

# East of Dili



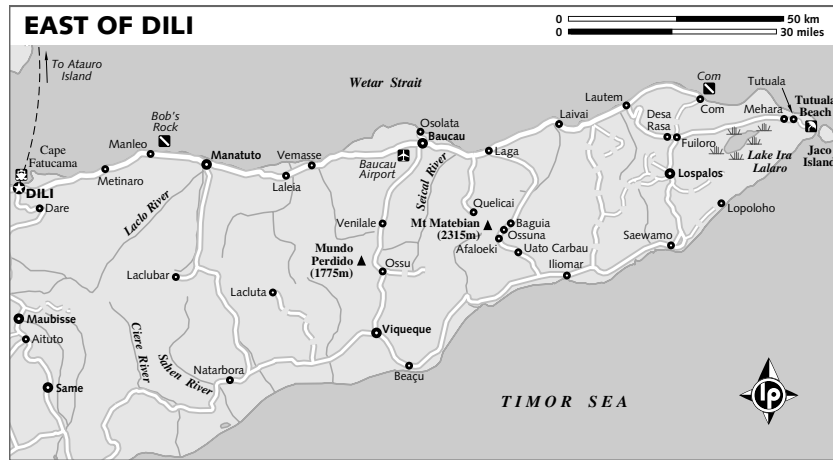
You can get lost for a week or more exploring the lands and seas east of Dili. A two-hour drive over good roads brings you to Baucau, a charming old colonial town that is the nation's second city. From here you can head deep into East Timor's interior. Back in these rugged hills cleaved with thundering streams is where East Timor's independence fighters holed up during the Indonesian occupation. Today that tradition continues in the fierce nationalism that permeates places like Viqueque.

It would take a week just to get an overview of the beaches here, the finest in East Timor and, many would say, much of Southeast Asia. Of course you'll have to decide for yourself as you'll often be the only person on 2km of dreamy white sand. Two special favourites are at Osolata, near Baucau, and at the far end of the island at Tutuala. The warm and gentle waters offshore are simply one sensational dive spot after another – most still waiting for names.

There's a nascent travellers' scene in Com, right at the end of the road, where you can kick back for a few days of languor. For more active exploration, consider the sacred peak of Mt Matebian or the desolate yet beautiful lands further afield. The south coast is untouched and the lack of useful roads makes this adventure travel of the first order.

## HIGHLIGHTS EAST OF DILI

Get caught up in the mellow vibe of Baucau's Old Town (p54) and spend some time at Osolata Beach (p55). All along the coast road are interesting small towns, such as Manatuto (p53), Laleia (p53) and Lautem (p59). The drive south of Baucau to Viqueque is as dramatic as the region's history: you can stay in a wilderness lodge and go trekking or overnight in Viqueque (p56). In the far east, Com (p59) is a popular spot for respite and the drive to Tutuala takes you through traditional villages and East Timor's first national park. Tutuala (p61) rewards at journey's end and you'll want to make time for the beach and a visit to Jaco Island (p63).



## GETTING THERE & AROUND

A good sealed road runs east of Dili along the coast to Baucau and beyond. Some twisting stretches climb high above the sea, but for much of the distance the road either winds right by the coast or shoots along dead straight on stretches of flat coastal plain. In the Indonesian era the occasional army trucks that hurtled along at great speed were known by the local people as the *tidak apa apa* ('no problem') because that was the army attitude if a pedestrian was hit. These days it's wise not to do too much hurtling because of the nasty speed humps around the villages and refugee camps, where a 45km/h speed limit applies. The speed humps are rarely marked, and in a regular car you're likely to hit bottom in a shower of sparks.

There are two routes out of Dili. The coast road climbs up above Areia Branca and the Christ statue at Cape Fatucama before dipping down to sea level again. The alternative departure route is along Rua Quinze de Outubro. This route then climbs steeply over the hills that hem Dili in to the sea before descending to meet the other route 13km east of the city. Most people go by the former route as there have been security incidents on the latter.

From Baucau to Com and Lospalos the road is in good enough condition that you can use a car. But places like Tutuala, Bagaia and Viqueque require a 4WD. During the rainy season stretches of the south coast may not be drivable at all.

## DILI TO BAUCAU

### METINARO

The road runs fairly level at first, passing through tiny Metinaro, 23km from Dili. Just past, look for the oft-photographed iconic isthmus, which joins a bulbous rocky outcrop in the ocean to the land via a spine of stone that has beaches on either side. The mangrove forests that extend from Dili fade out around this point and there are a number of fine beaches and popular scuba-diving sites along this stretch.

### MANLEO

The village of Manleo is 34km east of Dili. A variety of basketwork is sold from roadside stalls: goods include baskets, hampers and hats. A little further along, 400m off the road, is a pleasant stretch of sand with some Indonesian-built bungalows, but these now stand derelict. The dive site here is known as Hotels (see p60) after this construction. This lovely ribbon of beach is often deserted.

At 43km from Dili there's a small roadside shrine, dating from the Portuguese era, perched on the cliff top with a pretty little white-sand beach below. Just beyond the shrine the road drops from the cliff edge to sea level at Bob's Rock, a stony beach where the coral is in very shallow water, so the snorkelling is excellent. At the 47km mark look for deposits of marble right along the road. At 53km the road crosses a bridge and there are some nice drink stands under the trees.

