Religion

The native Sibulungan religion is a form of animism, involving the worship of nature spirits and a belief in the existence of ghosts, as well as the soul. The chief nature spirits are those of the sky, sea, jungle and earth. The sky spirits are considered the most influential. There are also two river spirits: *Ina Oinan* (Mother of Rivers) is beneficent, while *Kameinan* (Father's Sister) is regarded as evil. In addition, all inanimate objects have a *kina* (spirit), which gives them life.

The worship of the soul is of utmost importance, being vital to good health and longevity. The soul is believed to depart the body at various times during life before its ultimate escape at death. Sickness, for example, is the result of the temporary absence of the soul; dreams also signify that the soul is 'on vacation'.

When the soul leaves the body at death it is transformed into a *sanitu* (ghost). Mentawaians try to avoid these ghosts, whom they suspect of malevolently attempting to rob the living of their souls. To protect themselves, they place fetish sticks at every entrance to the village. This tactic is considered foolproof, provided no-one has committed a ritual sin or broken a taboo.

German missionary August Lett was the first to attempt to convert the local people, but he was not entirely successful: eight years after his arrival Lett was murdered by the locals. Somehow the mission managed to survive and 11 baptisms had been recorded by 1916. There are now more than 80 Protestant churches throughout the islands.

More than 50 years after the Protestants, Catholic missionaries moved in to vie for converts. They opened a mission – a combined church, school and clinic – in south Siberut. Free medicines and clothes were given to any islander who became a Catholic, and by 1969 there were almost 3000 converts.

Islam began to make inroads when government officials were regularly appointed from Padang during the Dutch era, and then to complicate religious matters further, the Baha'i faith was introduced in 1955. Today more than half the population claims to be Protestant, 16% Catholic, 13% Muslim, while the rest have no official religion.

Traditional Economy

Taro and banana are the staple crops of the Pagai islands and Sipora, while on Siberut, sago is also cultivated. Other crops include cassava and sweet potato.

Traditionally, women own the taro fields and are responsible for planting and maintaining them. The banana plantations belong to the men – some are worked by one or two families, others by an entire *uma*. In most cases the plantations operate on a subsistence level.

On Mentawai, especially Siberut, land is not cleared by fire, which is considered too disruptive to the forest.

Hunting is a major social activity for the men of the islands and is closely related to the traditional religions.

Sumatran sweet spot. Slowly but surely more and more land resorts are claiming little pieces of beach paradise for lazing under the coconut trees and savouring sunsets.

Information

The islands are fairly undeveloped. Be sure to arrive with enough cash and supplies. **Siberut National Park** (TNS; Siberut; ☎ 0759-21109; 17 8am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) You can

arrange local guides at the park office, which is a 10-minute *ojek* ride from the Siberut harbour to the village of Maileppet. The park office also runs a simple guesthouse (50,000Rp) and a small library.

Activities

TREKKING

The main reason people come to Siberut is to visit the traditional villages of the interior.

There is a lot of debate about how to trek responsibly: hiring a local Mentawai guide, rather than an outsider, is one obvious option. But transport costs can be expensive if you're travelling alone. More affordable, but not as directly beneficial to the local community, is to join an organised tour through a mainland operator. Most backpackers join a guided trip from Bukittinggi, but because fewer and fewer travellers are

visiting Sumatra, collecting the minimum number of people (between five and six) means waiting around for a few days or more.

To cut out the waiting game, try posting your planned travel dates to Mentawai on Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree (<http://thorn.tree.lonelyplanet.com>) to connect with other interested parties. Otherwise, you might consider signing up with the more

expensive online agents or Mentawai resorts (see Sleeping, right). Most trips to Mentawai last for 10 days (two of which are travel days from the mainland).

Prices in Bukittinggi start at US\$200 for the full 10 days and include a guide, accommodation (at family homestays) and transport, but there will be lots of extra costs, as Indonesia has a culture of tipping. Ask up front about what other costs are involved. See p392 for information about hiring a guide.

Trekking Essentials

What should you expect on this trip? Well Siberut isn't Chiang Mai hill tribe country. Treks usually include plenty of slogging through mud, crossing furious ravines on slippery rotting logs and battling with insects. Chloroquine-resistant malaria is a concern and proper precautions should be taken. Sanitation is rudimentary, with the local river serving as the communal faucet and toilet.

May is generally the driest month, while October and November are the wettest – but it can rain on Siberut any time of year. The seas between Siberut and West Sumatra can get very rough in June and July, when it can be too dangerous to sail.

You'll want to travel light but well prepared. Carry trekking essentials: a mosquito net, rain gear, insect and leech repellent, torch (flashlight), water purification tablets and plastic bags for keeping things dry. You can buy most supplies in Muarasiberut, but they are much cheaper in Padang.

You will also need to bring things for barter and gifts. Cigarettes are the preferred gift, but pens, pencils and paper might sit lighter on the conscious. Talk to your guide about what is customary.

SURFING

The Mentawai Islands have consistent surf year-round at hundreds of famous and not-so-famous breaks. But the best of the good waves can be found roughly between April and October (give or take a month).

In the past, charter boats were the primary means of reaching the top surfing spots, but beachside camps (many of which are affiliated with charter companies) have set down roots on the islands. Surf resorts also offer cultural tour treks into the interior of Siberut.

Tours & Charters

The following companies can arrange trekking tours and surf charters. Most have offices in Padang and a substantial online presence.

Bevys Sumatra (Map p431; ☎ 7517810835; bevyssumatra@yahoo.com; Hotel Batang Arau, Jl Batang Arau 33, Padang) A tour and ticket agent based in Padang, Bevys can arrange ferry tickets to Mentawai and organise a variety of mix-and-match tours from cultural trekking to dive trips.

Ina Tours (Map p431; ☎ 34262; Jl Diponegoro 13, Padang) Next door to Dipo International Hotel in Padang, this travel agent organises cultural tours to Mentawai Islands.

Mentawai Sanctuary (Map p431; ☎ 767888; www.mentawai.com; Villa Puncak, Jl Air Manis No 88) Surf charters (from US\$1550 for a 10-day tour), as well as island and culture tours. There are also plans for a resort near Ebay surf break, south of Siberut.

Sumatran Surfariis (Map p431; www.sumatransurfariis.com; Hotel Batang Arau, Jl Batang Arau 33) An affiliated venture from the folks at Hotel Batang Arau, Sumatran Surfariis operates a variety of surf boat charters. Packages start at US\$1600 for a 10-day tour.

Sleeping

Mentawai Islands is starting to open up as a resort destination. Many places are focused on the surf scene, but the white sands and natural surroundings are suitable for the average layabout. Lodging for ethno-treks is typically pre-arranged in family homes. Visit the individual resort's website for booking information in your home country.

Wavepark Resort (Pulau Siberut; www.wavepark.com; package US\$140-160) The first land-based resort on Mentawai, Wavepark has a front-row view of Hideaways and a quick shuttle transfer to Wavepark.

Macaroni's Resort (Pulau Pagai Utara; www.macaronisresort.com; packages from US\$150) Bamboo villas built over the water; quick speedboat transfer to Macaroni's and Macas Right.

Aloita Resort & Spa (Tua Pejat, Pulau Sipora; www.aloitaresort.com; packages from US\$180) Seven bungalows occupy a private beach within shuttle's reach of Telescopes and Icelands. The resort also offers scuba diving and certification, as well as a spa.

Kandui Resort (Pulau Karamajet; www.mentawaiislands.com; packages from US\$200) Lodging in traditional Mentawai lodges (*uma*) and transfer to surf spots.

Getting There & Away

The only airport is on Pulau Sipora, but there are only charter flights.

Boats leave from Padang to Siberut on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday (from 85,000Rp). The return trip to Padang leaves on Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Mentawai Express operates a morning speedboat (from 85,000Rp, four hours) on Thursday; the return trip leaves Siberut on Friday. Sumber Rezeki Baru runs an overnight ferry (from 67,000Rp, 10 hours) from Padang to Siberut on Monday and Wednesday. The return trip leaves Siberut on Tuesday and Thursday. Beriloga, Mentawai Express and Sumber Rezeki Baru operate boats to other islands in the chain, such as Pulau Sipora and Pulau Pagai Utara.

Tickets can be bought from Bevys Sumatra (Map p431; ☎ 7517810835; Jl Batang Arau), a travel agent located at Hotel Batang Arau, which also acts as a ticketing agent.

BUKITTINGGI

☎ 0752 / pop 95,000

Welcome to a cool, lush landscape where fertility comes from volcanic destruction. Off in the distance are the blue circumscribed mountains – the Merapi, Singgalang and the more distant Sago – that periodically belch out the earth's interior fury. A crown of puffy white clouds hides their naked tips, and at their feet unfold terraced rice fields made so fertile by the once toxic emissions that seasons don't matter. Sitting at 930m above sea level, Bukittinggi is a busy market town halfway between the heavens and the rice paddies, with spectacular views of both. The town's alternate name, Tri Arga, refers to the three majestic mountains that dictate the region's fortunes.

Bukittinggi was once a well-carved niche in the Southeast Asia trail but now only sees a trickle of travellers headed for hikes to the nearby volcanoes, rafflesia sanctuary or for culture tours into the Minangkabau heartland.

During the Padri Wars (1821–37), a civil war between the local chiefs and Islamic reformists, Bukittinggi was a Dutch stronghold (the Dutch sided with the chiefs in this conflict). After independence it was also here that Sumatran rebels declared an

independent government in 1958 – one of a long list of separatist attempts in the archipelago.

Orientation

The town centre is conveniently compact and can easily be covered on foot. Jl Ahmad Yani was the tourist strip, now a depressing ghost town where far too many guides fish for too few customers. The town is much more interesting at the top of the hill around the clock tower, where the markets and the local sightseers promenade.

The bus terminal is south of the town centre, but accessible by public transport.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS & POST

Giganet (Jl Ahmad Yani; per hr 12,000Rp; 11 10am–10pm) Very slow, but conveniently located.

Kantin.net (Jl Sudirman; per hr 5000Rp) Catch it at the right time and the connection just sails.

Post office (Jl Sudirman) South of town near the bus terminal; internet facilities (10,000Rp per hour).

MONEY

There are lots of banks and moneychangers along Jl Ahmad Yani.

BI bank (Bank Internasional Indonesia; Jl Ahmad Yani)

BNI bank (Bank Negara Indonesia; Jl Lenggogeni)

TELEPHONE

International calls can be made from dozens of wartel around town.

TOURIST INFORMATION

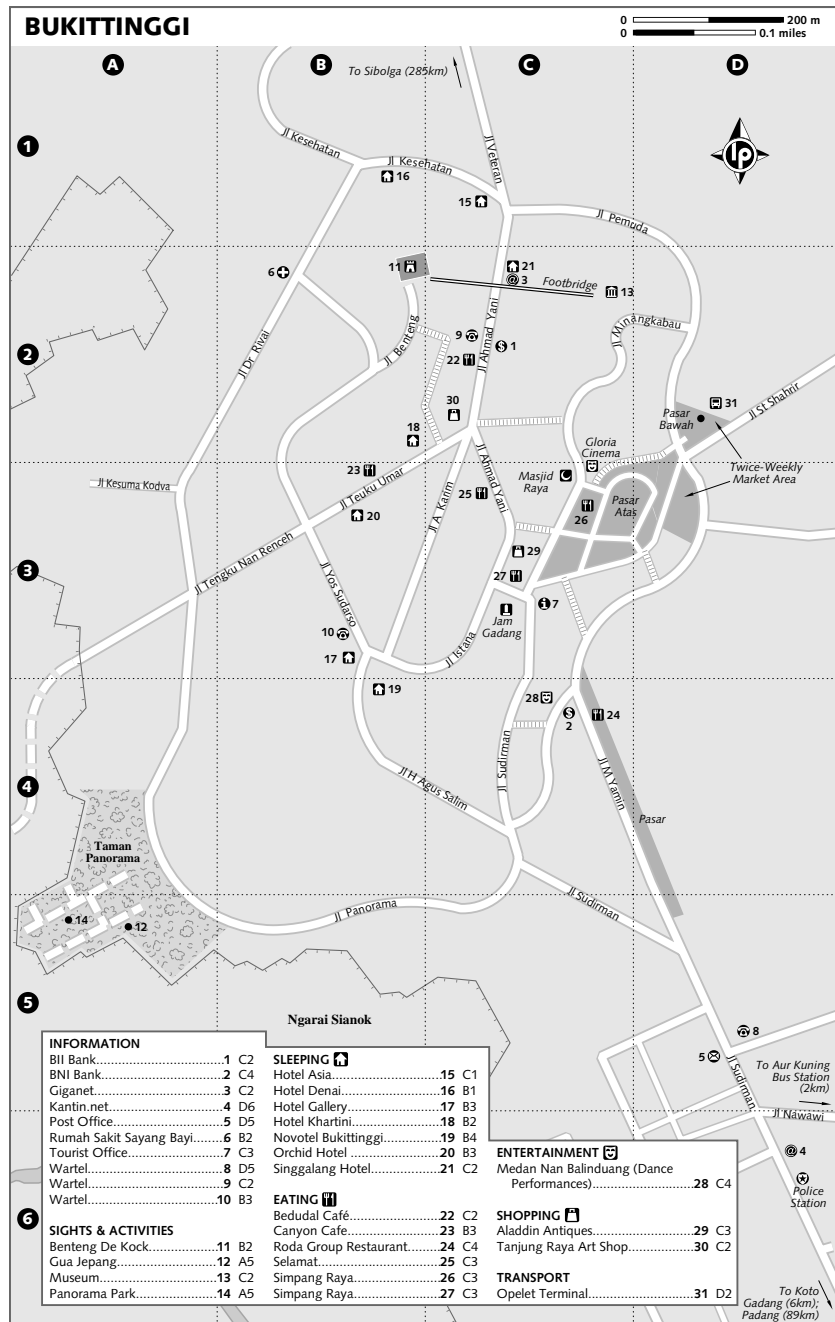
Tourist Office (Jl Sudirman; 11 8am–4pm) Across from the clock tower; city maps distributed by sweet if limited English-speaking staff.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Bukittinggi has plenty of travel agencies, most of them along Jl Ahmad Yani. It's a good idea to stroll along the street and compare what they offer.

Sights

Pasar Atas (btwn Jl Minangkabau & Yamin) is a large, colourful market crammed with stalls selling fruit and vegetables, second-hand clothing and crafts. It's open daily, but the serious action is on Wednesday and Saturday, when the stalls overflow down the hill and villagers from the surrounding area come to haggle and ogle.



Benteng de Kock (Benteng Fort; admission to fort & zoo 5000Rp) was built by the Dutch during the Padri Wars. Apart from the defensive moat and a few rusting cannons, very little remains of the original fortifications. It does, however, provide fine views over the town from its hilltop position. Clouds migrate over rusted tin roofs brought to life by the evening call to prayer.

A footbridge leads from the fort over Jl Ahmad Yani to Taman Bundo Kandung, site of the **museum** (admission 1000Rp) and **zoo**. The museum, constructed in 1934, is an example of Minangkabau architecture, with its small amphitheatre and colourful statues. It is the oldest museum in the province and has a dusty collection of Minangkabau historical and cultural exhibits. The zoo is just depressing.

Taman Panorama (Jl Panorama; admission 2000Rp), on the southern edge of town, overlooks the deep Ngarai Sianok (Sianok Canyon). This is especially scenic at sunset, when fruit bats swoop through the canyon. Guides will approach visitors under the auspices of friendship; don't get confused, this is how business works in Indonesia and payment is expected, even if an explicit price is never discussed. They'll lead you through **Gua Jepang** (Japanese caves), which was one of many feats of engineering that the Japanese accomplished with slave labour during WWII.

Jam Gadang (Big Clock Tower; btwn Jl Istana & Sudirman) is Bukittinggi's Big Ben and is the centre of the city's provincial activities: schoolchildren crowding under shade trees and day-trippers smiling for photo opportunities. The tower was built in the

1920s to house the Dutch queen's clock gift. After independence, the European homage was refitted with a Minangkabau roof.

Tours

With the decrease in tourist numbers, a simple stroll through town leads directly into the guide gauntlet. Often the pitch for business precedes the usual Indonesian formalities of handshakes and introductions. If perchance you can't find any guides, try **Bedudal Café** (Jl Ahmad Yani) and **Canyon Café** (Jl Teuku Umar 8). Take your time in finding a guide and be firm with a 'no' if you're just browsing.

Tours fall into two categories: culture or nature. There are day-long Minangkabau tours of the surrounding countryside, multi-day hikes to Danau Maninjau, and overnight volcano treks. If you're travelling solo, you'll have to wait a day or so for enough people to fill out the minimum requirement.

Sleeping

Good luck finding a hotel room well insulated from the pre-dawn call to prayers. If you aren't already conditioned to waking up with the muezzins, Bukittinggi will break you in.

Most hotel rates quoted here include a simple breakfast. Hotel tax is only applied to top-end options and inclusive rates can be negotiated. On holiday weekends rooms fill up with Indonesian visitors. Temperatures in Bukittinggi are relatively cool, making hot-water showers more of a necessary luxury than air-con.

HIRING YOUR NEXT BEST FRIEND

In Indonesia, the line between business and socialising isn't as distinct as it is in the West. We expect printed prices and obvious sales tactics. Without a price tag, we assume that it is free or done out of friendship. On the other side of the cultural divide, Sumatrans prefer business to resemble friendship: a little chit-chat, a steady sales pitch, and a sort of telepathic understanding that payment is expected. They'd rather be helpful instead of entrepreneurial, but necessity dictates an income. The sluggish state of the Sumatran economy means that unemployment is high, with an overload of young resourceful men supporting themselves by guiding too few tourists.

Once you realise that nothing is gratis, ask about prices. Don't assume that the quoted price is all-inclusive. You are expected to buy lunch and drinking water for your guide. If transport isn't included in the initial price, you should pay for this as well. A tip at the end is also welcome. Most are smokers and a pack costs about 10,000Rp. If all this seems steep, keep in mind that the guides have a couple of crumpled rupiah to their name and not a lot of other opportunities.

BUDGET

Singgalang Hotel (☎ 21576; Jl Ahmad Yani 130; d 60,000-70,000Rp) For a basic cheapie, Singgalang has a surprisingly breezy atmosphere.

Orchid Hotel (☎ 32634; Jl Teuku Umar 11; d 60,000-75,000Rp) A basic multistorey number where backpackers hope to meet other backpackers to swap trail notes and work through no-tourist shell shock.

Hotel Khartini (☎ 22885; Jl Teuku Umar 6; d from 70,000Rp) Meticulously maintained hotel with a tidy grandmotherly lobby of potted plants and doilies. There's a comfy upstairs sitting area and clean rooms.

Hotel Gallery (☎ 23515; Jl H Agus Salim 25; d from 90,000Rp) Doesn't look like much from the outside, but after scrambling up and down mountain-like stairs, you'll find a pair of economy rooms worth every rupiah. The basic rooms have their own patio garnering a fully loaded view of Gunung Merapi.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Hotel Asia (☎ 625277; Jl Kesehatan 38; d from 100,000-125,000Rp) When a little more comfort is needed, Hotel Asia delivers 'deluxe' without a self-absorbed price tag. Staff are friendly and the rooms pristine.

Hotel Denai (☎ 32957; Jl Dr Rivai 26; s/d from 325,000/520,000Rp) Quintessentially Sumatran: laid-back and comfortable, but sloppy and run-down.

Novotel Bukittinggi (☎ 35000; Jl Yos Sudarso; d from 650,000Rp; ♾) Bukittinggi's only top-end hotel bears an international name but not quality. The curious Arab-/Moghul-style building has sumptuous public areas, a great view bar, but rather standard rooms. It's better to grab an evening drink with a view than stay the night.

Eating

In the evening, Jl Ahmad Yani fills up with dinner stalls.

Naturally enough, Padang food is plentiful. Locals disagree about which outpost does the best *nasi Padang* – you'll just have to try them all for yourself: **Roda Group** (Jl M Yamin), south of the clock tower; **Simpang Raya** (Jl Ahmad Yani), with another branch on Jl Minangkabau; and **Selamat** (Jl Ahmad Yani). Dishes start at 5000Rp.

For bread, beer and English menus, try **Bedudal Café** (Jl Ahmad Yani) or **Canyon Café** (☎ 21652; Jl Teuku Umar 8). They also prepare

the local speciality, *dadiah campur*, which is a tasty mixture of oats, coconut, fruit, molasses and buffalo-milk yogurt.

Entertainment

Medan Nan Balinduang (Jl Lenggogeni; tickets 40,000Rp; ☎ 8.30pm Thu) If enough tourists show up, this culture centre presents Minangkabau dance performances.

West Sumatrans love a good bullfight, known locally as *adu kerbau*. The centres for bullfighting are the villages of Kota Baru and Batagak, between Padang and Bukittinggi. Bullfights are held irregularly, and most tours originate out of Bukittinggi; ask the local guides about upcoming events.