## MANATUTO

At the 64km mark a long bridge spans the Lacluta River at Manatuto, a large regional town with a big **Sunday market**. Not much happens the rest of the week – just a few vegetable stalls and an inevitable group of men gambling on cards, dice or sometimes cockfights. Manatuto is Xanana Gusmão's home town and, as such, is a hotspot for his National Congress for Timorese Reconstruction (CNRT) party.

The main part of the town is actually bypassed by the Baucau road and reached by turning off to the coast from the roundabout. It's worth the detour. On a wall near the market and waterfront there's a series of **independence murals**. Look for **pottery stands** a couple of blocks east of the main road into town. The local style is quite animated and includes figures and animals, as well as more mundane bowls.

The bus from Dili to Baucau (US\$1) stops briefly at Manatuto.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Accommodation Copa** (r per person US\$10; ☎) Not far from the rocky seashore and the cathedral, this place has six comfortable rooms set in a large home with gardens. Some have air-con, all have bathroom and kitchen. There's no food but you can partake of the offerings at the café next door.

**Restaurant Cock & Bull** (☎ 732 4666; meals US\$1.50-3; ☎ 8am-9pm) You can never be sure of the veracity of any story you hear here. The English-language menu features fresh fish, rice dishes and omelettes. It's very clean, has a shady patio and is behind a large government building near the market.

### LALEIA

Continuing another 19km east from Manatuto, Laleia's 1933 **Portuguese church** overlooks the verdant river valley, back from the road towards the sea. Although not particularly old or large, the church's twin-towered design and pastel-pink colours make it one of the most beautiful in East Timor. The brightly coloured interior is worth a look. In front of the nearby administration building a flagpole out the front is supported by a pile of concrete skulls, a memorial to the victims of the 1999 slaughter (see p13).

A long bridge crosses the river just east of town. Such bridges were almost all built during the Indonesian period; very few major bridges were constructed during the Portuguese era.

(Approaching from the east, the town looks especially attractive on its hill.)

## VEMASSE

From Laleia it's 9km to Vemasse, where the flat countryside is devoted to rice paddies. Another long Indonesian bridge, this one with a plaque noting that it was built in 1992, leads into the town. Vemasse has a quaint-looking **church**, in reds, blues and greens, close to the road. On the hillside overlooking the village are the imposing walls of a fortress-like Portuguese construction.

Nine kilometres further there's a string of roadside refreshment stands where passing buses often stop to give passengers a break. The road from here to Baucau climbs inland from the coast, running through mostly flat, dry and lightly populated countryside as it gently circles up to the forested Baucau plateau. Here you'll find roadside fruit vendors selling *carambola* (star fruit).

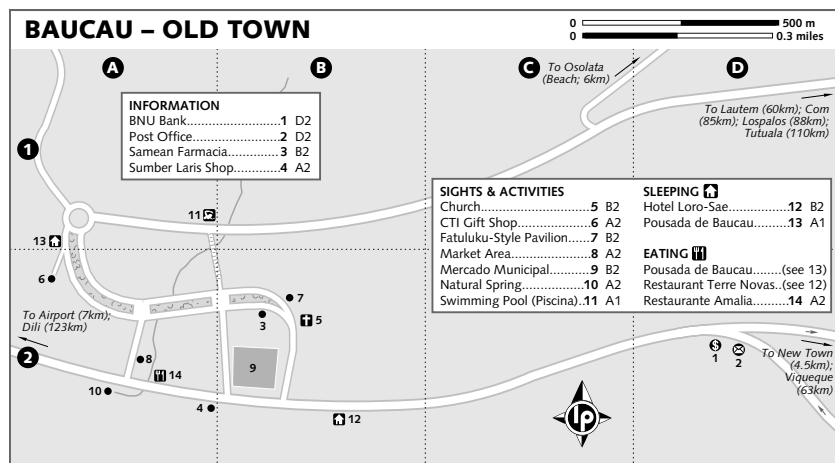
## BAUCAU

The number-two town of East Timor, Baucau is a distant second to Dili. It has a pretty colonial centre and a few services, but foreigners are still a sensation in these parts. It sits at an altitude of 330m, 123km east of Dili, where the sea breezes make it noticeably cooler than the coast. This charmingly raffish colonial town has many Portuguese buildings. Like most Portuguese settlements, it was sited with defence in mind, sitting above the sea to repel a water attack, and backed by steep cliffs as a natural barrier to incursions from the interior.

As you approach Baucau from Dili the big airport is 7km before the town. Past the airport a statue marks where the road forks: turning left takes you directly to the colonial-era Old Town, while turning right will take you first to the New Town before dropping down to the Old Town. Down at the sea, you'll find the very attractive beach village of Osolata (see p55).

### Information

There's a **post office** (☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) just past the Old Town centre on the road to the New Town. Adjacent to the post office a **BNU bank** (☎ 413 0017; ☎ 8.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri) branch will change euros and Australian dollars into US dollars (but only after 2pm). In the same space, **Timor Telecom** has internet access (US\$2 per hour).



Western Union has a money transfer office in Baucau at the **Sumber Laris Shop** (☎ 724 0897; Old Town; ☹ 9am-8pm). **Samean Farmacia** (☎ 726 2472; Old Town; ☹ 7am-8pm) is a tidy place run by a nice man near the church.

## Old Town

The town has a split personality. The streets of the Kota Lama (Old Town) are lined with Portuguese buildings, centred on the impressive **Mercado Municipal**. During the Indonesian era the **market** was renovated after a fashion, but it now lies empty and in clear need of some major renovation efforts. Meanwhile a small market operates from the roadside in the town centre. Beside the modern, tiled **church** stands an open **pavilion** built in the Fataluku style of the eastern end of East Timor, with the floor raised on stilts and with a high roof.

A clear **natural spring** bubbles from the almost-vertical cliff face backing the Old Town, running under the road, popping up in a local laundry and then running by what must have once been a small pavilion before disappearing under the road again towards the town **swimming pool**. The pool is large and surprisingly well maintained and, perhaps most surprisingly, you may find it full, thanks to its association with the *pousada* (inn). There's even a slide.

Just north of the *pousada* on the same terrace, look for the **CTI Gift Shop** (☹ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri), which is part of a handicrafts school and sells *tais*, baskets and housewares made around the region.

## New Town

Above the cliffs, 2km from the Old Town, is the characterless Kota Baru (New Town), the modern administrative centre that sprang up after the Indonesian takeover. It's a sea of rusty corrugated-metal roofs and is home to the major **market**, where you can get everything from cheap sneakers to dried cod. Several NGOs have branches here, which helps support the decent range of eateries in Baucau.

## Baucau Airport

Baucau's airport is a curious anomaly. It's much larger than the airport at Dili and capable of taking large jet aircraft. The Portuguese built it to be Portuguese Timor's international gateway, and at that time there were regular flights from Darwin, Australia, although never with large aircraft. During the Indonesian era it was used only for military flights, and it's been used and fortified by the UN since 1999. There are ongoing bone-headed discussions about once more making this East Timor's main international arrival and departure point, although those pushing for this have the words 'Baucau Booster' on their business cards.

## Sleeping

**Hotel Loro-Sae** (Map p54; Old Town; per person US\$10) Close to the centre of the Old Town, this rather basic hotel is upstairs above street-level workshops. The five somewhat clean rooms share a bathroom that's Indonesian *mandi* style.

**Albergaria do Planalto** (☎ 726 3579; New Town; r US\$30; ♿) This modern eight-room place is perched on the edge of the plateau, just as you enter the New Town on the direct route (avoiding the Old Town, before the road drops down to the bus stop roundabout). There's a good view over both the New and Old Towns, but otherwise the location is rather isolated. All rooms are the same price and come with attached bathroom, so get one with a terrace and a view.

**Pousada de Baucau** (Map p54; ☎ 724 1111; Old Town; r incl breakfast US\$60; ♿) This flamboyant pink hotel is the reason many people regularly trek out to Baucau from Dili. It's probably the most interesting and certainly the most charming place to stay in the country. The 10 rooms are in a newer block beside the original old *pousada* building. They have balconies, attached bathroom, satellite TV, fridge and more. The restaurant is excellent (see below) and spending time sitting on the veranda of the old building is one of Baucau's pleasures. There's a computer with s-l-o-w internet access in the beautiful library area. Book ahead on weekends.

## Eating

**Nagarjo Supermarket** (☎ 726 8086; ☹ 24hr) Out towards the airport where the road splits for the New and Old Towns, this place has a decent selection of food and cold drinks. It has petrol as well.

**Restaurant Terre Novas** (Map p54; Old Town; meals US\$3-6; ☹ 8am-8pm) This very tidy place on the main road into the Old Town is the perfect spot to perch on the patio and watch the local comings and goings. The menu is a mix of influences, with dishes such as pork with oyster sauce, and crème caramel.

**Restaurante Benfica** (New Town; dishes US\$4-6; ☹ 7am-9pm) This neat and orderly restaurant caters primarily to the expats working in New Town. Get a table on the plant-filled terrace and enjoy a range of Asian curries and noodles.

**Restaurant Amalia** (Map p54; ☎ 726 3610; Old Town; mains US\$4-6; ☹ 8am-9pm) Near the old town market, this lovely restaurant is in an old colonial officer's quarters and shaded by large trees. Portuguese-style dishes include crispy little croquettes and steak with lots of garlic. There's a decent list of wines by the glass.

**Pousada de Baucau** (Map p54; Old Town; dishes US\$8-10) The bottles of Mateus Rosé on display

in this elegant dining room tell you to expect Portuguese specialities. The bread is fresh and the steaks are excellent. Pork stews are also good, as are the many desserts. Service is obliging to the point of being slightly nervous. This is the best dining east of Dili.

## Getting There & Around

Dili to Baucau is a three-hour bus trip (US\$2) along the coast. Buses and *mikrolets* (mini-buses) run from Baucau to Viqueque for US\$1.50 and to Lospalos for US\$3. All stop at the station near the New Town market. Most times, you'll need a local *mikrolet* to reach the Old Town. *Mikrolets* around town cost US25¢.

## OSOLATA

Lush hills lead down from Baucau's centre to Pantai Wataboo, a breathtakingly beautiful **beach** at Osolata. The 5km drive is shaded by rustling palms and old banyan trees. It passes rushing waters fed by the Old Town spring, rice terraces and the ruins of the Portuguese commandant's house.

Down at the sea is what used to be Baucau's port. The abandoned Portuguese **customs house** (*alfandega*) fronts the beach and is next to a small fishing village. One picturesque cove over, there's yet another perfect beach, this one with an old, turreted bath house. With its curving stretch of silky white sand, shady palm trees and gentle aquamarine surf, the beach here is as nice as any in Southeast Asia. Once East Timor hits its stride it should become quite popular – for better and worse.