It bears no resemblance to Spanish bullfighting – there is no bloodshed (except by accident) and the water buffalo bulls are unharmed, save for their reputations. The showdown matches up two animals of roughly the same size and weight who are made to lock horns in a trial of strength. The winner is whichever one forces the other into a retreat. It often ends up with both beasts charging around a muddy paddock, scattering onlookers in all directions.

The original intention was to help develop buffalo breeding in the region, but as a spectator sport the main focus is betting. The host village will often kick off proceedings with a meeting of village elders, followed by a demonstration of *pencah silat*.

Shopping

Bukittinggi is a good place to go shopping for everyday necessities and otherworldly oddities: shiny headscarves, sarongs, false teeth, plastic sandals, interesting antiques, and curios. Box collectors can look out for a couple of Minangkabau versions. *Salapah panjang* (long boxes) are brass boxes used for storing lime and tobacco; *salapah padusi* are silver boxes for storing betel nut and lime.

Souvenir shops line Jl Ahmad Yani. Poke your head into **Tanjung Raya Art Shop** (☎ 23435; Jl Ahmad Yani 85) and **Aladdin** (☎ 33593; Jl Ahmad Yani 14).

The market shops are crammed with beautiful embroidered Minangkabau garments in rich reds and golds. Pillow cases and slippers are easy-to-carry souvenirs, as are ceremonial wedding sashes and gold hair adornments.

Getting There & Away

The Aur Kuning bus terminal is about 2km south of the town centre, but easily reached by *opelet* (1500Rp). Tell the driver you're going to Kampung China, where most of the hotels are located.

There are heaps of buses to Padang (12,000Rp, two hours), Danau Maninjau (6000Rp, 1½ hours) and Solok (9000Rp, two hours).

Bukittinggi is a stop for the north-/south-bound buses on the Trans-Sumatran Hwy. Bussing to Jakarta (air-con/executive from 226,000/300,000Rp including ferry ticket, 29 hours) is more expensive than catching a flight from Padang. Medan-bound buses (air-con/executive 110,000/190,000Rp, 20 hours) also stop off at Parapat (air-con/executive 110,000/190,000Rp, 14 hours). En route, you'll cross the equator, just outside of Bonjol.

East-west buses shake, rattle and roll to Pekanbaru (35,000Rp for economy, five hours) and Dumai (economy/air-con 60,000/80,000Rp, 10 hours), where you can catch a boat to Melaka. There are a

few buses to Bengkulu (80,000Rp), Jambi (75,000Rp) and Palembang (150,000Rp), but most services leave from Padang.

Getting Around

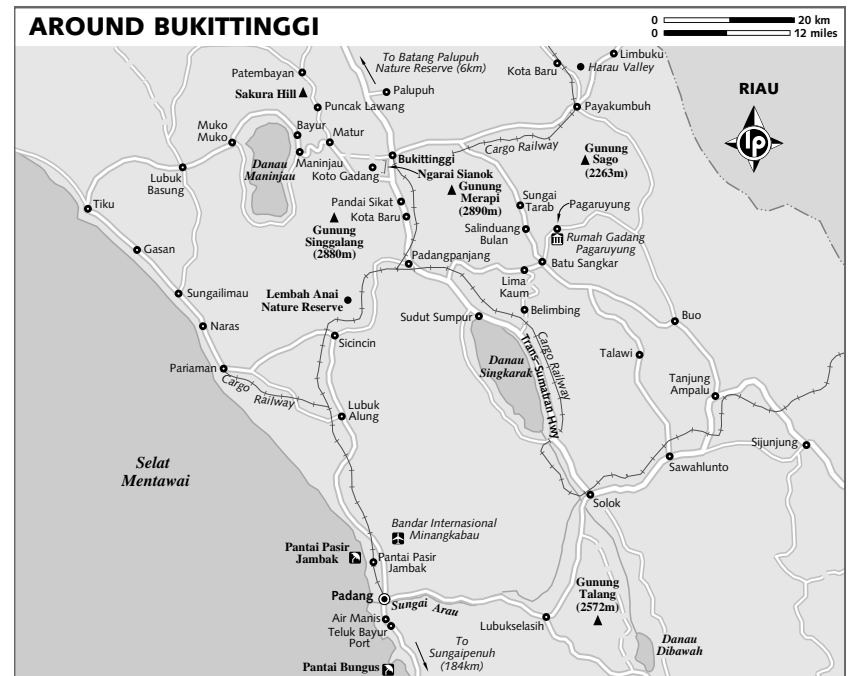
Opelet around Bukittinggi cost 1500Rp. *Bendi* cost from 5000Rp. A taxi from the bus terminal to Jl Ahmad Yani costs 15,000Rp.

AROUND BUKITTINGGI

While Bukittinggi is an interesting market town, visitors come to explore the Minangkabau countryside, hike up an active volcano or sniff the world's biggest, smelliest flower.

Handicraft Villages

Silver shops occupy the old Dutch houses of Koto Gadang, which is known for its handicraft tradition. The village is about 5km from Bukittinggi and can be reached by *opelet* from Aur Kuning bus terminal (400Rp). Alternatively, it is an hour's walk from Taman Panorama. The route is heavily worked by guides and only the bullheaded manage to go at it alone.



WHO LET THE DOGS OUT

Unlike other parts of Southeast Asia, Sumatra is not overrun with packs of stray dogs. In Islam, dogs are regarded as impure and contact with the animal is prohibited. Then what is all that barking, you might ask? Minangkabau culture makes an exception to some of the Islamic precepts, especially when it comes to protecting crops. The farmer's great nemesis is the wild boar, which will root up vegetable patches during overnight feasts. To combat the intruder, farmers keep very vocal hunting dogs, usually tied up on leashes or kept in pens. All that caged energy is then unleashed on boar-hunting days, assigned to various villages throughout the year. In other hunting traditions, the prey is usually retrieved for the owner, but because pigs are also haram (forbidden) in Islamic law, the dogs get the spoils instead of the scraps.

Famous for *songket* weaving and wood-carving, Pandai Sikat stays true to its name, which means 'clever craftsmen'. The village is only 13km from Bukittinggi and easily accessible by *opelet* (6000Rp) from Aur Kuning bus terminal.

Minangkabau Sights

The countryside around Bukittinggi is oh so charming. Terraced rice fields sprout makeshift scarecrows cradled in the palm of a jagged mountain range. In the villages, the Minangkabau traditional wooden houses are adorned with soaring buffalo-horned roofs beside the metallic domes of the local mosque. *Keropok* and laundry dry on every sunny surface and the hip-roofed Dutch chalets survive the elements thanks to elbow grease and spare parts.

If you're lucky, you'll see a wedding parade. The bride and groom dress in full traditional regalia and are accompanied by musicians, family members and half the village. The Minangkabau tribal flags (vertical bands of red, black and yellow) typically mark the site of the festivities.

Rumah Gadang Pagaruyung (admission 5000Rp; 7am-6pm), curiously known as the King's Palace in a matrilineal society, is a scaled-down replica of the former home of the rulers of the ancient Minangkabau kingdom of Pagaruyung. The interior is dominated by a central meeting hall, where locals come to be photographed in traditional costumes.

If you're an anti-tourist, you can get here by taking a public bus first to Batu Sangkar (6000Rp), which is a quiet, lunch-worthy town, and then take an *ojek* (10,000Rp) to the palace.

Another popular tour stop is **Belimbing**, one of the largest surviving collections of traditional architecture in the highlands. Many of the homes are 300 years old and are in various geriatric states. In many cases the owners have built modern homes nearby and use the relics for ceremonial purposes. The mixing of the old and new makes it a more worthwhile stop than a preserved theme park.

For ethno-musicologists, the town of Padangpanjang, 19km south of Bukittinggi, is a major pilgrimage site because of the **Conservatorium of Traditional Music** (STSI; % 0752-82077; Jl Bundo Kandung 35; 7am-3pm Mon-Thu, 8am-noon Fri). Minangkabau culture, dance and music are preserved, performed and taught here. There are regular buses between Bukittinggi, Padang and Padangpanjang (10,000Rp).

Nature Reserves

West Sumatra is famous for its many orchid species and for the *Rafflesia arnoldii*, the largest flower on the planet. The blossom of the parasitic plant measures nearly a meter in diameter and can weigh up to 11kg. The flower is known for its putrid perfume and typically blooms between August and November. The best place to find the ripe blossoms are in **Batang Palupuh Nature Reserve**, 16km north of Bukittinggi. Local buses to Palupuh cost 5000Rp.

On the highway between Padang and Bukittinggi is the **Lembah Anai Nature Reserve**, which is renowned for its waterfalls, wild orchids and giant rafflesia flowers. Any Bukittinggi-Padang bus can drop you off nearby.

Gunung Merapi

Looming large over Bukittinggi to the east is the smouldering summit of Gunung Mer-

api (2891m). Merapi is one of Sumatra's most restless volcanoes and is occasionally deemed too dangerous to climb. The last major eruption was in 1979, but ask locally for an up-to-date status report.

If Merapi isn't huffing and puffing, then visitors typically do an overnight hike in order to view sunrise on the summit. The climb begins at the village of Kota Baru (of bullfighting fame). It's a one-hour climb to the forestry station shelter then another four to the top. You'll need good walking boots, warm clothing, a torch, food and drink.

It's unwise to attempt the climb alone, and people are advised to take a guide or join a group. Travel agencies in Bukittinggi do guided trips to Merapi for US\$20 per person.

Harau Valley

Following the emerald road of rice fields leads to the speck-sized village of Harau, a little one-lane road where automobiles have to yield to groups of schoolchildren and sauntering old men. Another 3km from the village rises spectacular 100m cliffs that enclose the verdant Harau Valley, 15km northeast of Payakumbuh.

Harau Valley is under-used by backpackers, most of whom zip in and out on tours to **Lemba Harau** (admission 1500Rp), a series of pooling waterfalls. A handful of self-sufficient rock-climbers base themselves here, within an echo's reach of the scalable heights. But Harau's rice fields, jungles filled with howling gibbons and easy pace is surely why people stumble through Sumatra instead of baking on the beaches in Bali.

Smack in the middle of the valley is **Echo Homestay** (% 7750306; Taratang Lb Limpato; d from 50,000Rp), one of Sumatra's most scenic places to stay. Slum it in the ewok-hut bungalows with shared bathroom or step up to the artsy wooden treehouses designed in traditional Minangkabau style.

There is no direct transport to the Harau Valley, but you can take a local bus from Bukittinggi to Payakumbuh (5000Rp) and then hire an *ojek* to take you the rest of the way (10,000Rp).

DANAU MANINJAU

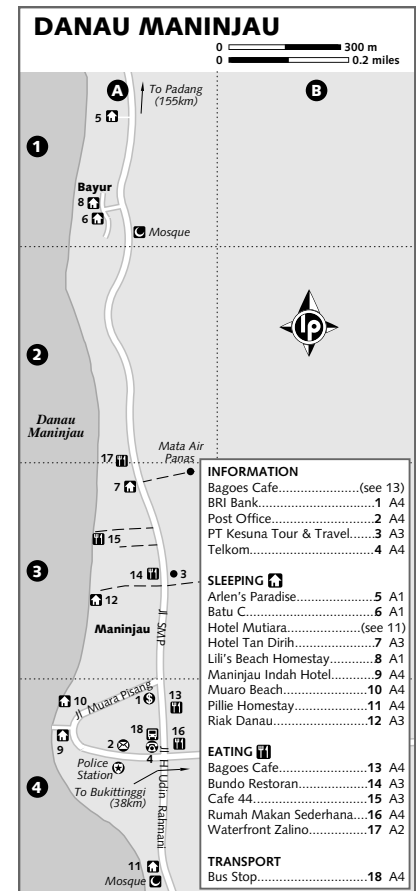
% 0752

When viewed from the mountains above, Danau Maninjau looks as if a piece of the

sky had grown weary with its eternal floating and crawled to earth for an afternoon nap. And the pace is just as sleepy: no jarring call to prayers, no overload of 'Hello mister' calls. Just the basic elements: land, sky and water.

This is a great place to evaporate a Sumatra session with early-morning swims or quiet afternoons watching the clouds slip over the peaks and slither down the 600m crater walls. From the right vantage point you can outline Maninjau's crater lip, engulfing a diminutive lake measuring 17km long and 8km wide.

The final descent to Danau Maninjau, on the road from Bukittinggi, 38km west, is unforgettable. The road twists and turns



through 44 hairpin bends, and offers stunning views over the shimmering blue lake and surrounding hills.

Orientation & Information

The only village of any size is Maninjau, but most people stay near Bayur, 3km north. Tell the conductor where you want to stay and you'll be dropped off at the right spot.

In Maninjau village, most businesses centre around the junction of Jl H Udin Rahmani and the highway to Bukittinggi.

INTERNET ACCESS

Bagoes Cafe (per hr 20,000Rp; 11 10am-9pm) Slow and unreliable internet access.

MONEY

There's a small branch of **BRI bank** in Maninjau, but it doesn't offer foreign currency exchange. Several losmen in town change money but rates are much better in Bukittinggi.

POST & TELEPHONE

The post office and Telkom wartel are next to each other, on the lakeside junction of Jl H Udin Rahmani and the highway.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

PT Kesuna Tour & Travel (% 61422) Arranges air tickets and minibus charters (300,000Rp) to Padang. It will also change money.

Sights & Activities

At 500m above sea level, Maninjau has an ideal climate, and hanging out by the lake is the most favoured activity. Although the lake is 480m deep in places, the water is considerably warmer than at Danau Toba, so it's a good place for swimming. Some guesthouses hire dugout canoes or inflated truck inner tubes. Generally, the further away you travel from town, the cleaner the water.

There are some strenuous and slippery hikes to make you earn your dinner. Catch a Bukittinggi-bound bus to Matur and walk 5km to the lookout of **Puncak Lawang**. Half-way between Lawang and Bayur is **Ana's Homestay**, deep within the jungle. Ana's is popular with trekking tours from Bukittinggi, but you can arrange a visit from Maninjau through the guesthouses along the lake.

Festivals & Events

Rakik Rakik is celebrated on the night before Idul Fitri (the end of Ramadan) by building a platform to hold a replica Minangkabau house and mosque. The offering is then floated out onto the lake on canoes accompanied by fireworks and revelry.

Sleeping

Want to stay in a postcard-perfect setting? Then migrate to the guesthouses around Bayur, where you can watch the quiet industry of cultivating the land and lake. Fisherfolk paddle silently to the shore to ravel and unravel weighted nets and stoic coconut hunters command their trained monkeys to scale the towering palms and pluck out only the good fruit.

If you need more city-ish action, there is a louder heartbeat in Maninjau village, but the shorefront is dominated by small-scale fish ponds, making swimming less appealing.

MANINJAU

Riak Danau (% 081 9751706; d 20,000Rp) The best of a cluster of cheapies in town.

Pillie Homestay (% 61048; d 30,000Rp) South of Maninjau's main junction, Pillie's draw is the personality of the pleasant family: mama, papa and the girls.

Muaro Beach (% 61189; d 30,000-40,000Rp) Well hidden past the village schools along a twisty footpath, Muaro has basic numbers on the beach.

Hotel Mutiara (% 61049; d from 80,000Rp) Next door to Pillie, Mutiara is a breezy spot with clean, tiled rooms.

Maninjau Indah Hotel (% 61018; d from 165,000Rp) Of the hotels in town, Maninjau Indah has the best location: overlooking the lake far enough from road noise.

Hotel Tan Dirih (% 61263; r from 100,000Rp) Rooms here are better than at Maninjau Indah, but the location is lacking.

BAYUR

To get to the following from the main road, take the tiny tracks through the paddy fields to the lakefront.

Arlen's Paradise (% 081 535204714; d from 75,000Rp) From the front porches of Arlen's grown-up bungalows, you get a full shot of Maninjau's scenic beauty and enough privacy to swim in modern fashions.

Further south is Bayur's primary clutch of bungalows. Some close for the season, some for good. These were the ones open during research:

Lili's Beach Homestay (d from 30,000Rp) A hard-core backpacker spot with bungalows just a notch above camping.

Batu C (d from 30,000Rp) Next door, Batu C has a bed-head vibe with basic huts on a nice beach, but the toilets are still terrible.

Eating

Most of the guesthouses serve basic meals such as *mie/nasi goreng*, some Western favourites and freshly caught fish. A few places in Maninjau village are also worth checking out.

Bagoes Cafe (% 61418; mains 10,000-12,000Rp) A tourist-friendly place with all the usual fare and a few local specialties. There are free movies on demand, and internet.

Cafe 44 (% 61238; mains 10,000Rp) Budget views of the lake, with a good selection of local food and a friendly atmosphere.

Waterfront Zalino (% 61740; mains 10,000-18,000Rp) A little classier than the rest of Maninjau, this waterfront restaurant does grilled fish with a perky attitude.

Rumah Makan Sederhana and Bundo Restoran (dishes 8000Rp) both serve a good selection of Padang food.

Getting There & Around

There are hourly buses between Maninjau and Bukittinggi (10,000Rp, 1½ hours). To reach Padang without backtracking to Bukittinggi, catch an *opelet* to Lubuk Basung (5000Rp, 20 minutes), then a bus to Padang (7000Rp, three hours). There is also an economy bus to/from Dumai (40,000Rp).

Several places rent out mountain bikes for 30,000Rp a day, motorcycles for 65,000Rp (including petrol) and canoes for 10,000Rp.

Buses travel throughout the day between Maninjau and Bayur – just stand by the road and hail one. Alternatively, you can take an *ojek* between the two (3000Rp to 5000Rp).

KERINCI VALLEY

% 0748 / pop 300,000

Kerinci is a stunning mountain valley tucked away high in the Bukit Barisan on Jambi's western border. Much of the cool,

lush forests are protected as the Kerinci Seblat National Park. To the south is picturesque Danau Kerinci and a patchwork of rich farmland. The waxy-leaved bushes of Kerinci's profitable tea plantations transform the hilltops into rows of green corduroy. Much of the wealth in the valley is also from cinnamon plantations, which supply 40% of the world's market.

Dotting the valley are 200 villages, the majority being unmistakably Minangkabau West Sumatran, with the same matrilineal social structure. Kerinci is in Jambi province but appears in this section because of its geographic proximity to Padang.

Sungaipenuh

Sungaipenuh (Full River) is the largest town, the regional administrative centre and transport hub in the valley. It has a quiet, provincial atmosphere, with most places of importance near the large sports field in the centre of town.

This is where you'll be able to purchase supplies for hikes and entertain yourself once you emerge from the woods.

INFORMATION

BNI ATM (Bank Negara Indonesia; Jl Matadinata) Just off the main square; accepts MasterCard and Visa.

BNI bank (Bank Negara Indonesia; Jl Ahmad Yani) Exchange US dollars (cash and travellers cheques) here; opposite Hotel Matahari.

TNKS (Taman Nasional Kerinci Seblat; % 323701; Jl Basuki Rahmat 11; 11 8am-2.30pm Mon-Thu, 8-11am Fri, 7.30am-12.30pm Sat) Park headquarters sell park permits and the informative booklet 'An Inside Look at the Secret Valley of Sumatra'.

Post office (Jl Sudirman 1)

Telkom wartel Around the corner from the post office, on the southern side of the sports field next to Hotel Aroma; also has internet access.

SIGHTS

Mesjid Agung Pondok Tinggi

This fine old mosque (Jl Sudirman; admission by donation 10,000Rp), with its pagoda-style roof, stands at the northern edge of Sungaipenuh in the village of Pondok Tinggi. Not a single nail was used when it was built in 1874 and, although it looks nothing special from the outside, the interior has elaborately carved beams and old Dutch tiles. You need permission to go inside and must be dressed in traditional attire. The mosque is west of the central square.

SLEEPING & EATING

Accommodation options in Sungaipenuh are not plentiful or particularly affordable.

Hotel Yani (☎ 21409; Jl Murandi 1; d 65,000-100,000Rp) Next door to Minang Soto, Yani is one the town's better budget options.

Hotel Jaya (☎ 21221; Jl Martadinata; d 85,000-160,000Rp) The newest hotel in town, Hotel Jaya looks like a nouveau riche mansion, smuggling a little style into this backcountry.

Last-resort options include **Hotel Matahari** (☎ 21061; Jl Ahmad Yani 25; d 75,000Rp) and **Aroma Hotel** (☎ 21142; Jl Imam Bonjol 14; d 65,000-150,000Rp).

Kerinci is known for the local speciality of *dendeng batokok*, charcoal-grilled strips of pounded beef. Street stalls pop up in the evening along Jl Teuku Umar, a block from the square. The fruit and produce market is at the southern end of Jl Diponegoro.

Minang Soto (Jl Muradi; dishes from 5000Rp) On the main street, Minang Soto is the town's favourite stop for Padang food.