You can stay down here at the burgeoning **Baucau Beach Bungalows** (☎ 731 9127; Osolata; r per person US\$15). Choose between rooms in old houses and thatched bungalows at this little slice of paradise down by the sand. Meals can be arranged for US\$6 and are sourced from the fishing boats across the road.

Infrequent *mikrolets* run from Baucau to Osolata but you might have to charter one for a few dollars. Otherwise take the road downhill from the Pousada de Baucau, winding past the public swimming pool and under the shade of old banyan trees. At the 1km post turn left, then left again almost immediately. The other fork runs to the beach as well, but the road is in bad condition. It's a pleasant walk downhill, but the walk back is a long slog.

## SOUTH OF BAUCAU

The rugged mountains south of Baucau were the centre of the Fretilin resistance during the Indonesian years. The Falantil fighters hid in the deepest recesses of the hills, making forays in to Baucau and Dili to raise trouble, raise cash and get something to eat. This legacy can be felt today and the locals have a head-strong reputation. Political unrest has broken out in these small villages often since 2005. Outsiders, however, might not as quickly discern the edgy local vibe here as people wave with abandon as you traverse roads through some very dramatic scenery.

The road winding south over the mountains from Baucau via Venilale to Viqueque near the south coast is mostly decent but some parts require 4WD. Continuing further along the south coast to the east or west is difficult because of miserable road conditions and unbridged rivers.

### VENILALE

Venilale is 28km south of Baucau and just off the road through to Viqueque. The leading local candidate for a 'tidy town' award if one was given, it was a popular Portuguese-era mountain retreat from the coastal heat. There's colonial architecture and the large **Escola do Reino de Venilale**, a school built in 1933 and recently restored by being painted bright pink with blue-and-yellow trim.

North of the town, particularly at around 22km from Baucau, the Japanese had locals dig bomb-shelter **tunnels** into the roadside embankments during WWII. They are little to look at, but memories of the labour caused a local delegation to protest against Japanese aid in Dili after 1999. The **Vaicana hot springs** are a long walk on a narrow path from near here.

There are rice paddies on the terraced hillsides around Venilale, and Mt Matebian dominates the view to the east. Off to the west of Venilale is the mountain known as Mundo Perdido (1775m), the 'Lost World'. This was a Fretilin stronghold during the Indonesian period.

### OSSU

The road continues 16km south to Ossu, a traditional village with a daily market and a waterfall. The drive is quite beautiful as the

road crosses a high peak and the terrain becomes almost alpine. At the summit, horses graze on grass, silhouetted by clouds.

South of Ossu, the road winds through dripping forests and rice terraces 19km to Viqueque. At roughly midway, look for a sign on the left heading south just past the huge rushing Loi Hunu River. The **Timor Village Hotel** (☎ 728 5611; www.tvh.tl; r per person US\$20) is a very comfortable and modern place set in the lush countryside. The seven rooms have good beds and quality furnishings, breakfast is included and there's a generator for electricity. The hotel is affiliated with Harmonia Eco Tours, which can arrange transport here. Tours and treks with local guides cost US\$5 per day. The 700m drive from the main road is right out of an SUV ad.

Just south of the hotel, a huge **waterfall** pounds the rocks next to the road.

### VIQUEQUE

Viqueque, 63km from Baucau, is a largish regional town and the heart and soul of the Fretilin party. You can't help but notice this is the one place in East Timor where the dogs never seem to stop barking.

In 1959 Viqueque was the centre of the only uprising against the Portuguese after WWII. The Portuguese administration had given political asylum to 14 Indonesians who had been part of an unsuccessful rebellion against President Sukarno. A year after their arrival they apparently decided that if they couldn't overthrow the Indonesian government perhaps they'd have better luck against the Portuguese Timorese one, and inspired Timorese in the Viqueque area to rise. The Portuguese put the revolt down with bloody efficiency, in part by using neighbouring Timorese groups who didn't get on with their Viqueque neighbours. More than 150 Timorese were killed and more than 50 were exiled to the Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique. The Indonesian rebels were packed off back to Indonesia where, no doubt, Sukarno welcomed them home.

In August 1983, Creras, near Viqueque, was the site of one of the worst massacres during the Indonesian period, when as many as a thousand Timorese were slaughtered by Indonesian troops.

The town is noted for its distinctive **weaving** style, dyed with colours produced from local plants and berries. There's a hot spring

near the town. Just north of the older centre, guesthouses and cafés are strung out all along the main road. There's a significant gap along the river and then comes the not-especially-pretty original part of town, with a largish **market** known for rice and peanuts.

### Sleeping & Eating

A constant stream of NGO and UN types keeps several places in business. Starting north of town, you'll encounter these places in the order they appear here.

**Finlos Restaurant** (mains US\$2-3; ☎ 7am-10pm) This place is about 2km north of the centre. Not only is it spotless but there's a bakery that produces fresh bread and rolls. Look for the huge wooden looms out the back where women make *tais* in many iterations.

**Motel Borala** (☎ 726 7866; r per person US\$9) These seven clean rooms with private bathroom are in a modern block beside the road. Mosquito nets aren't provided but breakfast is (and the power is on from 6pm till midnight).

**Restaurante Luminar** Like all places locally, the food is simple combinations of rice, vegetables and meats. The owners are just plain welcoming and can possibly set you up in a room in a pinch but are more likely to serve you a great cup of coffee.

**Pousada Irmaos Soares** (☎ 725 2364; r per person US\$15) In the centre of Viqueque, these four rooms in a gracious family home share an outside bathroom. The deep veranda is the place to while away the hours. (Note that this place is often booked out with UN police.)

### Getting There & Away

Buses run regularly to Viqueque from Baucau or all the way from Dili for US\$3. Road conditions along the south coast and unbridged rivers make it difficult to travel east to Lospalos or west to Betano.

### BEYOND VIQUEQUE

Travelling towards Lospalos it's 18km to the small coastal town of Beacu, with its nice little beige church. Beyond Beacu it's about three hours to Uato Carbau, where there are springs and the impressive **Ira Bere waterfall**. Crocodiles can supposedly be found in the pools along this stretch of coast.

On good days, this route is a challenge. There are deep river crossings that become impossible in the rainy season. Beyond Uato Carbau the road actually gets worse, a feat it

manages to top again after Iliomar. Very few buses or *mikrolets* use this route, and there are no services. It takes five to six hours from Uato Carbau to Lospalos. The road west to Natarbora is not in great condition either, and is impossible in the rainy season.

## EAST OF BAUCAU

The land becomes progressively less populated as you journey into the far eastern regions. The vistas are often long and the untrammelled beaches even longer. You'll see people living in the iconic Fataluku houses and you might find yourself repeating the word 'unspoiled' often.

From Baucau the road drops down to the coast and follows it all the way to the popular beachside town of Com, 80km further along and just over 200km east of Dili. Or you can turn inland at Lautem and follow the road south to Lospalos and on to the south coast. This region remained a Fretilin stronghold throughout the struggle against Indonesian rule and, perhaps as a result, Lospalos suffered particularly harshly during the 1999 turmoil. At Fuiloro, just past Desa Rasa, a road branches east to Tutuala. Here, at the extreme eastern tip of East Timor, 230km east of Dili, you'll find gem-like Jaco Island.

### LAGA

On the coast highway, 19km east of Baucau, is Laga, a peaceful little town with a small **market** from which a road leads down to a pleasant pebbly **beach** about 1km away. The land here is largely flat with virescent rice fields stretching to the horizon.

The town's crumbling old **Portuguese fort** tops a low hill just south of the main road. The square fort has round towers at two of its corners, and there are fine views from the battlements north over the town and church towards the coast, and south across the river and rice paddies to the central mountains. Salt is gathered from lakes near the town.

The town's pale blue **church** is fronted by a big ceramic panel illustrating smiling Timorese getting their introduction to Christianity from a Portuguese friar. Across the road there's an interesting collection of **bas-reliefs** and brightly coloured statues with more religious messages. Look for a large orphanage run by the Silesian Sisters just east of town. The turn-off to Baguia is just past the church.

## BAGUIA

An interesting side trip can be made south of Laga to the small town of Baguia, 38km up into the hills. Obscure and unique languages are spoken in this area, and can vary from one slope of a mountain to another. Indonesian and Tetun are widely spoken, but very little English is. At first the sealed road is in OK condition as it climbs steadily away from the coast. But as the road climbs and dips, the remaining 26km are in the typically rural condition that history buffs will compare to 1916 Verdun.

The dry northern hills are scattered with the occasional traditional village, and small cemeteries with white crosses dot the hills – not an uncommon sight in East Timor. About halfway along, the road crosses the northern mountain range and the countryside becomes much greener and lusher as you approach Mt Matebian, which towers over the area.

Two kilometres before Baguia are the ruins of the **Escola do Reino de Haudere**. Only the walls remain of this impressive Portuguese school, which fell into disrepair and disuse after WWII.

Baguia itself is a diminutive, relaxed hill town with a small **Portuguese fort** built in 1915. The walls are reasonably intact and inside is an old villa, occupied by the UN police force. You can walk along the walls and climb the corner turret that was once used as a prison.

At the top end of town the baby-blue **church** features a Christ-and-child statue perched atop the church tower. The name Baguia is derived from the Portuguese for ‘under the cave’, and the large rock outcrop overlooking the town is said to contain caves. Other than checking out the sites, there’s little to keep you here.

## Mt Matebian

The main attraction of the area is the climb to 2315m-high Mt Matebian, one of the highest peaks in East Timor. In its isolated splendour Mt Matebian dominates this part of the island. It’s clearly visible from Laga on the north coast or from Venilale, on the road south from Baucau to Viqueque. The name means ‘Mountain of the Dead’, and this was one of the last holdouts of the Fretilin forces before they were overrun by the Indonesians in the ‘encirclement and annihilation’ campaign of 1978. The mountain is considered holy and on top are statues of Christ and Mary.

Pilgrimages in August and October attract thousands of the faithful.

The road past Baguia leads 5km to the village of Ossuna at the base of a jutting rock outcrop. From Ossuna it is about a 30-minute walk from the road around the outcrop to the village of Oeiburu, where the trail begins. It is a steep climb for the first half hour, then a more gradual one-hour climb around the flank of the mountain to the barren ridge. It is then a fairly strenuous climb along the ridge to the top. The views are stunning, right across to the south and north coasts. Most people take about five hours to get to the top on this route.