Kersik Tua

Just beyond the tea plantations of the massive Kayo Aro estate, Kersik Tua is often used by Gunung Kerinci trekkers as a base, as the village is a 5km walk to the park entrance. The village is 43km north of Sungaipenuh on the road from Padang and can be reached via any Padang–Kerinci bus.

There are basic necessities available in Kersik Tua, including several basic homestays.

Subandi Homestay (☎ 357009; d 50,000Rp) is a family home with clean, simple rooms. The proprietor, Pak Subandi, is also a jack of all trades: rice farmer, jungle guide, keen bird-watcher and environmentalist.

The other homestays include **Wisma Paiman** (☎ 357030; d 25,000Rp) and **B Darmin** (☎ 357070; d 25,000Rp).

In front of the park entrance, 5km from Kersik Tua, **Losmen Pak Edes** (50,000Rp) has rooms with shared *mandis* and can arrange park permits and guides. Many people stay here before or after the trip to Danau Gunung Tujuh.

Kerinci Seblat National Park

This is the largest national park in Sumatra, covering a 350km swath of the Bukit Barisan range and protecting 15,000 sq km of prime equatorial rainforest spread over four provinces, with almost 40% of the park falling within Jambi's boundaries.

Most of the protected area is dense rainforest; its inaccessibility is the very reason it is one of the last strongholds of endangered species such as the Sumatran tiger and Sumatran rhinoceros. There have also been numerous reported sightings of the orang pendek (see the boxed text, opposite).

Because of the great range of elevation within the park, Kerinci has a unique diversity of flora and fauna. Many high-latitude flowers, like a type of edelweiss, grow in the forest. At lower altitudes, there are more familiar tropical flowers – orchids, rafflesia and the giant *Amorphophallus* (a Sumatran native and one of the tallest flowers on the planet).

As with many of Sumatra's protected areas, encroachment by farmers, illegal logging and poaching are all serious issues for Kerinci. Looking at satellite photographs of the park shows quickly disappearing forest cover. According to park estimates, between 2002 and 2004, a total of 23,000 hectares (230 sq km) of forests were destroyed.

Tourist infrastructure within the park is nonexistent and Kerinci sees very few visitors. Trekking opportunities typically focus on the northern region of the park, while the southern region is the traditional zone where local people are allowed to cultivate the land. Permits and guides are required to enter the park; both can be arranged at the TNKS office in Sungaipenuh (see p449) or through area losmen. There is a park office at the northern entrance, but it is rarely staffed. Surrounding the newly built office are the remnants of park-owned buildings that were torched by pro-logging interests.

Permits cost 15,000Rp and guide rates are highly negotiable, ranging from 50,000Rp to 150,000Rp per day. Be sure to clarify with your guide what the quoted rate entails. Camping gear, food and transport may be considered additional costs.

Kerinci's climate is very cool, and approaches cold as you gain altitude. Bring warm clothes and rain gear on treks. See the boxed text on p393 for additional instructions.

GUNUNG KERINCI

In the northern corner of the park is Gunung Kerinci (3805m), an active volcano and Sumatra's highest peak. It is said that from the summit you can see north all the way to Gunung Singgalang and Gunung Merapi on those rare clear days.

Summit treks typically start in the village of Kersik Tua and tackle the mountain in two stages. It takes approximately six hours to climb to a camping ground at about 3000m, where most people spend the night. The next day the final two-hour climb to the summit departs at dawn in order to be at the top for sunrise.

The volcano last erupted in 1934 and today you'll find a small greenish crater lake at the top. You'll also spot Javanese edelweiss and, if you're lucky, a few rare bird species, such as Schneider's pitta and red-billed partridge.

There are cave paintings in Gua Kasah on the lower slopes, 5km from Kersik Tua. On the way back down the mountain, you can stop at **Sungai Medang Hot Springs & Wisma** (day use 2000Rp, r 50,000Rp). The facility has overnight rooms and day-use rooms – both with hot-water *mandis*, a wonderful elixir from the jungle chills.

Although the path to the top of the mountain is clearly defined, parts are covered in scree, making it easy to slip, and weather conditions can change very suddenly. It is recommended to hire a guide who knows the terrain and weather patterns. You'll need to bring food, water, camping gear (which can be hired in Kersik Tua) and warm clothes, as it can get as low as 2°C at night.

Most people spend the preceding night at a homestay in Kersik Tua (opposite), where guides, permits and supplies can be arranged.

DANAU GUNUNG TUJUH

A much easier climb than Gunung Kerinci, this tranquil lake sits at 1966m, garnering it the superlative of being the highest volcanic lake in Southeast Asia. As the name suggests, seven scenic mountains encircle it.

It takes 3½ hours to climb to the lake from the village of Pelompek, 8km beyond Kersik Tua. An additional two-hour hike leads to a camping beach.

To reach the starting point, take a bus from Sungaipenuh to Pelompek (4000Rp)

ORANG PENDEK: LITTLE BIG FOOT

Every culture that has lived among trees tells stories about elusive creatures that straddle myth and reality. Tales about leprechauns, fairies, and even Sasquatch have existed for so long that it is impossible to determine which came first: the spotting or the story. The Indonesian version of these myth makers is the *orang pendek*, which has been occasionally spotted but more frequently talked about in the Kerinci forests for generations.

Villagers who claim to have seen orang pendek describe the creature as being about 1m tall, more ape-like than human, but walking upright on the ground. The creature's reclusive habits made it a celebrity in local mythology. Common folk stories say that the orang pendek has feet that face backwards so that it can't be tracked through the forest or that it belongs to the supernatural not the world of flesh and blood. Others say that the first-hand accounts were only sightings of sun bears.

Scientists have joined the conversation by tramping through the forest hoping to document the existence of orang pendek. British researchers succeeded in making a plaster cast of an animal footprint that fits the orang pendek description and doesn't match any other known primate. Hair samples with no other documented matches have also led researchers to believe that there is merit to the local lore. Two members of Fauna & Flora International, a British-based research team, even reported separate sightings, but were unable to collect conclusive evidence. Researchers sponsored by the National Geographic Society have resumed the search by placing motion-sensitive cameras in strategic spots in the jungle. So little is known about this region and so many areas are so remote that researchers are hopeful that the orang pendek will eventually wander into the frame.

If nothing else, the orang pendek helps illuminate aspects of Sumatrans' linguistic and cultural relationship with the jungle. Bahasa Indonesia makes little distinction between man and ape, for example 'orang-utan' (forest man) or 'orang rimba' ('people of the forest', the preferred term for the Kubu tribe) may reflect a perceived blood tie between forest dwellers. This imprecision is often used for comic effect. A common joke is that the orang pendek (meaning 'short man') does indeed exist, followed by the punch line that the shortest person in the room is the missing link.

and hire an *ojek* (from 5000Rp) for the remainder of the trip to the park entrance.

The lake is within the park boundaries, so you need to get a permit either in Pelompek or from Losmen Pak Edes, near the park entrance.

DANAU KERINCI

Danau Kerinci, 20km south of Sungaipenuh, is a small lake nestled beneath Gunung Raja (2543m). There is a popular recreational park and an annual festival, typically held in July and displaying traditional Kerinci dance and music. Stone carvings in the villages around the lake suggest that the area supported a sizable population in megalithic times. The best known of these stone monuments is Batu Gong (Gong Stone), in the village of Muak, 25km from Sungaipenuh. It is thought to have been carved 2000 years ago.

To reach the lake, catch a public bus from Sungaipenuh to Sanggaran Agung (2000Rp). The last return bus leaves around 4pm.

SENGERING CAVES

The extensive network of caves outside the village of Sengering includes the celebrated Gua Tiangko. Obsidian-flake tools found in the cave show that it was occupied by some of Sumatra's earliest known residents some 9000 years ago. The caves are also known for their stalactites and stalagmites.

It is also locally believed that caves act as mediums for communicating with the supernatural and entrance into these sacred spaces requires a modest ritual. Hiring a guide helps both in the exploration of the physical and immaterial landscape of the caves.

Sengering is 9km from Sungai Manau, a village on the road to Bangko. Public buses leave from Sungaipenuh to Bangko in the mornings.

Getting There & Away

There is a regional airport but at the time of writing there was no contracted carrier.

Sungaipenuh doesn't have a bus terminal, but the bus companies all have offices near the market in the centre of town.

The shortest approach to Sungaipenuh is from the West Sumatran capital of Padang (70,000Rp, six to eight hours). Buses pass the village of Kersik Tua en route to Sungaipenuh; if you're staying in Kersik Tua, let the driver know, as it's easy to miss.

PO Cahaya Kerinci (% 21421; Jl Diponegoro), **PO CW Safa Marwa** (% 22376; Jl Yos Sudarso 20) and **PO AVU Transport** (% 22074; Jl Cokroaminoto), all in Sungaipenuh, run Padang-bound services.

Other destinations include Dumai (200,000Rp, twice weekly), Bukittinggi (80,000Rp, 10 hours, twice weekly), Bangko (30,000Rp, four hours, daily) and Bengkulu (75,000Rp, 16 hours, daily).

Getting Around

You can get almost anywhere in the valley from the bus terminal in Sungaipenuh market. Sample destinations and fares are Danau Kerinci (2000Rp), Kersik Tua (5000Rp) and Pelompek (5000Rp).

BENGKULU

Cut off from its neighbours by the Bukit Barisan range, Bengkulu remains Sumatra's most isolated province – and nothing much seems to have changed here for years.

Few tourists make it this far, but those that do are rewarded with the simple pleasures of ordinary Indonesian life and an opportunity to learn Bahasa Indonesia without the crutch of bilingualism.

History

Little is known of Bengkulu before it came under the influence of the Majapahits from Java at the end of the 13th century. Until then it appears to have existed in almost total isolation, divided between a number of small kingdoms such as Sungai Lebong in the Curup area. It even developed its own cuneiform script, *ka-ga-nga*.

In 1685, after having been kicked out of Banten in Java, the British moved into Bengkulu (Bencoolen, as they called it) in search of pepper. The venture was not exactly a roaring success. Isolation, boredom and constant rain sapped the British will, and malaria ravaged their numbers.

The colony was still not a likely prospect in 1818 when Sir Stamford Raffles arrived as its British-appointed ruler. In the short time he was there, Raffles made the pepper market profitable and planted cash crops of coffee, nutmeg and sugar cane. In 1824 Bengkulu was traded for the Dutch outpost of Melaka and a guarantee not to interfere with British interests in Singapore.

From 1938 to 1941 Bengkulu was a home-in-domestic-exile for Indonesia's first president, Soekarno.

BENGKULU

% 0736 / pop 380,000

A quiet provincial capital, Bengkulu doesn't have much to do for tourists but chat up the locals, most of whom don't speak English. Alternatively, you could pass through as a UFO – unidentified foreign object.

Orientation

Although Bengkulu is by the sea, most of the town is set back from the waterfront, touching only near the fort, Benteng Marlborough. The coast is unexpectedly quiet

and rural, just a kilometre or so from the town centre.

The commercial spine of Jl Suprpto and the nearby Pasar Minggu Besar are in the modern town centre, which is connected to the old town area around the fort by the long and straight Jl Ahmad Yani/Jl Sudirman.

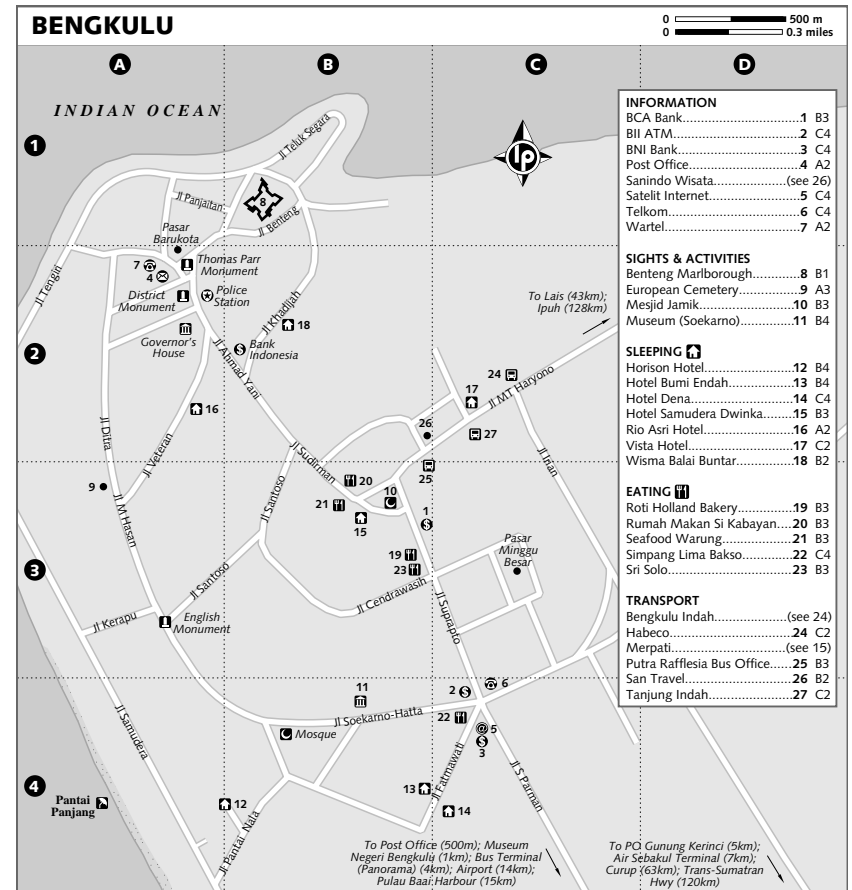
Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Satelit Internet (Jl S Parman 9; per hr 5000Rp; h 10am-8pm)

MONEY

There are plenty of ATMs around town. **BCA bank** (Bank Central Asia; Jl Suprpto 150) The best place to exchange money.



BIl bank (Bank Internasional Indonesia; Jl Suprpto)
BNI bank (Bank Negara Indonesia; Jl S Parman) Travellers cheques and US dollars can be changed here.

POST

Main post office (Jl S Parman) South of town centre; also has poste restante.
Post office (Jl RA Hadi 3) More convenient, opposite the Thomas Parr monument.

TELEPHONE

Telkom wartel (cnr Jl Suprpto & Soekarno-Hatta; 11 7am-10pm) International calls can be made here.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

Sanindo Wisata Tours and Travel (☎ 27522; Jl MT Haryono 73) Sanindo Wisata can arrange historical city tours, as well as tours to the Curup tea plantations and offshore islands.

Sights

Set on a hill overlooking the Indian Ocean, **Benteng Marlborough** (admission 1500Rp; 11 8am-7pm), a former British fort, was restored and opened to the public in 1984 after a long period of use by the Indonesian army.

Benteng Marlborough became the seat of British power in Bengkulu after 1719, when it replaced nearby Fort York, of which nothing but the foundations remain.

Despite its sturdy defences the fort was attacked and overrun twice – by a local rebellion just after its completion in 1719, and then by the French in 1760. The old British gravestones at the entrance make poignant reading. There are a few interesting old engravings and copies of official correspondence from the time of British rule. You can also see where the Dutch incarcerated Soekarno during his internal exile.

Bengkulu has a number of other British reminders. The **Thomas Parr monument** (Jl Ahmad Yani), in front of the Pasar Barukota, was erected in memory of a British governor beheaded by locals in 1807. The **Monumen Inggiris** (Jl M Hasan), near the beach, is dedicated to Captain Robert Hamilton, who died in 1793 'in command of the troops'.

Former president Soekarno was exiled to Bengkulu by the Dutch from 1938 until 1941. The small villa in which he lived is maintained as a **museum** (Jl Soekarno-Hatta; admission 1500Rp; 11 8am-4.30pm Mon-Thu, 8am-noon Sat & Sun). Exhibits include a few faded photos, a wardrobe and even Bung's trusty bicycle.

During his stay, Soekarno, who was an architect, designed the **Mesjid Jamik** (Bung Karno mosque; cnr Jl Sudirman & Suprpto).

Museum Negeri Bengkulu (☎ 32099; Jl Pembangunan; admission by donation; 11 8am-4.30pm Tue-Thu, 8am-noon Sat & Sun) has a poorly labelled collection of standard Sumatran fare. Bring your own light if you want to see anything. The graves in the **European cemetery** (Jl Ditra) behind the small church are testament to the colonialists' vulnerability to malaria.

Bengkulu's main beach, **Pantai Panjang**, although not the best in Indonesia, is clean, generally deserted and a good place for a walk. Strong surf and currents make it unsafe for swimming.

Sleeping

BUDGET

VistaHotel (☎ 20820; Jl MT Haryono 67; d 40,000-80,000Rp; a) Near the bus agents, Vista is excellent value. You might have forgotten what clean means in Sumatra, but Vista can remind you, with a good range of clean rooms.

Wisma Balai Buntar (☎ 21254; Jl Khadijah 122; s/d 55,000/70,000Rp) In an old Dutch villa, this is Bengkulu's version of backpacker land. The enormous rooms are a little faded, but the neighbourhood is worth a wander.

Hotel Bumi Endah (☎ 21665; Jl Fatmawati 29; d 75,000-100,000Rp; a) A friendly rambling hotel with quiet rooms and airy common spaces in a residential neighbourhood.

Hotel Samudera Dwinka (☎ 21604; Jl Sudirman 246; d 65,000-100,000Rp; a) Located in the centre of town, Hotel Samudera has rooms that are inexpensive without being depressing.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Hotel Dena (☎ 21981; Jl Fatmawati 28; d from 100,000Rp; a) A popular option with clean, comfortable rooms – all with hot water.

Rio Asri Hotel (☎ 34500; Jl Veteran 63; d 300,000-575,000Rp; s) For such a staid town, Rio Asri is a daring '80s-inspired design experiment. The rooms are equally as smart and some have high-top views over the garden city.

Horison Hotel (☎ 21722; Jl Pantai Nala 142; d from 400,000Rp; s) The fanciest hotel in town, with well-dressed rooms and a swimming pool overlooking the beach.

Eating

In the evening, several warung cause a traffic jam along Jl Sudirman, serving freshly

grilled seafood and *martabak* (stuffed savoury pancake).

Roti Holland Bakery (Jl Suprpto 124; pastries 2000Rp; 11 8am-5pm) Chocolate doughnuts are wrapped thoughtfully in a cardboard box for those with self-control. The rest of us can tear into the pastries at the café tables.

Sri Solo (Jl Suprpto 118; mains 8000Rp; 11 10am-10pm) The equivalent of an ice-cream parlour, Sri Solo serves local families after church, gangs of schoolkids and courting couples plates of *ayam baker* (grilled chicken) and tasty fruit juices.

Rumah Makan Si Kabayan (Jl Sudirman 51; mains from 25,000Rp; 11 6-10pm) This is where Bengkulu entertains guests, with fitting VIP prices.

Simpang Lima Bakso (Jl Soekarno-Hatta; mains from 10,000Rp) Bengkulu is *bakso* (meatball and noodle soup) crazy and this simple warung does a thriving business beside the city's crazy five-way intersection.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Merpati, Sriwijaya and Adam Air operate daily flights to Jakarta. The Merpati office (☎ 27111; Jl Sudirman 246) is in the Hotel Samudera Dwinka. Other tickets can be purchased through **Sanindo Wisata Tours and Travel** (☎ 27522; Jl Mt Haryono 73).

BUS

Bengkulu has two bus terminals: Air Sebakul terminal, 15km east of town, serves long-distance destinations, while Panorama terminal, 7km east, is used by local buses.

However, it is much easier to go to the bus company offices on Jl MT Haryono, as almost all long-distance destinations can be reached from here.

To get to Air Sebakul take a yellow *opelet* (2000Rp) to Panorama and then a white one (2000Rp) to Air Sebakul.

Putra Rafflesia (☎ 20313; Jl MT Haryono 12) services Palembang (economy 80,000Rp, 15 hours) and Padang (air-con 125,000Rp, 16 hours). **Bengkulu Indah** (☎ 22640; Jl MT Haryono) services a wide range of destinations. **San Travel** (☎ 21811; Jl MT Haryono 73) goes to Bukit Tinggi (80,000Rp, 17 hours).

PO Gunung Kerinci (Jl Bali 36) runs buses up the coast to Sungaipenuh in the Kerinci Valley (75,000Rp, 18 hours). **Tanjung Indah** (Jl MT Haryono 108) runs minivans to Palembang (150,000Rp) and other destinations.

Habeco (Jl MT Haryono), at the northern edge of town, has daily buses along the coast road to regional destinations, such as Lais (8000Rp, two hours), Ipuh (20,000Rp, five hours) and Mukomuko (30,000Rp, eight hours).

Getting Around

Airport taxis charge a standard 60,000Rp to town. The airport is 200m from the main road south, from where there are regular *opelet* to town (2000Rp). Tell the driver where you want to stay or simply ask for the *benteng* (fort). *Opelet* and *ojek* also greet buses when they arrive at Jl MT Haryono/Jl Bali. *Opelet* fares to almost anywhere in town are 2000Rp, *ojek* 5000Rp.