It may be possible to stay in Ossuna or Afaloeki, which is 3km further along the road, but it will likely be a mat on someone’s floor. Afaloeki has a superb aspect, in the shadow of the mountain and with views down the valleys to the south coast. The sunrise is stunning there.

There are plenty of opportunities for further exploration in the area. **Benteng Daralari** is another old fort, three hours’ walk to the south. **Buibela** and **Lena**, three hours on foot to the west and over the mountain behind Afaloeki, are said to be the two most traditional villages in the area.

An alternate way to the top of Mt Matebian starts in the village of **Quelicai** on the west face of the mountain. This is a popular pilgrimage route and you can get a lot of info and arrange for guides (US\$10 to US\$15 per day) at the town’s church. Quelicai is reached on a rough road that heads into the hills west of Laga.

## Getting There & Away

Four or five buses a day run between Baucau and Baguia (US\$2, 2½ hours) via Laga. Buses may continue a little way past Baguia to drop off passengers, but don’t count on it. Some maps show a road running right down to the south coast via Uato Carbau, but it’s impassable.

## LAIVAI

The little village of Laivai is barely perceptible as you follow the coast road east. But it is near a number of primo **beaches**. There’s a long curving swathe of sand from the 163–165km posts. There are shady places to park as well. Another good beach is at the 171km mark.

Buses between Baucau and Lautem often stop halfway for a break by the beach at the 172km point near Laivai. **Roadside stalls** under

the shade trees sell small grilled fish – *ikan tunu*, a local delicacy – and palm wine (*sabu*) to ease the long bus journey. Note that the latter is sold from the same used plastic water bottles as petrol. Vendors here have both so you’ll have to use the lighter colour of the *sabu* to differentiate the two as they taste similar. For a real treat, try *katupa*, little sachets of rice cooked in coconut milk. Yum.

## LAUTEM

This village, 60km east of Baucau and 183km from Dili, has a sprawling **Portuguese fort** in various states of disrepair, which begs exploration. Segments of the huge walls are still standing, and the canyon-like entrance to the town from Baucau gives Lautem the look of a medieval walled city. The squat **bunkers** on the beach, just beyond the town, are Japanese constructions from WWII.

At Lautem the coast road continues to Com, while another road dives off inland to climb up to Lospalos.

## COM

The north coast road dead-ends 15km beyond Lautem and 203km from Dili at the small fishing village of Com. In fact, the road finishes at the end of a large pier built during the Indonesian era to unload supplies for the military. There’s good **snorkelling**, although the only beaches are just beyond the pier or just before you enter the village, and even those are narrow.

Com is the closest thing East Timor has to a backpackers’ beach town – and that’s a bit of a stretch. But there are a fair number of guesthouses and one resort and it could take off further if the country settles down. Although you’ll pass better beaches on the way here, it has beautiful views and, when the touts shut up, a serene air.

The rest of the way along the village is rocky, right down to the fringing reef (arrange for diving at the Dili dive shops, p43). The Indonesian island of Wetar is often clearly visible directly across from Com, although it’s about 50km away.

Com is a popular weekend getaway from Dili. When you arrive in town, you’ll be greeted by large numbers of women and children hawking their rooms, *tais*, fruit and other goods. Unless it is clear you’re going to the Com Beach Resort (see right), competition can get a bit over the top. In fact if you buy something you can expect to be pestered to

explain why you ignored others. (One visitor bought something from virtually everybody so as not to offend.)

Several very basic guesthouses have opened along the short stretch of road right in town. All offer similar very basic accommodation (no electricity, limited ventilation, shared squat toilets) and average about US\$10 per person per night with simple fish dinners extra. A few choices:

**Alex** A beachside compound with five rooms. Arguably the best of the cheapies.

**Sina Guesthouse** Four rooms in a beachside site shaded by palms.

**Sely Guesthouse** Basic non-beachside place with 10 rooms in a small house.

The higher-quality, shell-studded **Com Beach Resort** (☎ 728 3311; rUS\$20-80; 🍷), in a lush compound across the road from the water, has basic rooms that share a bathroom block, and pricier ones with private bathroom (value goes down as prices rise; the US\$50 rooms with bathroom are a good choice). Book ahead. Snorkelling gear is also available. The long menu of the Resort’s **Ocean View Restaurant** (dishes US\$4-10) includes a whole roast pig for US\$100 – eight hours’ notice are needed for the victim to be selected and cooked. The restaurant, hard on the narrow strip of sand, is fine for a beer or a meal.

## Getting There & Away

*Mikrolets* run to Com from Lospalos (US\$1) and Baucau (US\$2). Maps show a shortcut over the hills between Com and the Lautem–Lospalos road at Fulooro. This would be a real timesaver if you’re going from Com to Tutuala except for one thing: the 15km route is too deteriorated to drive.

## DESA RASA

Desa Rasa is between Lautem and Lospalos, and just before the turn-off to Tutuala. This village was once noted for its traditional **Fataluku houses**, built on stilts that supported a main living room, which in turn was topped by a high, tapering thatch roof. Many have been destroyed but you’ll find good examples still being used between here and Tutuala. What you will also see is a profusion of pale, peach-hued pumpkins.

The road from Lautem, on the coast, turns inland and climbs steadily into the hills to reach Desa Rasa, 16km from the coast, and continues for another 12km to Lospalos.