There are no fixed routes for *opelet*; tell the driver your destination or general area and you might get a nod of approval. The city is roughly divided up into the Kampung (the area around Benteng Marlborough), Simpang Lima (the intersection of Jl Suprpto, Parman, Fatmawati and Soekarno-Hatta) and Minggu (the area around Pasar Minggu).

NORTHERN BENGKULU

The coast road (Jl Manusurai Pantai), running north from Bengkulu to Padang, offers a number of possibilities for travellers.

The road is sealed all the way and the journey takes about a mere 16 hours, a real quickie when measured by the Sumatran distance stick. However, in the wet season the coast road is prone to wash-outs and landslides, so the going can be much slower.

The journey can be done in a number of short hops, stopping off at a town along the way for the hell of it; each town has at least one losmen. The first town north of Bengkulu is Lais. There are reputed to be elephants further north near Ipuh, around the mouth of Sungai Ipuh. Mukomuko, 200km north of Bengkulu, is the largest community on this stretch of road and was the northern outpost of the British colony of Bencoolen.

Curup is a small market town in the foothills of the Bukit Barisan, halfway between Bengkulu and Lubuklinggau. There are several surviving traditional homes and the town itself is in a valley watered by the upper reaches of Sungai Musi, which eventually flows through Palembang. Curup is a good base for visits to the surrounding

mountains, including volcanic **Gunung Kaba**, 19km east of town, which has two large smouldering craters surrounded by dense rainforest.

There's nowhere to change money in Curup, so come prepared. Curup has a mediocre losmen and hotel to choose from.

Getting There & Away

Padang–Bengkulu buses can stop off at the northern coastal towns. Curup can be reached by frequent connections to Bengkulu and Lubuklinggau.

PULAU ENGGANO

This remote island, 100km off the coast of southern Bengkulu, is so isolated that until the early 20th century some Sumatrans believed that it was inhabited entirely by women, who miraculously gave birth to children sired by the wind.

The island is featured on a map of Asia drawn in 1593. Enggano is Portuguese for 'deceit' or 'disappointment', which suggests that the Portuguese were the first Europeans to discover it. It wasn't until three years later that Dutch navigators first recorded it.

Enggano's original inhabitants are believed to have fled the Sumatran mainland when the Malays migrated there. Today the islanders live by cultivating rice, coffee, pepper, cloves and copra. Wild pigs, cattle and buffalo are abundant.

The island has an area of 680 sq km and there are no tourist facilities. Malakoni is the main harbour. The island is relatively flat (the highest point is Bua Bua, at 250m) and has a swampy coastline interspersed with some good beaches and snorkelling. Few tourists make it this far and you need to speak some Bahasa Indonesia in order to have any worthwhile contact with the local people.

It is best to report to the *kepala desa* (village chief) and seek advice for lodging.

Getting There & Around

In theory there are three boats a week from Bengkulu to Malakoni, but no-one in Bengkulu was able to vouch for this service. Alternatively, go to the small port of Bintuhan, about 225km south of Bengkulu, and ask at the harbour.

The villages on the island are connected by tracks originally made by the Japanese

and not very well maintained since. The only way to get around is to walk.

RIAU

The landscape and character of Riau province is decidedly distinct from the northern and western rind of Sumatra. Rather than mountains and volcanoes, Riau's character was carved by rivers and narrow ocean passages. Trading towns sprang up along the important navigation route of the Strait of Melaka, across which Riau claims cultural cousins.

For the port towns, such as Pekanbaru, and the Riau islands, proximity to Singapore and Kuala Lumpur has ensured greater access to the outside world than the interior Sumatran jungle. The discovery of oil and gas reserves has also built an educated and middle-class populous within an otherwise impoverished island.

The interior of the province more closely resembles Sumatra as a whole: sparse population, dense jungle, surviving pockets of nomadic peoples (including the Sakai, Kubu and Jambaisal) and endangered species, such as the Sumatran rhinoceros and tiger.

A strain of chloroquine-resistant malaria has been reported in Riau archipelago.

History

Riau's position at the southern entrance to the Strait of Melaka, the gateway for trade between India and China, was strategically significant.

From the 16th century, the Riau Islands were ruled by a variety of Malay kingdoms, which had to fight off constant attacks by pirates and the opportunistic Portuguese, Dutch and English. The Dutch eventually won control over the Strait of Melaka, and mainland Riau (then known as Siak) became their colony when the Sultan of Johor surrendered in 1745. However, Dutch interest lay in ridding the seas of pirates, so they could get on with the serious business of trade, and they made little effort to develop the province.

Oil was discovered around Pekanbaru by US engineers before WWII, but it was the Japanese who drilled the first well at Rumbai, 10km north of the city. The country around Pekanbaru is crisscrossed by pipe-

lines connecting the oil wells to refineries at Dumai because ocean-going tankers cannot enter the heavily silted Sungai Siak.

PEKANBARU

☐ 0761 / pop 750,000

Before the Americans struck oil, Pekanbaru was little more than a sleepy river port on Sungai Siak. Today it is Indonesia's oil capital, with all the hustle and bustle of modern cities.

Pekanbaru's primary purpose for tourists is as a transit point between ferries from Singapore, but the increased affordability of air travel has curtailed the sea passage. Now only Western oil executives on business trips find themselves in Pekanbaru.

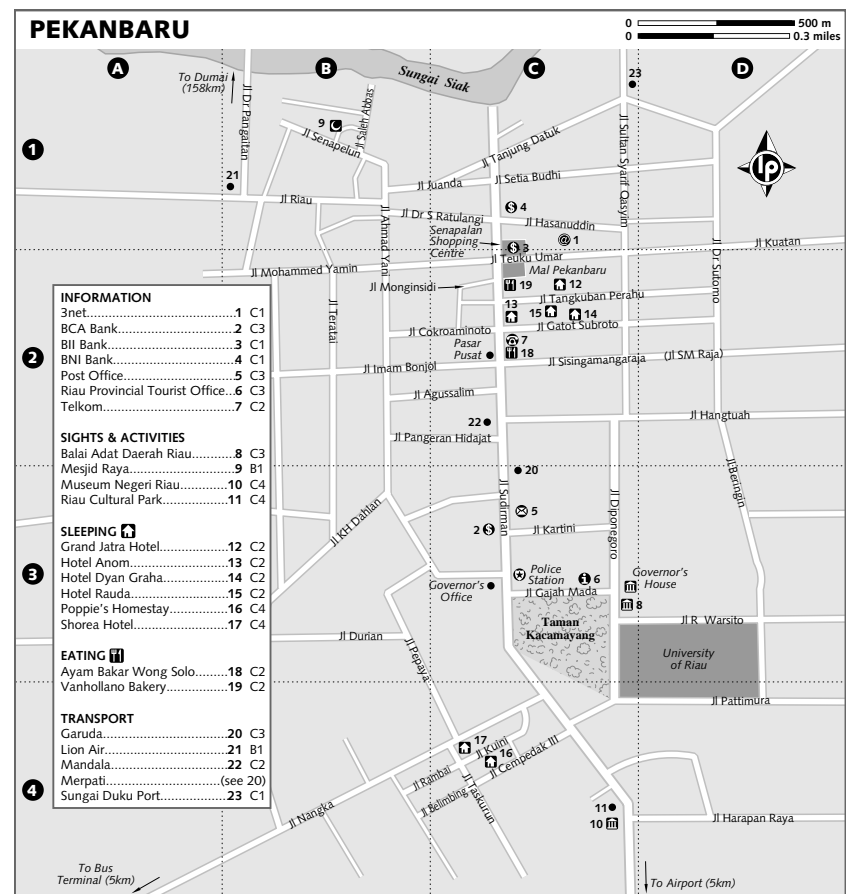
If you do decide to wander through, you'll spend most of your time accepting inexplicable gestures of kindness, from café conversations to instant friendships.

Orientation

The main street of Pekanbaru is Jl Sudirman. Almost everything of importance to travellers – banks, hotels and offices – can be found here or close by. Speedboats leave from the Sungai Duku port. The new bus terminal is 5km west of town.

Information

Most of the city's banks and ATMs are spread along Jl Sudirman. There are plenty of travel agencies around town that can



book plane and bus tickets as well as tours of the local area.

3net (Jl Teuku Umar 11; per hr 6000Rp; 7 9am-9pm) Internet café and travel agency.

BCA bank (Bank Central Asia; Jl Sudirman 448)

BI bank (Bank Internasional Indonesia; Jl Nangka 4) Changes US and Singapore dollars (cash and travellers cheques).

BNI bank (Bank Negara Indonesia; Jl Sudirman)

Post office (Jl Sudirman) Between Jl Hangtuh and Jl Kartini.

Riau provincial tourist office (☎ 31562; Jl Gajah Mada 200; 7 8am-4pm Mon-Thu, 8-11am Fri)

Telkom wartel (Jl Sudirman; 7 8am-9pm) About 1km north of the post office.

Sights

If you've got time to burn, you could check out the rather standard displays at **Museum Negeri Riau** (Jl Sudirman; admission 15,000Rp; 7 8am-2pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 8am-noon Fri). The neighbouring **Riau Cultural Park** (Jl Sudirman; 7 8am-2pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 8am-noon Fri) hosts occasional performances. Ask at the tourist office for details.

In the town centre, **Balai Adat Daerah Riau** (Jl Diponegoro; 7 8am-2pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 8am-noon Fri) maintains a few modest exhibits of traditional Malay culture. The **Mesjid Raya** (Jl Mesjid Raya), near the river, dates back to the 18th century, when Pekanbaru was the capital of the Siak sultanate. The courtyard holds the graves of the fourth and fifth sultans.

Sleeping

Most midrange hotels line Jl Sudirman and are oriented towards business clientele. If your timing is right, you may be able to broker considerable discounts.

Poppie's Homestay (☎ 45762; Jl Cempedak III; r 50,000Rp) Comfortable budget rooms in a converted house within a residential neighbourhood. It is tricky to find, but locals will be able to point you in the right direction once you turn off Jl Nangka.

Hotel Anom (☎ 36083; cnr Jl Sudirman & Gatot Subroto; d 75,000-140,000Rp; a) If you've never before met the Indonesian *mandi*, you might want to climb up the price scale for more amenities.

Shorea Hotel (☎ 48239; Jl Taskurun 100; d from 114,000Rp; a) A good-value place with clean, modern rooms, in a quiet spot off the main drag.

Hotel Rauda (Jl Tangkuban Perahu 4; d from 250,000Rp; a) A solid and centrally located

midrange option. The rooms are nothing special and ultimately forgettable – a plus when it comes to all the things that could go wrong.

Hotel Dyan Graha (☎ 26600; www.dyangraha.co.id; Jl Gatot Subroto 7; d 585,000-800,000Rp; a i s) Conveniently central, this is one of Pekanbaru's upmarket options. The bathrooms are certainly a plus. Rates include breakfast and tax.

Grand Jatra Hotel (Komplek Mal Pekanbaru, Jl Tangkuban Perahu; d from 776,000Rp; a i s) Visiting oil executives stay at this brand-new spot, providing international standards and décor.

Eating

There are innumerable places to eat along Jl Sudirman, particularly at night around the market at the junction with Jl Imam Bonjol.

Ayam Bakar Wong Solo (☎ 32962; Jl Sudirman 227; mains 15,000Rp) Not fancy but everything you'll need: an air-con retreat from steamy Pekanbaru and pictures of Indonesian standards.

Vanhollano Bakery (Jl Sudirman 153; burgers 12,000Rp) You could also skip the immersion and eat safely with these cakes, pastries, hamburgers and ice cream. It also serves fresh fruit juices.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Pekanbaru's Sempang Tiga has five direct flights to Jakarta each day with **Batavia Air**, **Lion Air**, **Adam Air**, **Mandala** and **Garuda**. Flights to Medan are handled by **Sriwijaya** and **Merpati**. **Garuda**, **Merpati** and **Lion Air** also have flights to Batam through which you can connect to Singapore flights.

Travel agents are located along Jl Sudirman. You can also find the following airline offices:

Garuda (Garuda Indonesia; ☎ 45063; Hotel Pangeran, Jl Sudirman 371-373)

Lion Air (☎ 40670; Mutiara Merdeka Hotel, Jl Yos Sudarso 12A)

Mandala (☎ 856777; Jl Sudirman 115)

Merpati (Merpati Nusantara Airlines; ☎ 21575; Jl Sudirman 371)

BOAT

Pekanbaru's Sungai Duku port is at the end of Jl Sultan Syarif Qasyim. Before flights be-

came so affordable, many travellers bounced between Pekanbaru and Batam's Sekupang port (economy/cabin 132,000/235,000Rp, six hours, 8am departure) en route to Singapore. When all the fares are tallied up, it is a long, expensive haul compared to the flying birds.

From Pekanbaru, boats also go to Melaka, Malaysia, three times a week (economy/cabin 215,000/365,000Rp; eight hours; 9am), **Tanjung Pinang** on **Bintan** (142,000Rp), **Tanjung Balai** on **Karimun** (200,000Rp) and **Tanjung Samak** on **Pulau Rangsang** (185,000Rp). It's also possible to go down **Sungai Siak** to **Tanjung Buton** (60,000Rp) and **Selat Panjang** (100,000Rp).

Ticket agents are located at the pier.

BUS

Pekanbaru's Terminal Nangka, 5km west of the town centre, is modern and uncharacteristically organised for Sumatra. There are posted prices and even staffed ticket booths within the terminal. If you don't want to be ripped off, buy tickets directly from the booths rather than the freelancers roaming the terminal. Destinations include **Bengkulu** (air-con 115,000Rp), **Bukittinggi** (economy 35,000Rp, five hours), **Dumai** (economy 7000Rp, five hours), **Jambi** (economy/air-con 75,000/150,000, 12 hours), **Medan** (economy 120,000Rp, 12 hours), and **Padang** (economy 51,000Rp, six hours).

Getting Around

Airport taxi charge 60,000Rp for the 10km trip into town.

Opelet around Pekanbaru cost a standard 2000Rp. From the port, catch a light-blue *opelet* to Pasar Pusat on Jl Sudirman. Green *opelet* on Jl Nangka shuttle between town and the bus terminal.

AROUND PEKANBARU

Some 120km downriver from Pekanbaru is **Siak Sri Inderapura**, site of the beautiful **As-serayah el Hasyimiah Palace**, built in 1889 by the 11th sultan of Siak, **Sultan Abdul Jalil Syafuddin**. It was the seat of the Siak sultanate until 1945. The palace was restored as a museum in 1989 but the best artefacts have been removed to Jakarta. The site also houses a dazzling white mosque with a silver dome.

You can stay at the basic **Penginapan Monalisa** (s/d 50,000Rp), by the dock in Siak.

To get there take the boat from the **Sungai Duku** port at 7.30am (economy/cabin 50,000/60,000Rp, four hours).

DUMAI

☎ 0765 / pop 180,000

Like most of Pekanbaru's oil, travellers enter and exit through the port of Dumai. Most are bound for the Malaysian port of Melaka. Although airfares between Malaysia and Sumatra are often more competitive, many travellers are still smitten with the idea of sailing the high seas.

If you get stuck in town, try the very basic **Wisma Hang Tua** (Jl Sudirman 431; d with fan from 50,000Rp); **Hotel Tasia Ratu** (☎ 31307; Jl St Syarif Kasim 65; d 100,000Rp), a tolerable midrange option; or **Royal Dumai Hotel** (☎ 34888; Jl Sudirman 58; d from 175,000-275,000Rp), Dumai's fanciest place.

Melaka-bound ferries depart from the **Yos Sudarso** port of Dumai three times a day at 8am, 10.30am and 1pm (170,000Rp, two hours). You must check in at the port two hours before departure in order to clear immigration. The port tax is 3500Rp.

Ferries travel daily to **Batam** (220,000Rp, seven hours). Two **Pelni** boats call at Dumai then **Bintan** en route to Jakarta.

There are frequent buses from Dumai to **Padang** (economy/air-con 70,000/100,000Rp, 12 hours), **Bukittinggi** (economy/air-con 50,000/80,000Rp, 10 hours) and **Pekanbaru** (economy 7000Rp, five hours). There are also minibus services timed with the arrivals of the boats from Batam.

RIAU ISLANDS

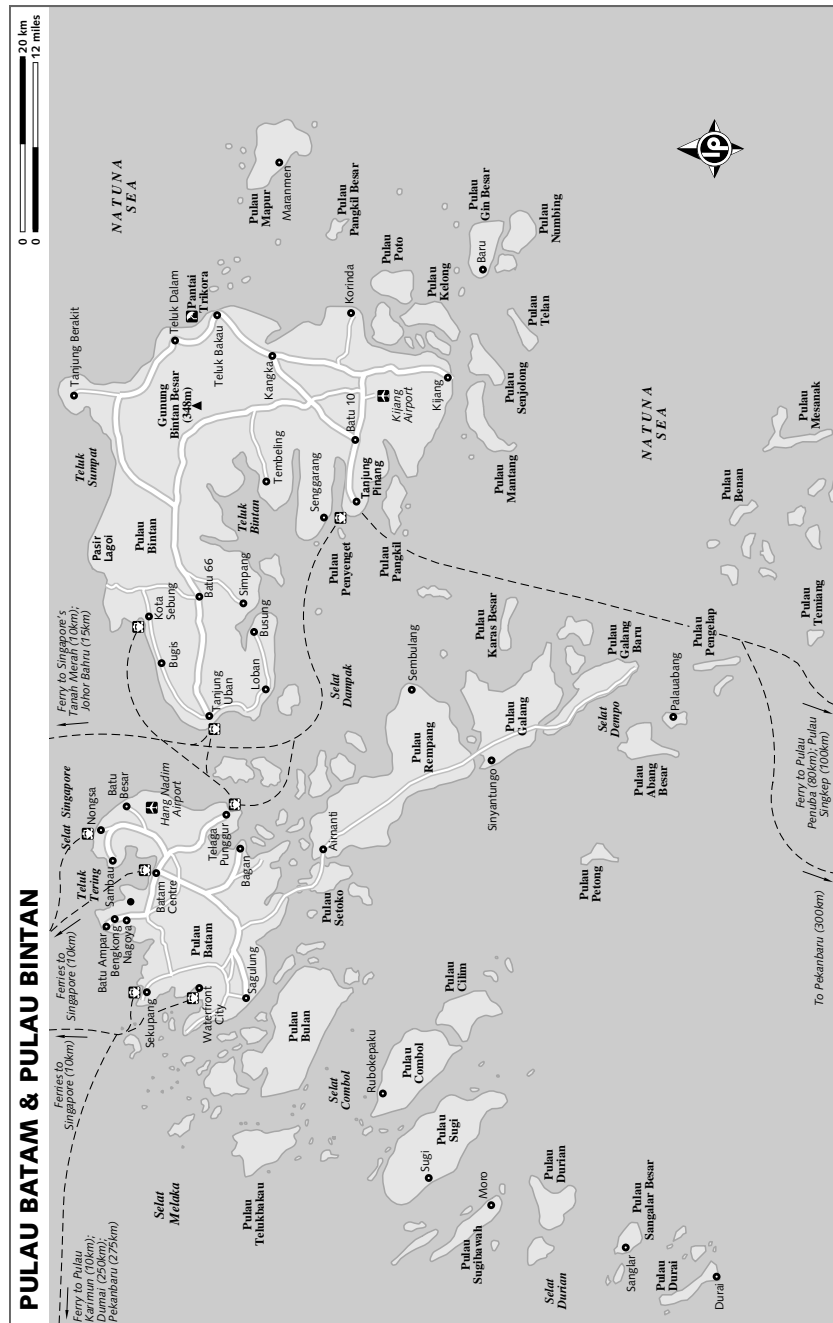
The Riau Islands are scattered like confetti across the South China Sea. The locals say there are as many islands as there are grains in a cup of pepper. That would be about 3214 islands in all, more than 700 of them uninhabited and many of them unnamed.

Pulau Batam and **Bintan** are practically suburbs of Singapore, with the attendant industry and recreation. In fact, the islands prefer to think of themselves as distinct from mainland Sumatra. Further away in the archipelago are the remote islands of **Anambas**, **Natuna** and **Tambelan**.

PULAU BATAM

☎ 0778 / pop 440,000

Nowhere in Sumatra is the pace of development more rapid than on Batam. With the



island's proximity to Singapore, Batam is the labour-intensive production leg of the Singapore–Johor Baru industrial triangle. Land and labour are cheaper here than in Singapore and many electronics companies have established production plants in the industrial park of Mukakuning. Much like the factory towns outside of Hong Kong, Mukakuning employs and houses mainly young women from impoverished areas of Indonesia. Hardly anyone living in Batam is a native and half the population is under 30 years old.

Higher up the economic food chain are the Western managers and executives who oversee the factories, as well as engineers employed by one of the island's largest multinationals, J Ray McDermott, which makes offshore oil rigs and pipelines.