### DIVE SITES EAST OF DILI

Some of East Timor's most popular dive sites are along the coast to the east of Dili. The fringing reef along this stretch often drops off only a short distance from the shore so it's easy to wade in from the beach and paddle out to the drop-off (boats are not necessary). New sites are being discovered and the site names are often changeable. The sites that follow are listed with their distance from Dili. (See p43 for details of dive operators.)

#### Secret Gardens (30km)

The first dive east of Dili. The coral gardens here are home to a colourful collection of small reef marine life.

#### Black Rock (37km)

Sheer walls and strong currents attract pelagic fish but because several different currents converge at Black Rock this isn't a good site for novice divers. Avoid the site when the tide is changing. The east side of the rock drops off to more than 20m, and cracks shelter many fish. Nudibranchs are often seen and manta rays sometimes pass by.

#### Dollar Beach (38km)

At this popular weekend beach visitors used to be charged a dollar – hence the name. The seagrass in the shallow waters make this a popular mating ground for dugongs, and sea turtles and reef sharks are also encountered here. It's a popular site for novice divers, with hard and soft corals on the sloping reef at 10m to 18m. From the west end of the beach you can approach Black Rock, but there can be strong currents at the east end of the beach.

#### K41 (41km)

Despite some big waves, the diving is usually pretty straightforward here, and this is a popular site. The reef drops straight into the deep on one side but slopes more gently on the other. There's a good wall at 18m to 20m with a large variety of sponges and soft corals, and plenty of reef fish. Sea turtles are also seen around the wall while black- and white-tip reef sharks pass by, and a family of dugongs makes periodic appearances. A popular night-diving spot.

#### Hotels (42–3km)

This site takes its name from a resort that used to operate here and is also known as Behau Village. The bottom is rocky, then sandy, before you reach the coral. There's more solid coral coverage to the west; to the east the sandy bottom is punctuated by coral outcrops.

## LOSPALOS

Lospalos, home of the Fataluku people, is in the middle of a gently rising plain that stretches off to the southern hills on the horizon. Although quite a fertile rice-growing area, it is dusty in the dry season, and the region supports mostly livestock grazing. There's not much to see here other than a lot of plundered Indonesian compounds on the way in.

Lospalos itself is mostly unappealing. The buildings still show a great deal of damage from the 1999 violence, particularly along the shabby main street. The highlight may be the profane revolutionary graffiti on many a once-blank wall. The entrance to the **Catholic church** is topped by a good example of a Fataluku-house

roof. The town also has a Protestant church and the disused Masjid Al Taowa Lospalos mosque. The main market is a good 3km outside town, although efforts are being made to rebuild the one in the centre.

### Sleeping & Eating

The accommodation and restaurant scene is serviceable in Lospalos. All sleeping places will prepare meals.

**27@** (r per person US\$8) An excellent choice in a shady compound near the old market, with six spotless rooms that share bathrooms. Good meals are available. The name derives from the day in August 1999 when the owner's husband was among scores of locals murdered by the retreating Indonesians.

#### Bob's Rock (45km)

A rock, the 'Bob' painted on it no longer so clear, marks the turn-off into the woods that give this site its alternative name, Behau Forest. Enter the water from the rocky beach and it's a short swim out to the steep drop-off to the west, where divers encounter colourful coral, lots of reef fish and the occasional shark. En route to the rocks, garden eels can be seen emerging from the sandy bottom at 5m to 6m. The shady forest area makes it a good picnic spot between dives.

#### Whale Shark Point (47–8km)

This was the first place where local dive operators encountered whale sharks. These huge but harmless creatures are known to visit around August to September, but diving hasn't been going for long enough in East Timor to be certain of their appearance. The cove has a wide variety of coral on the large and gently sloping reef.

#### Jim's Crack (55km)

The split in the wall that gives this site its name is best seen from above by snorkellers. Jim's Crack has lots of soft coral, sponges and nudibranchs, but the proximity of the river means that visibility can often be restricted. The wall has a shallow area at the top, then drops to 10m to 15m before sloping off gradually to greater depths. As well as the reef life on the wall, sharks, rays, sea turtles and barracudas have been seen further out. Jim's Crack is 4km west of the Manatuto River.

#### Com (203km)

At the east end of Com village, divers can enter the water from the wharf on the western side of the artificial harbour in about 10m depth. Alternatively dive the eastern side of the harbour, entering the water from beside the lighthouse. Rays are found on the sandy bottom and the wharf pylons attract lots of marine life, including lion fish, which are spectacular on night dives. Out to sea from the wharf you might spot sea turtles and sharks. Coming ashore on the beach, watch for boats being launched off the boat ramp, and be careful of fishing lines from the wharf.

#### Tutuala Beach (233km)

The very end of every road, Tutuala Beach fronts some of Timor's richest reefs – and that's saying something. Walk right in to snorkel or dive from the beach. For more details, see p62.

### Nova Esperança Restaurant & Guest House

(☎ 724 3580; r per person US\$10; ♿) Near 27@, this option has seven rooms with private bathroom (some of the rooms have air-con), a nice veranda and a Fataluku house across the street.

**Ayr Restaurant & Guest House** (r per person incl breakfast US\$10) On the other side of town, with a nice shady site with a pretty porch and tables where meals (\$4) are served. The eight rooms have a bathroom each.

**Hotel Roberto Carlos** (☎ 723 0826; r US\$35; ♿) Out towards the new market and away from the centre (perhaps not a bad thing). There are 13 air-con rooms in a modern two-storey building and a café with a generator so that vital beverages can be served chilled.