In addition to industry, the island has made several unsuccessful bids at diversifying into a tourist destination. Because its miles of coastline are too close to Singapore's harbour to be swimmable, resorts have tried to distract tourists with golfing and gambling, a promising combination until the Indonesian government unplugged the casinos.

The next jackpot scheme is to develop the island as a retirement community for East Asians, Singaporeans and Jakarta-based Chinese. New housing complexes are going up faster than new factories.

Besides using Batam as a transit point for boats from Singapore to Sumatra, it is unlikely that a tourist would purposely come to Batam. The majority of foreigners here arrive on corporate assignments and find that the island has cultivated a bit of a boys club ambience. The main town of Nagoya has plenty of girlie bars to make the buttoned-down execs feel like studs.

Orientation & Information

Most travellers to Batam arrive at the northern port of Sekupang by boat from Singapore. Sekupang has an international and domestic terminal next door to each other and all the short-term necessities that new arrivals need: immigration desk and moneychangers. There are no ATMs at Sekupang, so arrive with cash to avoid a taxi to Nagoya.

The main town on the island is Nagoya, with hotels, banks and other necessities. To

the south is the island's administrative centre, Batam Centre, which also has port facilities.

Waterfront City and Nongsa are the surviving resort areas that attract Batam expats on weekends and package tourists from elsewhere in Asia.

On Batam, Singapore dollars are as easy to spend as the Indonesian rupiah.

Nagoya

This is the original boom town, showing a lot more skin than you'll find in the rest of Sumatra. The heart of town is the Nagoya Entertainment District, where bars and massage parlours indulge male camaraderie with lap dances and take-home prizes. Although it ain't pretty, Nagoya is ultimately functional, with Western-gear food and entertainment sneaking in just under Singapore prices.

The city is divided up like Singapore into main avenues and tributary blocks and exhibits a certain Chinese industriousness similar to the city-state.

INFORMATION

Awal Brothers Hospital (% 431777; Jl Balai) Western-trained doctors and international facilities, 7km south of Nagoya.

Barelang Internet (Komplek Batam Plaza 4; per hr 10,000Rp)

Bank Danamon (Jl Imam Bonjol) Across from Goodway Hotel.

Batam Tourist Promotion Board (% 322871; next door to Sekupang domestic terminal) It can help with local information and hotel bookings but keeps erratic hours.

Post office (Jl Imam Bonjol)

SLEEPING

The really cheap stuff isn't worth it in Nagoya, but the midrange numbers are luxury compared to mainland Sumatra. The majority of midrange hotels are in the small lanes behind Goodway Hotel.

There are a handful of top-end hotels where visiting corporates are housed. The top-end lobbies often suggest great expectations but don't deliver inside the rooms; we've listed here the ones that come close to international expectations. Rates include tax and service charge.

Hotel Bahari (% 421911; Komplek Nagoya Square, Block D; d 145,000-200,000Rp; a) Bahari I and II occupy the block, with comfy concrete boxes with hot and cold showers. Breakfast included.

Goodway Hotel (% 42688; www.goodwayhotel.com; Jl Imam Bonjol; s/d from 480,000/540,000Rp; a s) Displaced gentleman are lucky to have this classic hotel in this far-flung corner of the world. The décor is subdued and the best rooms have balconies.

Planet Holiday (% 433555; www.planetholidayhotel.com; Jl Raja Ali Haji; d from 500,000Rp; a i s) Service is crisp, the rooms are modern and as the tallest building in town there are views over squatty Batam.

EATING & DRINKING

Nagoya has a tasty mix of Indonesian and Chinese restaurants and warung.

Grill Bar (% 7013670; Goodway Hotel; Jl Imam Bonjol; mains from 50,000Rp; 11 10am-11pm) Chase away the rice blues with a manly meal of New Zealand Angus steaks at this cherished expat restaurant.

Kedai Kopi Indah (mains from 20,000Rp) A popular in-town stop for Chinese-style seafood dishes, such as pepper crab and fish claypot. Located behind Panorama Hotel.

Golden Prawn (Bengkong; mains from 50,000Rp) This famous *kelong* (open-air seafood restaurant) is considered one of the best on the island. Everything is charged by the kilo.

For local food, head to the **night market** (Jl Raja Ali Haji) or the big and raucous **Pujasera Nagoya** (food centre, opposite Hotel Sahid Rashinta).

Goodway Wine Bar (% 426888; Goodway Hotel, Jl Imam Bonjol) Through the wild-west saloon doors is a comfortable tap room for unwinding expats. Kenneth, the publican, once peddled his 'very British' demeanour in Hollywood, a role he plays today.

There are lots of other naughty nightlife options, but this information isn't a secret. Just drop into the Wine Bar and chat up the Benny Hill gang.

Waterfront City

Near the shipyards, Waterfront City's resorts are a strange occurrence: beachside resorts without beach activities. Instead they focus on resort diversions: swimming, spa-ing, golfing and organised activities. These resorts are heavily marketed to East Asians, mainly Koreans. Weekday discounts through travel agents might override the obvious drawbacks.

Harris Resort (% 381888; d\$115-135; a i s) This fun-in-the-sun resort is targeted to families and folks of all ages.

Holiday Inn Resort (% 381333; d \$200; a i s) Mainly a corporate hotel, Holiday Inn has classically decorated suites with balconies overlooking the pool. The internationally recognised spa is a fave for Singaporeans who don't want to spa-trek all the way to Bali.

Nongsa

Batam's prettiest, but still unswimmable, beach occupies the less-developed Nongsa peninsula. Casino resorts had provided the biggest draw for nearby Singaporeans, but the Indonesian government recently outlawed gambling, effectively drying up business.

Turi Beach Resort (% 310075; d from \$200; a i s) Of the surviving resorts, Turi is the best and provides a close but delicious escape for Batam-bound visitors. The thatched-roof huts designed in the Balinese style have all the midlife comforts and a linen-suit ambience.

Golf courses in Nongsa offer attractive promotional packages (S\$70-100) during the week; Singapore-based travel agents typically have the best rates. Nongsa's two courses are **Tering Bay** (% 778761; 818 Jl Hang Lekiu, Km 4), which was designed by Greg Norman, and **Palm Spring Golf Resort** (% 778761222; Jl Hang Leiku).

Nongsa's favourite *kelong* is the **Rezeki Kelong** (Batu Besar; mains from 50,000Rp).

Getting There & Away

AIR

Hang Nadim airport is on the eastern side of the island. Garuda, Merpati, Mandala, Bouraq and Air Asia operate to/from Jakarta. Merpati destinations also include Medan, Padang, Palembang, Jambi and Pekanbaru, as well as Pontianak in Kalimantan (650,000Rp). Jatayu also flies to Medan.

Most of the hotels in Nagoya have travel agencies.

BOAT

Batam has five ports and services between Singapore, the Sumatran mainland and other Riau Islands.

To Pulau Bintan

The ferry dock at Telaga Punggur, 30km southeast of Nagoya, is the main port for

speedboats to Bintan. The departure tax is 3500Rp.

Boats to Bintan's Tanjung Pinang (one way/return 35,000/60,000Rp, every 30 minutes from 7.30am to 5.50pm) take 45 minutes. There are also boats to Bintan's Lagoi resort area (one way/return 100,000/170,000Rp, three times a day).

To Elsewhere in Indonesia

The main reason travellers come to Batam is its links to the Sumatran mainland. Dumai Express and Surya Gemilang Jaya are the best of the domestic carriers.

Boats leave from Batam's Sekupang terminal to Pekanbaru (210,000Rp, six hours, two morning departures). In order to make the connection without spending the night on Batam, you'll need to catch the first ferry from Singapore at 7.30am and assume that the Indonesian boats are running late as usual.

There are also two morning boats from Sekupang to Dumai (220,000Rp, six hours), one morning boat to Kuala Tungkal (231,000Rp) on the Jambi coast and three boats weekly to Palembang (305,000Rp, eight hours).

Other destinations from Sekupang port include Karimun (62,000Rp, one hour, every hour from 8am to 4pm) and Pulau Kundur (81,000Rp, two hours, every hour from 8am to 2.30pm).

Pelni ships pass through Batam to and from Belawan (the port for Medan) and Jakarta. The tickets can be bought at the domestic ferry terminal or at travel agencies in Nagoya.

Singapore

Frequent services shuttle between Singapore and Batam, taking between 25 minutes to 45 minutes depending on the pier. Tickets for all ferries to Singapore cost S\$17/23 one way/return. There is a S\$2 harbour departure tax leaving Batam and an hour time difference between Indonesia and Singapore. Penguin has the biggest and fastest ferries (25-minute crossing).

Sekupang is most widely used by tourists because the terminal that receives boats from Singapore's Harbourfront Centre is next door to the domestic terminal for transfer to the Sumatran mainland. The boats to Singapore run approximately

every hour from 6am to 6.45pm, and to Batam from 7.30am to 8pm. Batam Centre and Waterfront City have services only to/from Singapore's Harbourfront Centre. The last boat to leave the island departs from Batam Centre at 9.30pm. Waterfront City's schedule is fairly limited, with only four departures per day. Ferries to Nongsa shuttle back and forth to Singapore's Tanah Merah, with eight departures per day between 8am and 8pm.

At Sekupang port don't buy a ticket from the many touts and refuse any offers of 'assistance' to see you through immigration.

Getting Around

Taxis are the primary way to get around. Sample fares are as follows: from Sekupang to Nagoya (50,000Rp, 45 minutes) and Batam Centre to Nagoya (30,000Rp, 30 minutes). From the airport, it will cost 90,000Rp to Sekupang, 70,000Rp to Nagoya and 60,000Rp to Batam Centre.

Blue-and-white bemo shuttle between Nongsa and Nagoya (13,000Rp). There's also a public bus from Telaga Punggur to Nagoya (10,000Rp).

PULAU BINTAN

% 0771 / pop 200,000

Just across the Selat Dampak from Batam, the island of Bintan is twice as large and a mirror opposite. Where Batam is a creation of imported workers, Bintan has a local community of ethnic Hakka and Indo-Malays.

On the west coast, Tanjung Pinang is a busy provincial city, while the high-end resorts in the north of the island around Lagoi do beach escapes right. For the working stiffs from Singapore, there are the more rustic beaches on the eastern end of the island around Pantai Trikora for affordable weekend escapes.

Although Bintan is under the influence of Singapore prices, it is a smidge cheaper, so the last bits in your wallet won't evaporate as quickly as in the metropolis.

Bintan is also the administrative centre of the Riau Islands, a title that has funnelled some much-needed development to the island.

Tanjung Pinang

The main port town on the island is a bustling mercantile centre with more ethnic diversity

than most Sumatran towns. There is lots of provincial-style shopping and nibbling on Chinese and Indonesian specialities. Nearby are several traditional-style villages and temple attractions that tickle the culture-bone of weekend Singaporeans.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

The port, hotels, and other necessities are all within walking distance. There are plenty of ATMs around town and bank branches, mainly on Jl Teuku Umar.

Bank Mandiri (Jl Teuku Umar)

BCA bank (Bank Central Asia; Jl Ketapang)

BNI bank (Bank Negara Indonesia; Jl Teuku Umar)

Extreme Internet (Jl Mawar 9A; per hr 10,000Rp;

10am-10pm) On the 2nd floor of a wartel office.

Pinang Jaya Tour & Travel (☎ 21267; Jl Bintan 44)

Air tickets.

Post office (Jl Merdeka) Near the harbour, on Tanjung Pinang's main street.

Tourist information centre (☎ 31822; Jl Merdeka

5; 8am-5pm) Behind the police station; the helpful

English-speaking staff organise city tours

Wartel (Jl Bintan)

Wartel (Jl Merdeka)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

You can stroll around Tanjung Pinang in a leisurely hour. The older part of town is found around the narrow piers near Jl Plantar II. The harbour hosts a constant stream of vessels, from tiny sampans to large freighters.

The following sites can be visited independently or through tour programs arranged through the tourist office.

Penyenget

A short hop across the harbour from Tanjung Pinang, tiny Penyenget was once the capital of the Riau rajahs. The island is believed to have been given to Rajah Riau-Lingga VI in 1805 by his brother-in-law, Sultan Mahmud, as a wedding present. Another historical footnote is that the Penyenget-based sultanate cooperated with Sir Stamford Raffles to hand over Singapore in exchange for British military protection in 1819.

The island is littered with interesting relics and can be walked in a couple of hours. The coastline is dotted with traditional Malay stilted houses, while the ruins of the old palace of Rajah Ali and the tombs and

graveyards of Rajah Jaafar and Rajah Ali are clearly signposted inland. The most impressive site is the sulphur-coloured mosque, with its many domes and minarets. Dress appropriately or you won't be allowed in.

There are frequent boats to Pulau Penyenget from Bintan's main pier (4000Rp, from 7am to 5pm). There's a 2000Rp entry charge at weekends.

Senggarang

A fascinating village sits just across the harbour from Tanjung Pinang. The star attraction is an old Chinese temple, now suspended in the roots of a huge banyan that has grown up through it.

The temple is to the left of the pier, where boats from Tanjung Pinang dock. Half a kilometre along the waterfront, Vihara Darma Sasana, a complex of three temples, all said to be more than a century old, occupy a large courtyard facing the sea.

Boats to Senggarang (10,000Rp) leave from Pejantan II wharf.

Sungai Ular

Snake River swims through mangrove forests to Jodoh temple, the oldest Chinese temple in Riau Islands. The temple is decorated with gory murals depicting the trials and tortures of hell. You can charter a sampan (80,000Rp for five people) from Tanjung Pinang harbour.

SLEEPING & EATING

All of Tanjung Pinang's accommodation is within walking distance of the harbour.

Bong's Homestay (Lorong Bintan II 20; d 30,000Rp) A few basic rooms will make you feel like a stowaway. The family speaks English well and is good at US trivia.

Hotel Surya (☎ 318387; Jl Bintan 49; s/d 55,000/90,000Rp; a) Quality varies at this multistorey hotel. Fun rooms are basic concrete boxes, while some rooms have sunny windows and new paint.

Hotel Laguna (☎ 311555; Jl Bintan 51; d from 250,000Rp; a) Tanjung Pinang's corporate stay, with big beds and walk-in shower.

Hotel Melia (☎ 21898; Jl Pos 25; d from 350,000Rp) Bright and airy rooms and enormous suites with views over the harbour.

In front of the volleyball stadium on Jl Teuku Umar, an open-air food court (mains 8000Rp) whips up tasty snacks.

If you're looking for Padang food, there are several places on Jl Plantar II serving good fish or jackfruit curries.

The colourful *pasar buah* (fruit market) is at the northern end of Jl Merdeka. In the evening there are several food stalls scattered around town serving *mie bangka*, a Hakka-style dumpling soup.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

See p466 for details about how to get there and away.

GETTING AROUND

It is fairly easy to get around central Tanjung Pinang by catching one of the many *opelet* (2000Rp). The *opelet* don't have fixed routes, so tell the driver your destination and see if he agrees.

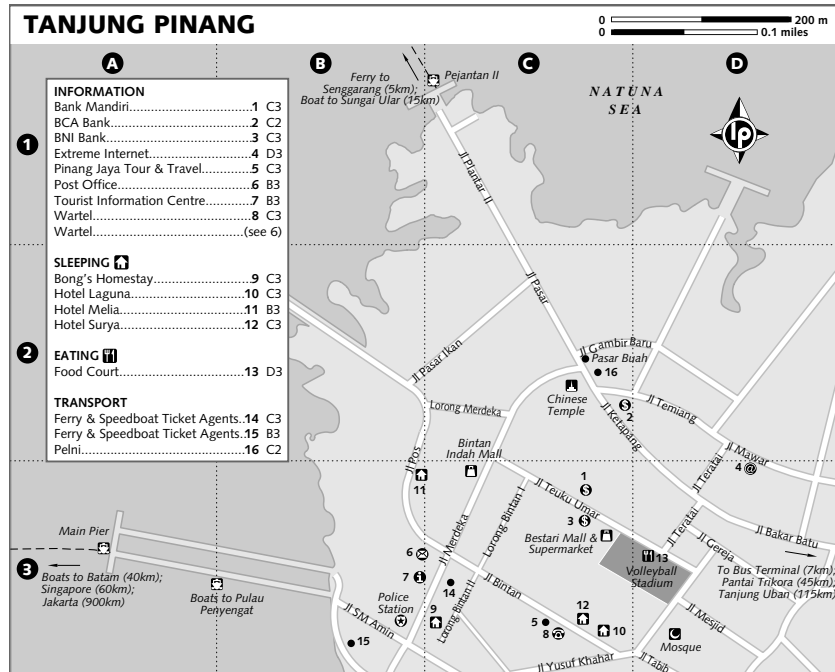
The bus terminal is inconveniently located 7km out of Tanjung Pinang, along the road to Pantai Trikora. But there aren't many services that leave from here.

To get to the outlying beaches is expensive. A taxi from Tanjung Pinang to Pantai Trikora is a long ride and will cost 100,000Rp. You can also fish around for share taxis, but most drivers won't want to cut a deal with a 'rich' foreigner. If you head out to the main highway, you can catch Barakit-bound public buses that pass through Trikora (20,000Rp).

Another not-so-affordable option is to rent a car, which gives you flexibility in exploring the beaches around the island. **Rico Rental** (☎ 315931; Jl Yos Sudarso 1) rents Kijang for 250,000Rp per day (not including petrol). Renting a car in Tanjung Pinang is cheaper than relying on the resorts in Lagoi.

Pantai Trikora & Around

Bintan's east coast is lined with rustic beaches and simple wooden bungalows. The main beach is Pantai Trikora, which is pretty enough at high tide but turns into miles of mud flats at low tide. The beaches to the north around Malangrupai have more consistent surf and turf. Regardless though, the area is relatively deserted: just you, the ocean and a few napping dogs. A group of small islands off Pantai Trikora are well worth visiting and there is good snorkelling outside the monsoon season (November to March).



SLEEPING & EATING

Accommodation at Trikora is outside the village of Teluk Bakau. The following can organise snorkelling trips to offshore islands (150,000Rp):

Shady Shack (☎ 081 364515223; www.lobo.kinemotion.de; d with breakfast 150,000Rp) A handful of weather-beaten shacks face directly to the sea. This is just a step above camping and is a good excuse not to shower or brush your teeth.

Gurindam Resort (☎ 26234; Telok Bakau, Km 35; weekday/weekend d with breakfast 150,000/210,000Rp) Designed like a Muslim fishing village with stilt-frame bungalows built over the water, this is a dream come true for down-to-earth family getaways. There's fishing in the attached fish ponds, a thatched-roof restaurant big enough for energetic tots, and a small swimming beach.

Lagoi

Bintan's resort area stretches along the northern coastline of the island along Pasir Lagoi, with acres of wilderness buffering the hotels from commoners to the south. Security is in full effect, with checkpoints at access roads and at hotel entrances. The beaches are sandy and swimmable, the resorts have polished four- and five-star service and there are water-sports activities and entertainment for all ages.

There are three golf courses in Lagoi designed by champion golfers: **Bintan Lagoon Resort Golf Club** (☎ 0770-691399), **Laguna Bintan Golf Club** (☎ 0770-693188) and top-rated **Ria Bintan Golf Club** (☎ 0770-692839; www.riabintan.com). Weekday promotional rates and packages range from S\$55 to S\$150.

SLEEPING

There are three resort compounds comprising several hotel clusters, private beaches and golf courses. Check with travel agents about weekday discounts, which can be as generous as 50%.

Of the three, we found the hotels within Laguna Bintan (Angsana Resort and Banyan Tree) and Nirwana Gardens (Nirwana Resort) compounds to be accommodating and well maintained.

Angsana Resort & Spa Bintan (☎ 0770-693111; www.angsana.com; packages S\$320-480; a s) The more dressed-down companion to sophisticated Banyan Tree, Angsana is best

sued to young professionals. The breezy common spaces are decorated in zesty citrus colours, with private rooms sporting a contemporary colonial style. The superior rooms are nice but the suites are super.

Banyan Tree Bintan (☎ 0770-693100; www.banyantree.com; packages S\$480-650; a s) More private and privileged than Angsana, Banyan Tree has the famed spa facilities and a high-powered retreat deep in the jungle. The hotel shares the 900m-long beach with Angsana.

Nirwana Resort Hotel (☎ 0770-692505; www.nirwanagardens.com; d from S\$320; a s) More targeted to local families, Nirwana is comfortable and unfussy, with sweet staff but not the best beach. The lagoon-style pool has a large baby pool area, but the grounds are little thirsty. The suites have sea views and huge bathrooms.

Getting There & Away**AIR**

Kijang airport is currently used for cargo, not passenger, flights.

BOAT

Bintan has three ports and services to Batam, Singapore and other islands in the Riau archipelago.

Tanjung Pinang is the busiest harbour and the best option for folks planning to stay in Tanjung Pinang or Pantai Trikora. If you're bound for the resort area of Lagoi, the port at Kota Sebung is more convenient. Tanjung Uban is the third option.

To Batam

Regular speedboats depart from the main pier in Tanjung Pinang for Telaga Pungur on Batam (35,000Rp, 45 minutes) from 7.45am to 4.45pm daily. There are also boats that go from Lagoi to Batam's Telaga Pungur (one way/return 100,000/170,000Rp).

To Elsewhere in Sumatra

There are boats to Pekanbaru (300,000Rp, daily) and Dumai (275,000Rp, daily). Tickets for all of these destinations can be bought from agents on Jl Merdeka, just outside of the harbour entrance.

Daily ferries travel to other islands in the Riau chain, such as Pulau Karimum's Tanjung Balai (80,000Rp, 2½ hours), Pulau Lingga's Daik (57,000Rp, three hours), Sungai

Buluh on Singkep (60,000Rp, three hours) and Penuba (80,000Rp, three hours). The Anugra Makmur company runs boats every 10 days to the remote Natuna Islands.

Pelni sails to Jakarta weekly from the southern port of Kijang. Travel agencies in Tanjung Pinang can supply tickets and schedules.

To Malaysia

There are boats to Johor Bahru in Malaysia (140,000Rp, five departures) from Tanjung Pinang. Tickets can be bought from agents on Jl Merdeka, just outside of the harbour entrance.

To Singapore

Boats from Tanjung Pinang go to Singapore's Tanah Merah (one way S\$25) between 7am and 6.30pm. There are more frequent services on the weekend.

Bintan Resort Ferries (www.brf.com.sg) is the only company that handles transport between Lagoi and Singapore; ticket prices vary based on day of week but start at S\$26.

Getting Around

For Lagoi-bound visitors, most resorts organise shuttle service between the harbour at Kota Sebung and the hotels as part of the package price or for an additional S\$6.

OTHER RIAU ISLANDS

Few travellers reach the remote outer islands of Riau. Getting there is half the problem. Head to the better-serviced islands first, and you can usually organise to island-hop from there.

Pulau Singkep

Singkep is the third-largest island in the archipelago. Huge tin mines once provided most of the island's jobs, but since their closure much of the population has moved elsewhere and the island has reverted to being a sleepy backwater.

The main town, Dabo, is shaded by lush trees and gardens and clustered around a central park. A large mosque dominates the skyline. The fish and vegetable markets near the harbour are interesting, and Jl Pasar Lamar is a good browsing and shopping area. Batu Bedua, 4km from town, is a lovely white-sand beach fringed with palms.

There is accommodation available at the simple **Wisma Gapura Singkep** (☎ 077621136; Jl Perusalaan 41; d from 80,000Rp).

You can eat at the markets behind Wisma Sri Indah or try any of the warung on Jl Pasar Lama and Jl Merdeka. Food stalls and warung pop up all over the place at night.

There's one boat a day to Tanjung Pinang on Bintan (57,000Rp, three hours) and daily ferries to Daik on Pulau Lingga. Boats dock at Singkep's northern port of Sungai Buluh, from where there are buses to Dabo. Several shops in Dabo act as ticket agencies.

Pulau Penuba

Penuba is a small island wedged between Singkep and Lingga. It's an idyllic place to do little but swim, walk and read. There are some great beaches near the north-coast village of Tanjung Dua and others near the main settlement, Penuba, on the southeastern coast.

Penuba is a sleepy village centred around the **Attaqwa Mosque**. Accommodation is available at the house next door – ask around for the caretaker – and you can eat at several warung along Jl Merdeka, the main street.

A daily boat travels to Penuba from Tanjung Pinang (80,000Rp, three hours) on Bintan, or you can charter a boat from Singkep for the half-hour trip.

Pulau Lingga

Not much remains of the glory that was once the royal island of Lingga except a few neglected ruins. Today there are few creature comforts and little in the way of modern development. The island resembles a crown and rises sharply from the shore to form the three jungle-clad peaks of Gunung Daik. The central peak reaches 1163m and is the highest point in the archipelago. Locals maintain that it has never been climbed.

Daik, the main village and arrival point, is hidden 1km up a muddy river. The town itself is pretty much a single street, with some cargo wharves and about a dozen Chinese shops. It has a certain tropical, seedy charm and a very laid-back atmosphere.

The main site of historical interest is the modest ruin of the palace of Rajah Suleiman, the last rajah of Lingga-Riau. Next to the palace are the foundation stones of a building said to have housed the rajah's extensive

harem. The palace was made of wood and little survives today, though the surrounding jungle hides overgrown bathing pools and squat toilets. The ruins are a two-hour walk from Daik and you'll need very clear directions or a guide to get you through the maze of overgrown forest paths.

On the outskirts of Daik the **Mesjid Sultan Lingga** houses the tomb of Rajah Mahmud I, who ruled in the early 19th century. A half-hour walk from town is the **Makam Bukit Cencek** (Cencek Hill Cemetery) on a hill overlooking the river. The crumbling graves of Rajah Abdul Rakhman (r 1812–31) and Rajah Muhammed (r 1832–41) are here. The remains of an old fort are nearby.

There is one basic **hotel** (d around 60,000Rp) in Daik, near the ferry dock on the main street. There are a few small **warung** on the main street.

There are daily boats for the two-hour trip from Daik to Dabo on Singkep (40,000Rp), and a daily service to Tanjung Pinang (50,000Rp, three hours) on Bintan.

Natuna Islands

These islands are right off the beaten track and difficult to reach.

The population of **Pulau Natuna Besar** is fairly small, although there's an extensive *transmigrasi* programme along Sungai Ulu, with settlers from Java growing cash crops such as peanuts and green peas.

The islands are noted for fine basket-weave **cloth** and various kinds of **traditional dance**. One particularly idiosyncratic local dance is a kind of *Thousand & One Arabian Nights* saga, incorporating episodes from Riau-Lingga history.

Ask in Tanjung Pinang on Pulau Bintan about infrequent boat services to Natuna.

JAMBI

For such a centrally located province, Jambi is not easy to reach and sees few foreign visitors. The province occupies a 53,435-sq-km slice of central Sumatra, stretching from the highest peaks of the Bukit Barisan range in the west, to the coastal swamps facing the Strait of Melaka in the east.

The eastern lowlands are mainly rubber and palm oil plantations. Timber is also big business, as is oil; Jambi's main field is

southeast of the capital on the South Sumatran border.

In the western portion of the province is the Kerinci Seblat National Park, home to Sumatra's highest peak, Gunung Kerinci (3805m), Sumatran tigers (Jambi's faunal mascot) and rhinos. The park is covered in the West Sumatra section (see p451) because Padang has more convenient transit links than Jambi.

Most of the province is sparsely populated; many are migrants from Java and Bali. In the province's fast disappearing forests, the Orang Rimba are an endangered hunter-gatherer tribe.

History

The province of Jambi was the heartland of the ancient kingdom of Malayu, which first rose to prominence in the 7th century. Much of Malayu's history is closely and confusingly entwined with that of its main regional rival, the Palembang-based kingdom of Sriwijaya. The little that is known about Malayu has mostly been gleaned from the precise records maintained by the Chinese court of the time.

It is assumed that the temple ruins at Muara Jambi mark the site of Malayu's former capital, the ancient city of Jambi – known to the Chinese as Chan Pi. The Malayu sent their first delegation to China in 644 and the Chinese scholar I Tsing spent a month in Malayu in 672. When he returned 20 years later he found that Malayu had been conquered by Sriwijaya. The Sriwijayans appear to have remained in control until the sudden collapse of their empire at the beginning of the 11th century.

Following Sriwijaya's demise, Malayu re-emerged as an independent kingdom and stayed that way until it became a dependency of Java's Majapahit empire, which ruled from 1278 until 1520. It then came under the sway of the Minangkabau people of West Sumatra.

In 1616 the Dutch East India Company opened an office in Jambi and quickly formed a successful alliance with Sultan Muhammed Nakhruddin to protect its ships and cargoes from pirates. It also negotiated a trade monopoly with Nakhruddin and his successors. The major export was pepper, which was grown in great abundance. In

ORANG RIMBA

Jambi's nomadic hunter-gatherers are known by many names: outsiders refer to the diverse tribes collectively as Kubu, an unflattering term, while they refer to themselves as Orang Rimba (People of the Forest) or Anak Dalam (Children of the Forest). Descended from the first wave of Malays to migrate to Sumatra, they once lived in highly mobile groups throughout Jambi's lowland forests.

As sedentary communities began to dominate the province, the Orang Rimba retained their nomadic lifestyle and animistic beliefs, regarding their neighbours' adoption of Islam and agriculture as disrespectful towards the forest. Traditionally the Orang Rimba avoided contact with the outsiders, preferring to barter and trade by leaving goods on the fringes of the forest or relying on trusted intermediaries.

In the 1960s, the Indonesian government's social affairs and religion departments campaigned to assimilate the Orang Rimba into permanent camps and convert them to a monotheistic religion. Meanwhile the jungles were being transformed into oil palm and rubber plantations during large-scale transmigration from Java and Bali.

Some Orang Rimba assimilated and are now economically marginalised within the plantations, while others take the government hand-outs and then return to the forests. About 2500 Orang Rimba retain their traditional lifestyles within the shrinking forest. The groups were given special settlement rights within Bukit Duabelas and Bukit Tigapuluh National Parks, but the protected forests are as vulnerable to illegal logging and poaching as other Sumatran parks. In addition, areas once classified as restricted are frequently converted into production.

In the opinions of the NGO groups that work with the Orang Rimba, it isn't a question of *if* the tribes will lose their jungle traditions but *when*. In the spirit of practical idealism, the organisation WARSI (www.warsi.or.id) established its alternative educational outreach. Rather than forcing educational institutions on the Orang Rimba, teachers join the nomads that will accept an outsider and teach the children how to read, write and count – the equivalent of knowing how to hunt and forage in the settled communities.

1901 the Dutch East India Company moved its headquarters to Palembang and effectively gave up its grip on Jambi.

JAMBI

☎ 0741 / pop 490,000

The capital of Jambi is the city of the same name, a busy river port about 155km from the mouth of Sungai Batang Hari. Jambi is not known as a tourist destination, but those who have wandered the markets and watched the city in action have found that nowhere can be more fun than somewhere.

Orientation

Jambi sprawls over a wide area, a combination of the old Pasar Jambi district spreading south from the port, and the new suburbs of Kota Baru and Telanaipura to the west. Most of the banks, hotels and restaurants are in Pasar Jambi near the junction of Jl Gatot Subroto and Jl Raden Mattaaher, while government buildings are out at Kota Baru.

Information

There are plenty of ATMs around town. Jl Dr Sutomo is the primary bank street.

Culture & Tourism Office (☎ 445056; Jl H Agus Salim, Kota Baru) The English-speaking staff are keen to promote the province and can organise city tours.

Main Telkom wartel (Jl Dr Sumantri) In Telanaipura.

Post office (Jl Sultan Thaha 9) Near the port.

Thamrin Internet (Jl Gatot Subroto 6; per hr 6000Rp; 11am–9pm) Internet access near Gloria Bookshop.

Wartel (Jl Raden Mattaaher; 11am–9pm) More convenient than the main Telekom wartel; you can make international phone calls here.

Sights & Activities

Jambi is the starting point for excursions to the archaeological site of Muara Jambi (see p470).

Museum Negeri Propinsi Jambi (cnr Jl Urip Sumoharjo & Prof Dr Sri Sudewi, Telanaipura; admission 2000Rp; 11am–3pm Mon–Fri), one of the city's few attractions, is out in Telanaipura. It has a selection of costumes and handicrafts, as well as a small historical display. Take an *ojek* (2000Rp).

Nearby the museum is a batik centre that produces and sells traditional Jambi textiles featuring striking floral motifs. The centre also has a range of handicrafts from all over the province, including *songket* weaving and finely woven split-rattan baskets. The centre provides employment for local women.

Sleeping

Accommodation in Jambi isn't much of a bargain, so you should opt for convenience instead. The most social spot to base yourself is near the market, behind the Novotel, where you'll find a cluster of midrange and top-end hotels.

Lukman Language Exchange (l_tanjung@yahoo.com) Delightful Jambi resident Lukman can provide lodging in his home in exchange for a few appearances by an English native speaker at his weekly tutoring sessions.

Hotel Da'lia (☎ 50863; Jl Camar 100; d 70,000-90,000Rp; a) Basic and clean, this is the best you'll get in the budget range.

Hotel Jambi Raya (☎ 34971; Jl Camar 45; s/d 160,000/250,000Rp; a) Deluxe rooms are decorated in glam honeymoon style.

Hotel Abadi (☎ 25600; Jl Gatot Subroto 92; d 390,000-500,000Rp; a s) Otherwise average top-end rooms are decorated with Jambi batik bedspreads for a local flair. Junior suites have a tranquil balcony.

Novotel (☎ 27208; novotel@e-jambi.net; Jl Gatot Subroto 44; d from 500,000Rp) Currently the most expensive hotel in town but far from being worth it.

Eating

Saimen Perancis (Jl Raden Mattaher; pastries 2000Rp) An excellent bakery that also serves meals.

Simpang Raya (Jl Raden Mattaher 22; dishes 7000Rp) An old friend in the *nasi Padang* game.

Munri Food Centre (Jl Sultan Agung; mains 10,000Rp) More night-time eats set the night ablaze at this alfresco dining area.

Ancol (near Sungai Batang Hari) Just down from the Trade Centre, this is an evening destination for promenading and river breezes. Stalls sell local favourites, such as *nanas goreng* (fried pineapples) and *jagung bakar* (roasted corn slathered with coconut milk and chillis).

Pasar Makanan (Jl Sultan Iskandar Muda) Lots of regional Palembang specialities, which Jambi also claims as its own, get top billing at this busy market.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The Sultan Thaka Airport is 4km east of the centre. Adam Air, Batavia Air and Mandala fly to Jakarta daily. Merpati flies to Batam. Most tickets are available through travel agents, but **Mandala** (☎ 24341; Jl Gatot Subroto 42) also has an office.

BOAT

Ratu Intan Permata (☎ 60234; Simpang Kawat, Jl M Yamin) operates connecting services from Jambi to the coastal town of Kuala Tungkal (35,000Rp, two hours), from where there are speedboats to Batam (200,000Rp, five hours).

BUS

The highways to the south and north are in poor condition, making bus travel an arduous task. Bus ticketing offices occupy two areas of town: **Simpang Rimbo**, 8km west of town, and **Simpang Kawat**, 3.5km southwest of town on Jl M Yamin.

There are frequent economy buses to Palembang (40,000Rp, seven hours).

Ratu Intan Permata (☎ 60234; Simpang Kawat, Jl M Yamin) has comfortable door-to-door minibus services to Pekanbaru (150,000Rp, eight hours), Bengkulu (175,000Rp, 10 hours), Palembang (120,000Rp, six hours) and Padang (200,000Rp, 13 hours).

Safa Marwa (☎ 65756; Jl Pattimura 77) runs a similar service to Kerinci-Sungaipenuh (90,000Rp, 10 hours).

Buses from Jambi depart from the companies' offices.

Getting Around

Airport taxis charge a standard 60,000Rp for the 8km run into town. Local transport comprises the usual assortment of *ojek* and *opelet*. Rawasari *opelet* terminal, off Jl Raden Mattaher in the centre of town, is where all *opelet* start and finish their journeys. The standard fare is 2000Rp.

MUARA JAMBI

The large temple complex at Muara Jambi, 26km downstream from Jambi, is the most important Hindu-Buddhist site in Sumatra. It is assumed that the temples mark the location of the ancient city of Jambi, capital of the kingdom of Malayu 1000 years ago. Most of the temples, known as *candi*, date

from the 9th to the 13th centuries, when Jambi's power was at its peak. However, the best of the artefacts have been taken to Jakarta.

For centuries the site lay abandoned and overgrown in the jungle on the banks of the Batang Hari. It was 'rediscovered' in 1920 by a British army expedition sent to explore the region.

Sights

It's easy to spend all day at **Muara Jambi** (admission by donation; 11 8am-4pm). The forested site covers 12 sq km along the north bank of the Batang Hari. The entrance is through an ornate archway in the village of Muara Jambi and most places of interest are within a few minutes' walk of here.

Eight temples have been identified so far, each at the centre of its own low-walled compound. Some are accompanied by *perwara candi* (smaller side temples) and three have been restored to something close to their original form. The site is dotted with numerous *menapo* (smaller brick mounds), thought to be the ruins of other buildings – possibly dwellings for priests and other high officials.

The restored temple **Candi Gumpung**, straight ahead of the donation office, has a fiendish *makara* (demon head) guarding its steps. Excavation work here yielded some important finds, including a *peripih* (stone box) containing sheets of gold inscribed with old Javanese characters dating the temple back to the 9th century. A statue of Prajnyaparamita found here is now the star attraction at the small site museum nearby.

Candi Tinggi, 200m southeast of Candi Gumpung, is the finest of the temples uncovered so far. It dates from the 9th century but is built around another, older temple. A path leads east from Candi Tinggi to **Candi Astano**, 1.5km away, passing **Candi Kembar Batu** and lots of *menapo* along the way.

The temples on the western side of the site are yet to be restored. They remain pretty much as they were found – minus the jungle, which was cleared in the 1980s. The western sites are signposted from Candi Gumpung. First stop, after 900m, is **Candi Gedong Satu**, followed 150m further on by **Candi Gedong Dua**. They are independent temples despite what their names may suggest. The path continues west for another

1.5km to **Candi Kedaton**, the largest of the temples, then a further 900m northwest to **Candi Koto Mahligai**.

The dwellings of the ordinary Malayu people have long since disappeared. According to Chinese records, they lived along the river in stilted houses or in raft huts moored to the bank.

Getting There & Away

There is no public transport to the park. You can charter a speedboat (300,000Rp) from Jambi's river pier to the site. You can also hire an *ojek* (35,000Rp).

SOUTH SUMATRA

Like Riau and Jambi provinces, the eastern portion of South Sumatra shares a common Malay ancestry and influence from its proximity to the shipping lane of the Strait of Melaka. Rivers define the character of the eastern lowlands, while the western high peaks of the Bukit Barisan form the province's rugged underbelly. The provincial capital of Palembang was once the central seat of the Buddhist Sriwijaya empire, whose control once reached all the way up the Malay Peninsula.

Despite the province's illustrious past, there aren't very many surviving attractions except for the hospitality that occurs in places where bilingual Indonesians don't get a lot of opportunity to practise their English.

PALEMBANG

☎ 0711 / pop 1.67 million

Sumatra's second-largest city, Palembang is reminiscent of Bangkok 30 years ago. This is a riverine culture that crawled to land to establish an equally free-flowing metropolis. It is chaotic and sprawling but still reverential of the central Sungai Musi.

The core industries of oil refining, fertiliser production and cement manufacturing scent the air with a distinctive odour you might first mistake as your own funk.

The town is also a major port, being only 80km from the mouth of Sungai Musi. When Sumatra's oil fields were discovered and opened in the early 1900s, Palembang quickly became South Sumatra's main export hub. As well as oil, the port handles

exports from the province's seemingly endless rubber, coffee, pepper and pineapple plantations.

History

A thousand years ago Palembang was the centre of the highly developed Sriwijaya civilisation. The Chinese scholar I Tsing

spent six months in Palembang in 672 and reported that 1000 monks, scholars and pilgrims were studying and translating Sanskrit there. At its peak in the 11th century, Sriwijaya ruled a huge slab of Southeast Asia, covering most of Sumatra, the Malay Peninsula, southern Thailand and Cambodia. Sriwijayan influence col-

lapsed after the kingdom was conquered by the south Indian king Ravendra Cholahadewa in 1025. For the next 200 years, the void was partly filled by Sriwijaya's main regional rival, the Jambi-based kingdom of Malayu.

Few relics from this period remain – no sculpture, monuments or architecture of note – nor is there much of interest from the early 18th century, when Palembang was an Islamic kingdom. Most of the buildings of the latter era were destroyed in battles with the Dutch.

The city's name comes from two words: *pa* (place) and *limbang* (to pan for gold). The prosperity of the Sriwijayan city is said to have been based on gold found in local rivers.

Orientation

Palembang sits astride Sungai Musi, the two halves of the city linked by the giant Jembatan Ampera (Ampera Bridge). The river is flanked by a hodgepodge of wooden houses on stilts. The southern side, Seberang Ulu, is where the majority of people live. Seberang Ilir, on the north bank, is the city's better half, where you'll find most of the government offices, shops, hotels and the wealthy residential districts. The main street, Jl Sudirman, runs north-south to the bridge. The bus terminal and train station are both on the southern side.

Information

Palembang has branches of all the major banks and there are ATMs all over the city. Outside banking hours, the bigger hotels are a better bet than moneychangers.