### Getting There & Away

Buses and *mikrolets* run several times daily between Lospalos and Baucau (US\$3, 3½ hours). Ask to be dropped off near the centre or old market, not at the new market far out of town.

Although a road runs from Lospalos to the south coast and then west to Viqueque, its condition is very bad. Locals recommend getting to Viqueque via Baucau.

## TUTUALA

You may well feel like you're going to the end of the earth – or at least of East Timor, which you are – as you head to Tutuala, the very tip of the island and the gateway to magical Jaco Island.

Just past Desa Rasa, on the road from Lautem to Lospalos, is the turn-off to Tutuala. The settlement of **Fuiloro** sits at the junction with the remains of an old Portuguese fort; its arched entranceway was painted by the Indonesians. An impassable 'short cut' to Com also starts from close to this turn-off. The 32km route to Tutuala is in barely passable condition. It's often narrow and has long sections where the surface has simply disappeared. Expect the trip to take more than an hour.

The road runs along the northern edge of **Lake Ira Lalaro**, a seasonal stretch of water that can flood right across the road during the rainy season. The salty lake is yet another place said to be home to crocodiles, as well as a great many of the island's bird species. At times you'll have views all the way south to the lake. The horizon-stretching expanse of grass slopes gently down to the distant water, punctuated only by the occasional hut.

This is a road for seeing the iconic **Fataluku houses**. There's a couple on display near Fuiloro but as you reach the village of Bauro, midway to Tutuala, you will see many still in use.

The village of **Mehara**, just before Tutuala, was a hideout for Xanana Gusmão in the 1980s during the independence struggle.

Just as you enter Tutuala there's another good example of a traditional Fataluku-style house beside the road. The road continues through the village to end at the top of a high cliff, the blue sea shimmering far below and with great views out to the Indonesian island of Kisar. Sometimes whales can be seen from here.

Tutuala defines sleepy; its market is small and there are no services. At the very end of the road you'll find the Portuguese-era **pousada**, a quaint yet solid house with a fine vantage point from its bluff high above the sea. It's in good condition and there are two basic rooms for rent (US\$5 per person) plus a common room with comfy bamboo furniture. The bathrooms combine Western sit-down convenience with an Asian-style *mandi* operation. When you arrive, settle in on the wide veranda and soon the caretaker and about 20 curious children will appear. He'll run the electricity generator from about 7pm to midnight. There are no real cooking facilities here and you may not find food in town, so bring what you want from Baucau or Dili.

## Archaeological Sites

Near Tutuala are the most important archaeological sites in East Timor. The caves at **Ili Kere Kere** were first excavated in 1966–67 by a student from the Australian National University (ANU). Finds included stone tools and the bones of giant rats. Radiocarbon dating established that the caves were used 13,000 years ago, but less than a decade after excavations started the Indonesian invasion halted further research. After independence, ANU researchers returned to the Tutuala district, and at the **Lene Hara caves**, not far from the earlier Ili Kere Kere discoveries, they recovered shells that dated back 30,000 years. These were of great interest to the scientists as East Timor may have been a stepping stone to Australia for the earliest aboriginal arrivals 50,000 to 60,000 years ago. Cave paintings have also been found in the Ili Kere Kere and **O Hi caves**. The Tutuala caves have also had much more recent use, when guerrillas hid there during the independence struggle with Indonesia. The caves are a hot and difficult walk from Tutuala, and you will need a local guide to find them.

## Getting There & Away

You can get a daily *mikrolet* to/from Lospalos (US\$1, three hours) or charter one from Com for about US\$15.

## TUTUALA BEACH

Although the journey can be perilous, all agree that the end justifies the means (and the broken axle). It's 8km downhill from the village of Tutuala to its fine white-sand beach, also known as Pantai Walu (also spelt Waloo or Vallou). For the first 5km the road is sort of OK, but it turns into a rough rocky track for the last 3km – strictly for 4WDs and a good test of your wits. It takes at least 30 minutes. It's a fine walk down, but a major slog back up.

The beach looks like a dreamy ad for a white-chocolate bar. There are always a few fishers about and, even with limited effort, they catch a huge range of fish, including tuna. At times, they'll grill up some fresh with garlic for a sublime meal. Recently a couple of very simple huts have appeared and you may be able to rent one for a night. Think of it purely as shelter, otherwise you'll want to bring camping gear.

Just offshore is Jaco Island and in the surrounding turquoise waters you'll find reefs with an incredible diversity of life. It's ideal for **snorkelling** and **diving**. Look for large anemones with their colourful attendant anemone fish, reef fish of literally every stripe, porpoises and more. The reef is part of the vaunted Coral Triangle.

## JACO ISLAND

A mere 10 sq km and at most 100m above the sea, Jaco Island is like the featured item in the catalogue of perfect beach islands. It's

ringed by a circle of flawless, fine white sand lapped by azure waters. Considered sacred by the Timorese, no-one lives on the island and no camping is allowed. But a visit during the day is fine as Tutuala Beach is just a short way across the shallow channel. Fishers will take you across and back for US\$5 (three minutes). Avoid the real temptation just to swim it – the currents through the narrow passage are swift. For visitors, Jaco is all about walking the sands and being immersed, not just in the beautiful waters, but in the solitude and absolute silence that prevails in this special place.

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