BCA bank (Bank Central Asia; Jl Kapitan Rivai)
BII bank (Bank Internasional Indonesia; Jl Kapitan Rivai)
BRI bank (Bank Rakyat Indonesia; Jl Kapitan Rivai)
Moneychanger (Jl Kol Atmo)

Palembang city tourist office (☎ 358450; Museum Sultan Machmud Badaruddin II, Jl Pasar Hilir 3) A useful office at the Museum Sultan Machmud Badaruddin II, off Jl Sudirman; the staff can arrange trips down the Sungai Musi and handicraft tours.

Post office (Jl Merdeka) Close to the river, next to the Garuda monument. Internet facilities available.

Provincial tourist office (☎ 357348; Jl Demang Lebar Daun) Outside of the centre of town; a useful office.

Telkom wartel (Jl Merdeka; ☎ 8am-9pm) Next to the post office; international phone calls can be made here.

Wartel (Jl Kapitan Rivai)

Sights

Museum Sumatera Selatan (☎ 422382; Jl Sriwijaya 1, Km 5.5; admission 1000Rp; ☎ 8am-4pm Sun-Thu, 8-11am Fri) is well worth a visit. It houses finds from Sriwijayan times, as well as megalithic carvings from the Pasemah Highlands, including the famous *batu gajah* (elephant stone). There is a magnificent *rumah limas* (traditional house) behind the museum. The museum is about 5km from the town centre off the road to the airport.

Museum Sultan Machmud Badaruddin II (Jl Pasar Hilir 3; admission 1000Rp; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 8-11am & 1.30-4pm Fri) has a few dust-covered exhibits.

Other Palembang attractions include the imposing **Mesjid Agung** (Jl Sudirman), built by Sultan Machmud Badaruddin at the beginning of the 19th century.

The remains of a late-18th-century Dutch fort, occupied today by the Indonesian army, can be seen to the north of Jl Merdeka. Only sections of the fort's outside walls still stand.

Tours

Carmeta Travel (☎ 356653; Jl Dempo Luar 29/30) Agents can book city and river tours and trips to Bangka and Danau Ranau.

Festivals & Events

Palembang's annual tourist event is the *bidar* race held on Sungai Musi in the middle of town every 17 August (Independence Day) and on 16 June (the city's birthday). A *bidar* (canoe) is about 25m long, 1m wide and is powered by up to 60 rowers.

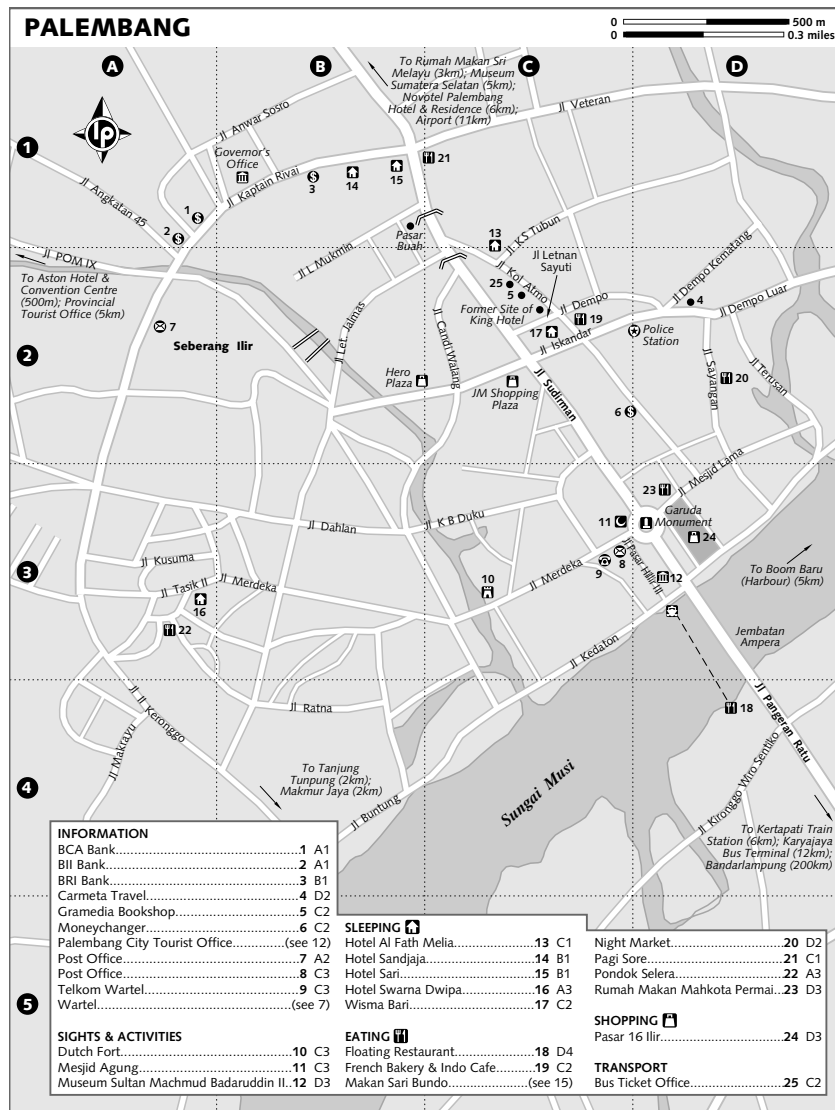
Sleeping

The midrange hotels in Palembang are typical Indonesian breeds: personality-less multistorey boxes with prices that make a backpacker wince. The upmarket business options are slowly but surely maturing to match international standards.

Hotel Al Fath Melia (☎ 370488; Jl KS Tuban 19; d from 100,000Rp; a) Set on a quiet street, this is a decent choice with fairly basic rooms.

Hotel Sari (☎ 313320; Jl Sudirman 1301; d 120,000-140,000Rp; a) On a noisy junction, this hotel has the best 'deluxe' you'll find for the money.

Wisma Bari (☎ 315666; Jl Letnan Sayuti 55; d from 150,000Rp; a) Well positioned in a quiet lane, the postmodern rooms are modest but tolerable.



Hotel Swarna Dwipa (☎ 313322; Jl Tasik II; s/d from 270,000/300,000Rp; a s) In a leafy area, this mini resort is filled with Indonesian big-wigs, but the rooms don't quite deliver.

Aston Hotel & Convention Centre (☎ 383838; Jl POM IX; d with breakfast from 400,000Rp; a i s) The very modern Aston is decorated in the reigning trend of global minimalist. The business travellers stay self-contained here for conferences.

Hotel Sandjaja (☎ 362222; Jl Kaptain Rivai 6193; d from 450,000Rp; a s) This smart, upmarket hotel has rooms that match what you would get back home for the same price, plus a few more fingerprints. But when measured on the Sumatran scale, this is top-grade.

Novotel Palembang Hotel & Residence (☎ 369777; Jl R Sukanto 8A; d with breakfast from 800,000Rp; a i s) Outside of the town centre, the Novotel is a stone fortress resort with chic rooms oriented around a central pool.

Eating

Palembang lends its name to the distinctive cuisine of southern Sumatra (including Lampung and Bengkulu) in the same way Padang lends its name to West Sumatran fare.

The best-known dishes are *ikan brengkes* (fish served with a spicy durian-based sauce) and *pinang*, a spicy, clear fish soup. Another Palembang speciality is *pempek*, also known as *empek-empek*, a mixture of sago, fish and seasonings that is formed into balls and deep fried or grilled. Served with a spicy sauce, *pempek* is widely available from street stalls and warung; you typically pay for what you eat.

Palembang food is normally served with a range of accompaniments. The main one is *tempoyak*, a combination of fermented durian, *terasi* (shrimp paste), lime juice and chilli that is mixed up with the fingers and added to the rice. *Sambal buah* (fruit sambals), made with pineapple or sliced green mangoes, are also popular.

Rumah Makan Mahkota Permai (Jl Mesjid Lama 33; dishes from 6000Rp) Near the junction with Jl Sudirman, this is a good place to try Palembang food.

Rumah Makan Sri Melayu (☎ 420468; Jl Demang Lebar Daun; mains 25,000-35,000Rp) For the full immersion of Palembang food and culture, visit this showpiece restaurant with

polished wooden seating around a stylish coo pond.

Floating Restaurant (Seberang Ulu; mains 5000-20,000Rp; 11 noon-10pm) Directly across the Sungai Musi from the museum are Palembang's favourite date restaurants, serving local specialities.

Pondok Selera (Jl Rambutan; mains from 5000Rp) Near the Songket Village, this open-air lunch spot pulls in the government workers for Palembang style *ayam baker* served with fresh vegetables and sambal.

French Bakery and Indo Cafe (Jl Kol Atmo; dishes 8000Rp) Near the bus ticket agents, this bakery and café offers all sorts of carb-loaded dishes and fancy coffee drinks.

The main night market (Jl Sayangan), to the east of Jl Sudirman, has dozens of noodle and sate stalls. Missing Padang food already? Load up at our old pals **Pagi Sore** (Jl Sudirman) and **Makan Sari Bundo** (Jl Kaptain Rivai).

Shopping

Tanjung Tunjung, 2km from the town centre, is the handicraft village where Palembang's local *songket* industry is based. Ground-floor showrooms display sarongs used in marriage ceremonies and traditional costumes, as well as more functional scarves and textiles. Above the storefront are the workshops where it takes the young weavers a month to weave one sarong and chest wrap as well as keep up with the daily soap operas.

Makmur Jaya (☎ 3553720; Jl Ki Gede Ing Suro 12) Beyond tourist-market selections of fine silk and batiks.

Pasar 16 Ilir (Jl Mesjid Lama; 11 6am-6pm) Near the river, just off Jl Pangeran Ratu, this market sells batik and other textiles from Sumatra and Java, as well as house wares.

Getting There & Away

AIR
Sultan Badaruddin II airport is 12km north of town. There are flights by Silk Air to Singapore three times a week (US\$90-110). Garuda flies daily from Palembang to Yogyakarta (800,000Rp) and Surabaya (655,000Rp).

Garuda, Adam Air, Wings Air, Lion Air, Batavia Air and Sriwijaya all fly to Jakarta.

Merpati flies to Batam daily and Medan four times a week. Garuda, Wings, Lion, Merpati, Jatayu and Batavia also have flights to Medan. Batavia Air serves Jambi daily.

Carmeta Travel (☎ 356653; Jl Dempo Luar 29/30) can handle all of these ticketing arrangements.

BOAT

There are several services each day from Palembang's Boom Baru harbour to Mentok on Bangka (100,000Rp to 200,000Rp depending on class, four hours).

There are direct ferry services to Batam (VIP/business 305,000/255,000Rp, 10 hours). Boats depart from Boom Baru on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at 7.30am.

BUS

The **Karyajaya Bus Terminal** (cnr Jl Sriwijaya Raya) is 12km from the town centre.

Most of the bigger companies have ticket offices on Jl Kol Atmo, just near the former Hotel King. These agents are convenient for buying advance tickets and checking departure times, but it is recommended to catch the bus at the terminal instead of dealing with the extra transfer fee and extra wait time from the agents' offices.

Sample destinations and fares include Bukittinggi (air-con 165,000Rp, 18 hours), Medan (220,000Rp, 36 hours) and Jakarta (air-con 150,000Rp, 20 hours).

There are several companies on Jl Veteran offering door-to-door minibus services to Jambi (120,000Rp, six hours) and Bengkulu (150,000Rp, 15 hours).

TRAIN

On the south side of the river, Kertapati train station is 8km from the city centre. There are two daily train departures to Bandarlampung. The morning train has economy class only (28,000Rp); the evening train has executive (85,000Rp) and business (50,000Rp) class. The trip takes nine to 10 hours.

There are also two trains that go north-west to Lubuklinggau (economy/business 28,000/60,000Rp) with a stop at Lahat (for the Pasemah Highlands). It's four hours to Lahat and seven to Lubuklinggau, but the fares are the same.

Getting Around

Opelet around town cost a standard 2000Rp. They leave from around the huge roundabout at the junction of Jl Sudirman and Jl Merdeka.

Any *opelet* marked 'Karyajaya' (4000Rp) will get you to the bus terminal. Any *opelet* marked 'Kertapati' (4000Rp) will get you to the train station.

Taxis to the airport cost 50,000Rp to 70,000Rp. A taxi from the station to the town centre should cost around 30,000Rp.

DANAU RANAU

Remote Danau Ranau, nestled in the middle of the southwestern Bukit Barisan range, is one of the least accessible and least developed of Sumatra's mountain lakes. It's an extremely peaceful spot and an excellent place to just relax or, if you're feeling energetic, go hiking in the surrounding mountains. It's possible to climb Gunung Seminung (1881m), the extinct volcano that dominates the region. Temperatures at Ranau seldom rise above a comfortable 25°C.

The main transport hub of the area is Simpang Sender, about 10km northwest of the lake. At the northern tip is Banding Agung, the main settlement. There is no bank, so change money before you get there.

There are several small hotels in Banding Agung, including **Losmen Batu Mega** (Jl Sugilaras 269; d 50,000Rp) and **Hotel Seminung Permai** (Jl Akmal 89; d 80,000Rp). Jl Akmal is the main street leading down to the lake.

The village of Pusri also has accommodation, including **Danau Ranau Cottages** and **Wisma Pusri** (d 60,000-100,000Rp).

South of Simpang Sender on the western shore is **Wisma Danau Ranau** (d 150,000-200,000Rp), an upmarket place popular with tour groups.

Padang food is about all you'll find in the restaurants.

Getting There & Away

Most routes to Danau Ranau go through the Trans-Sumatran Hwy town of Baturaja. There are two buses a day to Baturaja from the main bus terminal in Palembang (20,000Rp, four hours). The Palembang-Bandarlampung train line stops at Baturaja, which is about 3½ hours south of Palembang.

There are regular buses for the remaining 120km from Baturaja to Simpang Sender (10,000Rp, three hours), where you can pick up an *opelet* for the final 18km

to Banding Agung (4000Rp). It's a good idea to arrive in Baturaja as early as possible to give yourself plenty of time to get a bus out again. If you do get stuck, there are dozens of uninspiring budget losmen to choose from.

KRUI

The quiet coastal village of Krui is an ideal base to explore the unspoiled western coastline. Well off the beaten track, it receives few visitors and there's little to do except enjoy small-town life and the magnificent scenery. Long, white-sand beaches with turquoise waters stretch north and south from Krui and can be explored by taking local *opelet* up and down the coast.

You can stay at **DWI Hotel** (☎ 51069; Jl Merdeka 172; d 1200,000Rp) in the town centre. **Hotel Mutiara Alam** (☎ 51000; 3km south of Krui; d 50,000Rp) is an out-of-town possibility right on the beach.

Backpackers might not pay much attention to Krui but surfers come for the unhindered swells that roar in off the ocean. Right in front of the scenic **Karang Nyimbor Beach Hotel** (☎ 086 812122115; www.sumatrasurfcamps.com; 10km north of Krui; surf packages per day from US\$100) surf camp is a long reef break surfable during all tides. The proprietors also have accommodation near other breaks that line the southwestern coast.

There are daily buses to Krui from Bandar Lampung (50,000Rp, six hours) and Bengkulu (80,000Rp, eight hours). *Opelet* depart regularly for Liwa (6000Rp, one hour) and from there to Simpang Sender (for Danau Ranau).

PASEMAH HIGHLANDS

The highlands, tucked away in the Bukit Barisan west of Lahat, are famous for the mysterious megalithic monuments that dot the landscape. The stones have been dated back about 3000 years, but little else is known about them or the civilisation that carved them. While the museums of Palembang and Jakarta now house the pick of the stones, there are still plenty left *in situ*.

The main town of the highlands is Pagaram, 68km (two hours by bus) southwest of the Trans-Sumatran Hwy town of Lahat.

The best source of information about the highlands is the Hotel Mirasa in Pagaram.

There's nowhere to change money, so bring enough rupiah to see you through.

Sights & Activities

MEGALITHIC SITES

The Pasemah carvings are considered to be the best examples of prehistoric stone sculpture in Indonesia and fall into two distinct styles. The early style dates from almost 3000 years ago and features fairly crude figures squatting with hands on knees or arms folded over chests. The best examples of this type are at a site called **Tinggi Hari**, 20km from Lahat, west of the small river town of Pulau Pinang.

The later style, incorporating expressive facial features, dates from about 2000 years ago and is far more elaborate. Examples include carvings of men riding, battling with snakes and struggling with elephants. There are also a couple of tigers – one guarding a representation of a human head between its paws. The natural curve of the rocks was used to create a three-dimensional effect, though all the sculptures are in bas-relief.

Sculptures of this style are found throughout the villages around Pagaram, although some take a bit of seeking out. **Tegurwangi**, about 8km from Pagaram on the road to Tanjung Sakti, is the home of the famous **Batu Beribu**, a cluster of four squat statues that sit under a small shelter by a stream. The site guardian will wander over and lead you to some nearby dolmen-style stone tombs. You can still make out a painting of three women and a dragon in one of them.

The village of **Berlubai**, 3km from Pagaram, has its own **Batu Gajah** (Elephant Stone) sitting out among the rice paddies, as well as tombs and statues. There is a remarkable collection of stone carvings among the paddies near **Tanjung Aru**. Look out for the one of a man fighting a giant serpent.

GUNUNG DEMPO

This dormant volcano is the highest (3159m) of the peaks surrounding the Pasemah Highlands and dominates the town of Pagaram. Allow two full days to complete the climb. A guide is strongly recommended as trails can be difficult to find. The lower slopes are used as a tea-growing area, and there are *opelet* from Pagaram to the tea factory.

Sleeping

The best place to stay in the highlands is Pagaram.

Hotel Mirasa (☎ 21484; Jl Mayor Ruslan; d from 60,000-80,000Rp) There is a range of rooms to choose from and the owner can organise transport to the sites or guides to climb Gunung Dempo. The hotel is on the edge of town, about 2km from the bus terminal.

Hotel Telaga (☎ 21236; Jl Serma Wanar; d from 60,000Rp) A basic place with simple but clean rooms and very little else.

If you get stuck in Lahat, there is **Hotel Permata** (☎ 21642; Jl Mayor Ruslan III 31; s/d 60,000/80,000Rp; a), conveniently close to both the bus terminal and the train station.

Getting There & Around

Every bus travelling along the Trans-Sumatran Hwy calls in at Lahat, nine hours northwest of Bandar Lampung and 12 hours southeast of Padang. There are regular buses to Lahat from Palembang (35,000Rp, five hours), and the town is a stop on the train line from Palembang to Lubuklinggau. There are frequent small buses between Lahat and Pagaram (10,000Rp, two hours).

There are *opelet* to the villages near Pagaram from the town centre's *stasiun taksi* (taxi station). All local services cost 1500Rp.

PULAU BANGKA

☎ 0717 / pop 790,000

Bangka is a large, sparsely populated island 25km off Sumatra's east coast. Bangka has several white-sand beaches and a peaceful way of life but little in the way of alluring accommodation. Resort hotels were originally designed for wealthy visitors from Singapore and Malaysia, but they, like everyone else, have been spooked by security in Indonesia.

The island's name is derived from the word *wangka* (tin), which was discovered near Mentok in 1710. Tin is still mined on the island, although operations have been greatly scaled down in recent years.

There are only small pockets of natural forest left on Bangka with a large part of the land cleared for rubber, palm oil and pepper plantations.

Pangkal Pinang

Bangka's main town is Pangkal Pinang, a bustling business and transport centre with a population of about 140,000 people.

Most places of importance to travellers are close to the intersection of the main streets, Jl Sudirman and Jl Mesjid Jamik. The bus terminal and markets are nearby on Jl N Pegadaian.

SLEEPING

There are quite a few cheap losmen around the centre of town.

Penginapan Srikandi (☎ 21884; Jl Mesjid Jamik 42; d 35,000Rp) Simple and clean, and, best of all, cheap.

Bukit Shofa Hotel (☎ 21062; Jl Mesjid Jamik 43; d 70,000-90,000Rp; a) A large, modern place with a choice of decent rooms.

Sabrina Hotel (☎ 22424; Jl Diponegoro 73; d 100,000Rp; a) A midrange place with comfortable rooms on a quiet side street off Jl Sudirman.

EATING

There are lots of small restaurants in Pangkal Pinang, including plenty of places along Jl Sudirman and in the markets near the main junction.

Restaurant Asui Seafood (Jl Kampung Bintang; seafood from 20,000Rp) Behind the BCA bank, this is the place to go for seafood. *Gebung*, known locally as 'chicken fish' because of the firmness of its flesh, is worth trying.

Mentok

Mentok, on the northwestern tip of the island, is the port for boats to/from Palembang. Most people hop on a bus directly from the port to Pangkal Pinang.

In Mentok, there is little of interest other than a memorial to 22 Australian nurses shot dead by the Japanese during WWII.

If you get stuck, try **Tin Palace Hotel** (Jl Major Syafrie Rahman 1; s/d 50,000/70,000Rp; a).

Beaches

The best beaches are on the northeastern coast around the town of Sungailiat, the island's administrative centre.

Pantai Parai Tenggara is one of the most popular and is monopolised by the **Parai Beach Hotel** (☎ 92335; Jl Pantai Matras; d from 400,000Rp; a). The deserted **Pantai Matras**, 5km further on, is even better.

Getting There & Away

Merpati flies three times a week to Jakarta (350,000Rp).

There are several services each day from Palembang's Boom Baru jetty to Mentok on Bangka (100,000Rp to 200,000Rp depending on class, four hours).

Pelni ships stop in at Mentok travelling to Bintan. The Pelni office (☎ 22743) is outside the port gates in Mentok.

Getting Around

There is regular public transport between Bangka's main towns, but most *opelet* stop running in the mid-afternoon. After that taxis are the only option.

Airport taxis charge 50,000Rp for the 7km run into Pangkal Pinang.

There are public buses from Mentok to Pangkal Pinang (15,000Rp, three hours) and Sungailiat (20,000Rp, 3½ hours).

LAMPUNG

At the very tip of this bow-shaped land-mass is Sumatra's southernmost province, which was not given provincial status by Jakarta until 1964. Although the Lampungese have had a long history as a distinct culture, the most recent tug of Jakarta's gravitational force is altering Lampung's independence streak. Big-city TV news and fashions have crept across the Sunda Strait, as did Javanese settlers under the *transmigrasi* policies, designed to off-load excess population and turn a profit in the wilds of Sumatra.

Outside the provincial capital of Bandarlampung, the province's robust coffee plantations dominate the economy and the unclaimed forests, closely followed by timber and pepper. There are also large areas of rubber and palm oil plantation.

Today many Jakarta weekenders hop over to tour the Krakatau volcano or visit the elephants of Way Kambas National Park. The rugged western seaboard is ostensibly protected as the Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park.

History

Long before Jakarta became the helm of this island chain, there's evidence that Lampung was part of the Palembang-based Sriwijayan empire until the 11th century, when the Jambi-based Malayu kingdom became the dominant regional power.

Megalithic remains at Pugungraharjo, on the plains to the east of Bandarlampung, are thought to date back more than 1000 years and point to a combination of Hindu and Buddhist influences. The site is believed to have been occupied until the 16th century.

Lampung has long been famous for its prized pepper crop, attracting the West Javanese sultanate of Banten to the area at the beginning of the 16th century and the Dutch East India Company in the late 17th century.

The Dutch finally took control of Lampung in 1856 and launched the first of the transmigration schemes that sought to ease the chronic overcrowding in Java and Bali. Most migrants came to farm the fertile plains of eastern Lampung and today the area is something of a cultural melting pot.

BANDARLAMPUNG

☎ 0721 / pop 850,000

Perched on the hills overlooking Teluk Lampung, Bandarlampung is the region's largest city and its administrative capital. The fourth-largest city in Sumatra, it is the product of an amalgamation of the old towns of Telukbetung (coastal) and Tanjungkarang (inland).

Bandarlampung is the transport hub for stepping into Sumatra from Java and used to see a lot of coming-and-going foreigners. But plane travel now whisks backpackers away from more-northern latitudes. Today visitors come on package tours to Way Kambas or Krakatau arranged in Jakarta.

Orientation

Bandarlampung is something of an administrative creation and the now massive, sprawling city has no real heart. Most places of relevance to travellers are in Tanjungkarang, including the train station and the bulk of the hotels. The Rajabasa bus terminal is 10km north of the town centre; the airport is 24km away.

Information

All the major banks have branches in Bandarlampung, and there are ATMs all over town.

Arie Tour & Travel (☎ 474675; Jl Monginsidi 143) A helpful travel agent located outside the city centre.

BCA bank (Bank Central Asia) Jl Raden Intan 98 (Jl Raden Intan 98); Jl Kartini (Jl Kartini) Offers the best exchange rates.

BCA bank (Bank Central Asia; Jl Kartini) Offers the best exchange rates.

BII bank (Bank Internasional Indonesia; Jl Kartini)

BNI bank (Bank Negara Indonesia; Jl Kartini)

FajaNet (Jl Raden Intan 61; per hr 5000Rp; ☎ 10am-10pm) Internet access.

Lippo bank (Jl Kartini)

Post office Main office (Jl KH Dahlan); central branch (Jl Kotaraja)

Provincial tourist office (☎ 266184; Jl Sudirman 29) A helpful centre centrally located.

Rumah Sakit Bumi Waras (Jl W Monginsidi)

Squid Net (Jl Raden Intan 88a; per hr 5000Rp; ☎ 10am-8pm) Internet access.

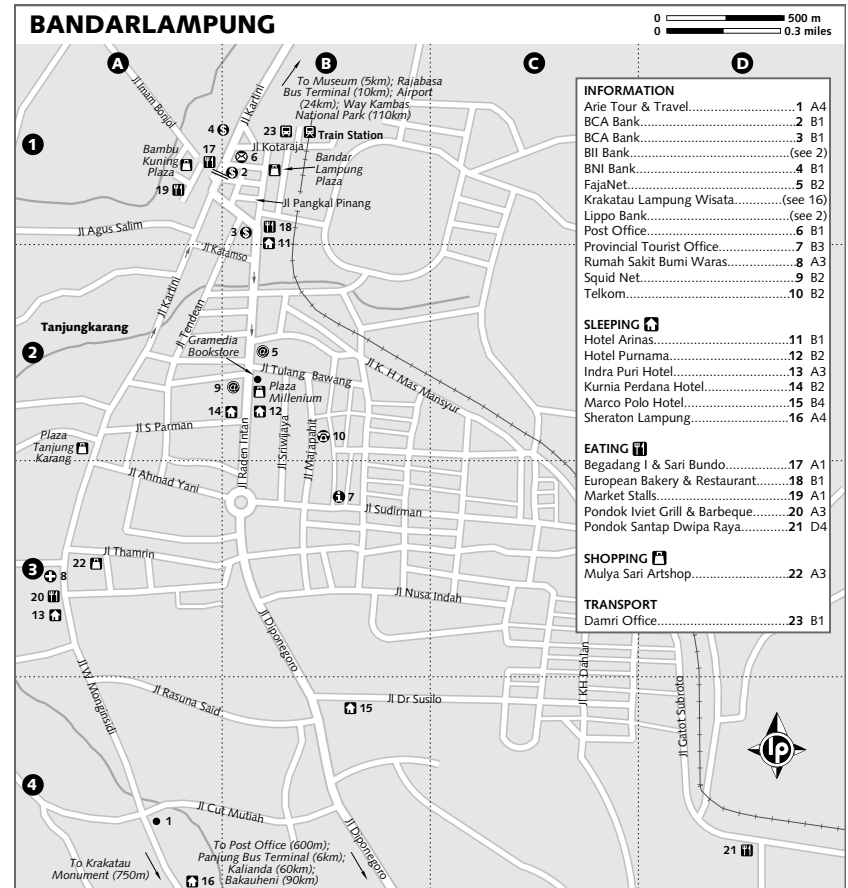
Telkom wartel (Jl Majapahit; ☎ 24hr)

International and Home Country Direct calls can be made here.

Sights

The **Krakatau monument** (Jl Veteran, Telukbetung) is a lasting memorial to the force of the 1883 eruption and resulting tidal wave. Almost half of the 36,000 victims died in the 40m-high tidal wave that funnelled up Teluk Lampung and devastated Telukbetung. The huge steel maritime buoy that comprises the monument was washed out of Teluk Lampung and deposited on this hillside.

Lampung Provincial Museum (Jl Teuku Umar; ☎ 9am-4.30pm, closed Mon), 5km north of central Tanjungkarang, houses a dusty collection of bits and pieces – everything from Neolithic relics to stuffed animals. To reach the museum, catch a grey *opelet* (2500Rp).



Sleeping

Bandarlampung has a nice selection of mid-range hotels that line Jl Raden Intan, within walking distance or a short *ojek* ride from the train station.

Hotel Purnama (% 261448; Jl Raden Intan 77; d 90,000-150,000Rp; a) The best option in this price range. It is well managed and maintained, with big comfortable rooms.

Kurnia Perdana Hotel (% 262030; Jl Raden Intan 114; d 95,000-125,000Rp; a) Clean, comfortable rooms with TV, but no charm.

Hotel Arinas (% 266778; Jl Raden Intan 35; d from 200,000Rp; a) Central with clean, comfortable, modern rooms, all with TV and hot water.

Marco Polo Hotel (% 262511; Jl Dr Susilo 4; d from 250,000Rp; a s) Loads of character are permanent guests at this atmospheric old gent. Rooms are spacious and many have views of Teluk Lampung.

Sheraton Lampung (% 486666; Jl W Monginsidi 175; d from 575,000Rp; a s) An impressive place, the Sheraton is the most stylish hotel in town and offers a range of sporting activities onsite.

Indra Puri Hotel (% 258258; Jl W Monginsidi 70; s/d from 625,500/687,500Rp) Perched high on a hill, the Indra Puri has beautiful rooms with excellent views of the bay.

Eating

The market stalls around the Bambu Kuning Plaza offer a wide range of snacks.

Pondok Santap Dwipa Raya (Jl Gatot Subroto; dishes from 15,000Rp) An upmarket Palembang-style place. It serves a delicious *sayur asam* (sour vegetable soup).

Pondok Iviet Grill and Barbeque (Jl W Monginsidi 64; steaks from 15,000Rp) A meat lover's paradise, with lots of steaks and grills to choose from.

European Bakery & Restaurant (Jl Raden Intan 35; pastries 2500Rp) For those in need of a sugar fix.

Begadang I (one of four in town) and **Sari Bundo** (dishes 6000Rp) are a couple of popular Padang restaurants near the markets on Jl Imam Bonjol.

Shopping

Lampung produces weavings known as *ship cloths* (most feature ships), which use rich reds and blues to create primitive-looking geometric designs. Another type is *kain tapis*, a ceremonial cloth elaborately embroidered with gold thread.

Mulya Sari Artshop (Jl Thamrin 85) A good collection of both ship cloths and *kain tapis* can be found here.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The airport is 24km north of the city. There are flights every day to Jakarta through Merpati, Sriwijaya, Adam Air and Riau Air. Riau also flies to Palembang twice a week. Do note that Merpati flies to Halim Perdanakusuma Airport not Soekarno-Hatta airport. Arie Tour & Travel (p478) is a helpful travel agent.

BUS

There are two bus terminals in Bandar Lampung. The city's sprawling Rajabasa bus terminal is 10km north of town and serves long-distance destinations. Panjang bus terminal is 6km southeast of town along the Lampung Bay road and serves local and provincial destinations.

From Rajabasa, buses run to Palembang (80,000Rp, 10 hours) and Bengkulu (100,000Rp, 16 hours), but most people heading north go to Bukittinggi (regular/air-con 160,000/300,000Rp, 22 hours).

You've got several bus options for getting to the Bakauheni pier, where boats go to Java. If travelling from central Bandar Lampung, the most convenient option is the Damri bus-boat combination ticket (business/executive 90,000/105,000Rp, eight to 10 hours). Damri buses leave from Bandar Lampung's train station at 9am and 9pm, shuttling passengers to the Bakauheni pier, and then picking them up at Java's Merak pier for the final transfer to Jakarta's train station. Damri's office is in front of Bandar Lampung's train station.

For other options, see the Bakauheni section (p483).

TRAIN

The train station is in the town centre at the northern mouth of Jl Raden Intan. Sumatra's only convenient rail service connects Bandar Lampung with Palembang (economy/business 28,000/85,000, 10 hours) and then beyond to Lubuklinggau (economy/business 28,000/60,000Rp, 14 hours).

Getting Around

For the airport, taxis charge 80,000Rp to 90,000Rp for the ride to/from town.

All *opelet* pass through the basement of the Bandar Lampung Plaza on Jl Raden Intan and the standard fare around town is 2000Rp.

To reach the Rajabasa bus terminal, take a green *opelet* (2000Rp). To reach the Panjang bus terminal, take a green *opelet* to Sukaraja and then transfer to a red *opelet* (2000Rp).

WAY KAMBAS NATIONAL PARK

This national park is one of the oldest reserves in Indonesia. It occupies 1300 sq km of coastal lowland forest around Sungai Way Kambas on the east coast of Lampung. What little remains of the heavily logged forests is home to endangered species of elephants, rhinos and tigers.

It is believed that close to 200 wild Sumatran elephants (*Elephas maximus sumatrensis*) live in the park, but reliable estimates are uncertain and poaching and development pressures are constant. The Sumatran elephant is a subspecies of the Asian elephant and is found only in Sumatra and Kalimantan. Another rare but endemic creature in Way Kambas is the Sumatran rhino, the only two-horned rhino of the Asian species. Its hide is red in colour with a hairy coat.

The area around Way Kanan, a subdistrict of the park, is frequently visited by bird-watchers. Of the most remarkable species, white-winged duck and Storm's stork get the binoculars fogged up.

For some time an elephant training centre operated in the park and served as a major tourism draw. The centre was created to rehabilitate wild elephants that were threatening farmer's crops. It was hoped that training the elephants for jobs in the logging or tourism industry would resolve the conflicts created by diminishing wild lands. But the elephants, like many of the island's human population, had a hard time finding work and caring for a large population of animals proved too costly after the monetary crisis. As a result many of the elephants have been moved elsewhere and the ones who remain are used to carry tourists on jungle treks.

Also operating in the park is the Sumatra Rhino Sanctuary, where four rhinos formerly held in captivity are introduced to more wild surroundings in the hopes of

successful breeding. The Sumatran rhino is a solitary animal and its habitat in the wild is so fractured that conservationists fear the species will die out without intervention. Breeding centres for rhinos are a controversial component of species-protection campaigns as they are expensive to maintain and have reported few successful births. For more information, visit the website of the International Rhino Foundation (www.rhinofoundation.org), one of the lead organisations involved with the centre and anti-poaching patrols in the park.

Visiting the Park

For the average visitor not engaged in wildlife conservation, a visit to the park is a nice break from the concrete confines of Jakarta, but it's not a true wild safari. Most visitors are led through the forest on elephants or by canoes on the Sungai Way Kanan and surrounding waterways. The most commonly spotted animals on the tour include primates and birds. Herds of elephants are seen here from time to time but sightings of the Sumatran tiger are extremely rare.

A day trip to Way Kambas costs around US\$50 per person for a minimum of two people and can be arranged through tour operators in Jakarta. Bandar Lampung-based tour agents include Arie Tour & Travel (% 474675; Jl W Monginsidi 143) and Krakatau Lampung Wisata (% 263625, 486666; Sheraton Lampung).

You could visit the park independently, but transport is limited and expensive. To strike out on your own, hire an *ojek* from Rajabasalama to Way Kanan, where you can hire a guide (50,000Rp to 100,000Rp) and arrange transport.

Sleeping & Eating

Tourist facilities within the park are limited. About 13km from the entrance to the park is Way Kanan, where there are a collection of simple guesthouses (75,000Rp) on the banks of Sungai Way Kanan. Food stalls nearby cater for day-trippers and close after dark, so you'll need to bring food if you're staying the night.

Getting There & Away

The entrance to Way Kambas is 110km from Bandar Lampung.

There are buses from Bandar Lampung's Rajabasa bus terminal to Jepara (15,000Rp,

2½ hours). They pass the entrance to Way Kambas, an arched gateway guarded by a stone elephant, in the village of Rajabasalama, 10km north of Jepara. Alternatively, you can catch a bus to Metro (8000Rp, one hour) and then another to Rajabasalama (10,000Rp, 1½ hours).

From the park entrance, you can also hire a motorcycle to take you into the park and to pick you up.

KALIANDA

☎ 0727

Kalianda is a quiet little town overlooking Teluk Lampung 30km north of the Bakauheni ferry terminal. The main reason for passing through is to visit Krakatau, but the town can also be used as an alternative base to Bandarlampung. Nearby are pretty white-sand beaches and simple fishing villages. Jakarta weekend refugees fed up with Bali have begun small migrations to Kalianda.

Sights & Activities

Overlooking the town is **Gunung Rajabasa** (1281m), an easily scaleable volcano. Afterwards you can soak in the **hot springs** at Wartawan Beach, just beyond Canti. Beaches around Canti have relaxing sea breezes. An *opelet* to the beach costs 4000Rp.

Off the coast **Pulau Sebuk** and **Pulau Sebesi** have snorkelling and swimming. Cargo boats leave from Canti to these islands, or you can charter a tour from the local fishermen.

To reach Krakatau, stop in at Hotel Beringin and ask about organised tours or head down to the Canti harbour on weekends to pair up with local groups chartering boats.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Beringin (☎ 2008; Jl Kesuma Bangsa 75; d 50,000Rp) Close to the centre of town, this is an old Dutch villa with high ceilings and languid fans. The hotel has lots of information about local attractions and can arrange trips to nearby attractions.

Kalianda Hotel (☎ 2392; d from 80,000Rp; a) On the way into town from the highway, this is a more upmarket choice.

Laguna Helau (☎ 081 1727638; www.lagunahelau.com; Jl Sinar Laut 81, Ketang; cottages from 200,000Rp) Just outside town, this oceanside resort has cottages inspired by stilt-frame fishing vil-

lages nestled between a private beach and palm-fringed lagoon. Larger bungalows have four bedrooms and kitchen facilities.

The food stalls that appear in Kalianda's town centre at night are the best places to eat.

Getting There & Around

There are regular buses between Kalianda and Bandarlampung's Rajabasa bus terminal (8000Rp, 1½ hours). Most buses don't run right into Kalianda, but drop you on the highway at the turn-off to town. From there, simply cross the road and wait for an *opelet* into town (2000Rp). There are a few direct buses from the Bakauheni ferry terminal to Kalianda (10,000Rp), but it's usually quicker to catch any north-bound bus and get off at the junction for town.

There are regular *opelet* from Kalianda to Canti (4000Rp) and along the road that rings Gunung Rajabasa via Gayam and Pasuruan.

There are also cargo boats from Canti, a fishing village outside of Kalianda, to nearby Sebuk and Sebesi (12,000Rp). Canti can be reached by public bus.

GUNUNG KRAKATAU

Krakatau might have come closer than any other volcano in recent history to destroying the planet when it erupted in 1883. Tens of thousands were killed either by the resulting tidal wave or by the pyroclastic flows that crossed 40km of ocean to incinerate Sumatran coastal villages. Afterwards all that was left was a smouldering caldera where a cluster of uninhabited islands had once been. Perhaps peace had come, thought local villagers. But Krakatau, like all scrappy villains, re-awoke in 1927 and resulting eruptions built a new volcanic cone since christened Anak Krakatau (Child of Krakatau).

Tours to the island launch from West Java (see p126) or from Kalianda on the Sumatran coast. Organised tours typically cost US\$90 per person. **Hotel Beringin** (left) in Kalianda might also be able to organise a tour.

You can also join up with weekenders chartering boats from Canti, a fishing village outside of Kalianda, or from Pulau Sebesi (see left). Charters usually cost 500,000Rp to 900,000Rp for 15 people.

BAKAUHENI

Bakauheni is the major ferry terminal between Java and southern Sumatra.

There are frequent ferries between Bakauheni and Merak, Java's westernmost port. A fast ferry runs between the two ports every 30 minutes from 7am to 5pm and costs 22,500Rp; the crossing takes 40 minutes. A slow ferry runs every 30 minutes, 24 hours a day and costs 6700Rp; the crossing takes two to three hours.

The journey between the two islands sounds like a snap until you factor in land transport between the ferry terminals and the major towns on either side. Bakauheni is 90km from Bandarlampung, a bus journey of about two hours. Buses to the port leave from the Bandarlampung town centre (see p480) or from the Panjang bus terminal (20,000Rp). A taxi to Bakauheni from Bandarlampung should cost 30,000Rp. In Java, the bus transfer from the port of Merak to Jakarta is another two-hour journey; see p116 for more information.

BUKIT BARISAN SELATAN NATIONAL PARK

At the southern tip of Sumatra, this national park comprises one of the island's last stands of lowland forests. For this rea-

son the World Wildlife Fund has ranked it as one of the planet's most biologically outstanding habitats and is working to conserve the park's remaining Sumatran rhino and tigers. The park is also famous for many endemic bird species that prefer foothill climates, and several species of sea turtle that nest along the park's coastal zone.

Of the 365,000 hectares originally designated as protected, only 324,000 hectares remain untampered. The usual suspects are responsible: illegal logging and plantation conversion, and poachers are also at work.

Tourist infrastructure in the park is limited and most people visit on organised tours. The easiest access point into the park is through the town of Kota Agung, 80km west of Bandarlampung.

Kantor Taman Nasional Bukit Barisan Selatan (☎ 21064; Jl Raya Terbaya, Kota Agung; 17 8am-4.30pm Mon-Thu, 8am-noon Fri) sells permits into the park (5000Rp) and can arrange guides and trekking information.

Less-accessible access points are Sukaraja, 20km west of Kota Agung, and Liwa, the northernmost entry way.

Kota Agung has several basic hotels and there is a campground near Sukaraja.

There are frequent buses from Bandarlampung to Kota Agung (10,000Rp).

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'