

# History

If East Timor's history were a novel, it would be an entertaining read. The tragedy, of course, is that it's all true.

## KINGDOMS & CANNIBALISM

The discovery of stone artefacts and evidence of pre-agricultural societies may indicate that Timor was home to *Homo erectus*, early hominoids related to Java Man, who settled the Indonesian archipelago up to one million years ago. Evidence of modern human settlement on Timor dates back at least 13,000 years, when the Austronesian peoples of Asia migrated throughout the eastern islands. These hunter-gatherers were joined by later migrants from Asia, who introduced agriculture around 2000 BC.

Little is known of Timor before AD 1500, although Chinese and Javanese traders visited the island from at least the 13th century, and possibly as early as the 7th century. Traders visited coastal settlements in search of the plentiful sandalwood (prized for its aroma and for the medicinal santalol made from the oil) and beeswax.

Timor was divided into a number of small kingdoms, which were little more than tribal groupings involved in frequent skirmishes, with head-hunting a popular activity. The Dawan (Atoni) people, thought to be the earliest inhabitants of Timor, were the largest group in western Timor, but were divided into numerous small kingdoms.

The Tetun (Belu) people, the other major ethnic group, migrated to Timor in the 14th century, settling the fertile central regions and pushing the Dawan westward. Their origins are uncertain, but they call their homeland Malaka, and they may well have migrated from the Malay Peninsula. From their fertile base, which straddles the current West Timor–East Timor border, they expanded until four of their tribes had formed kingdoms and pushed further into East Timor.

## PORTUGUESE & DUTCH DEALINGS

The first Europeans in Timor were the Portuguese, who may have landed as early as 1509, although 1515 is generally given as the arrival date. Antonio de Abreu is said to have

been the first Portuguese visitor. Portuguese trading ships regularly visited the north coast in search of sandalwood. It wasn't until 1568 that Dutch traders first arrived in Timor. For the next 300 years the Dutch and Portuguese competed for control of Timor.

The era of Portuguese influence really begins in 1556 at Lifau (in present-day Oecussi), when Dominican friars established a settlement and set about converting the Timorese to Catholicism. Official Portuguese efforts were minimal, and colonisation was left to a handful of Dominicans in the hope that conversion would spread Portuguese influence and keep out the Dutch.

A Dutch expedition, led by Apollonius Scotte, sailed in 1603 to Kupang, in today's Indonesian West Timor, and negotiated with the local ruler to build a fort in return for Dutch military help against competing tribes. Dutch claims to Timor date from this time, but Scotte didn't act on the agreement, and it was to be 40 years before the Dutch showed any serious interest in Timor.

Away from the coast, a dozen or so Timorese kingdoms held sway over the island with no interference from the colonial powers until 1642. The most dominant kingdom in the west was the Dawan kingdom of Sonbai, while the central Tetun kingdom of Wehali, based around the present-day region of Belu, was the most powerful in central-east Timor.

In 1642 Francisco Fernandes landed in Naikliu and led a Portuguese military expedition to weaken the power of the Timor kings. With the assistance of Timorese allies, Fernandes marched across Sonbai territory, around present-day Kapan and, after successes there, went on to defeat Wehali. His small army of musketeers was composed primarily of Topasses, the mestizo group from the Portuguese settlements at Larantuka (Flores) and Pulau Solor. The Christian, Portuguese-speaking Topasses, called 'Black Portuguese' by the Dutch, were descended from intermarriage between the Solorese, Portuguese, and slaves from Portuguese colonies in India and Melaka.

After this show of strength, the Topasses settled in Timor, at Lifau on the coast and

then further inland around present-day Kefamenanu and Niki Niki in West Timor. These strangers representing a far-off, powerful kingdom were welcomed by local rulers and given land. Although acting on behalf of Portugal, through intermarriage they went on to form their own kingdoms and become a power unto themselves. Two clans of Topasses, the de Ornai and the da Costa clans, integrated into the local community and became the new rulers, controlling most of Timor, but not without skirmishes among themselves.

The Dutch, unsettled by the growing Portuguese influence, arrived in Kupang in 1653 to stake their claim to Timor. First they fortified Kupang and then set about controlling the surrounding area. They forged alliances with local rulers around the Bay of Kupang, but a Dutch military expedition to the south was soundly defeated by Timorese and Topasses forces in 1656.

In the same year a Portuguese was appointed to administer the settlement at Lifau, making it the first real Portuguese colony on Timor. When the Portuguese commander died, a Topasse *capitao* was appointed in 1663 and the Topasses went on to consolidate their power. In 1701 the Portuguese Viceroy of Goa appointed a governor to control Lifau, but he lasted only until 1705 when he was driven out by the Topasses.

The Portuguese returned to Lifau, but their power was tenuous at best. By 1749 the Topasses controlled central Timor and marched on Kupang to confront the Dutch. Although outnumbered, the Dutch won and killed many Topasse leaders at the battle of Penfui, the site of Kupang airport today.

The Dutch in Kupang, comprising only a handful of United East India Company (VOC) officers, became the major force on Timor through alliances with inland chiefs and further military campaigns. The Portuguese had to abandon Lifau in 1769 after more attacks from the Topasses, and the colony was moved east to Dili, the present-day capital of East Timor.

Conflict between Timorese kingdoms and against the Dutch continued throughout the 19th century. The Dutch were firmly ensconced in Kupang, but unable and unwilling to control the interior. The VOC went bankrupt in 1799, leaving the Dutch government to assume direct control, but they ignored

far-flung Kupang, which held little economic interest. Trade was largely conducted by Chinese merchants, and the Dutch colony was neglected.

It was a similar story in the east, where the Portuguese held on to power through strategic alliances against attacks from local chiefs. Portuguese settlement was minimal, and the colony was ruled from Macau on the Chinese coast. Chinese outnumbered Europeans in Portuguese Timor, and the colony also had to cope with Chinese rebellions. The sandalwood trade began to die, and coffee, introduced as a cash crop in 1815, became the principal concern of the Portuguese.

Dutch–Portuguese conflict was mostly confined to Flores. When the Dutch finally took Larantuka in 1851, they forced negotiations that resulted in the Treaty of Lisbon in 1859. The Portuguese relinquished all claims on Flores, and Timor was divided in half. The split was not formalised until a further treaty in 1904, with a slight rejigging of the borders right up until 1916. Portugal claimed the east and the north-coast pocket of Oecussi in the west, based around Lifau, while Holland received the rest of the west.

## A FORGOTTEN CORNER

The 20th century brought the greatest changes to Timor as the colonial powers increased their involvement. The new Dutch policy was to rule all of the East Indies possessions directly, establishing Dutch government throughout the archipelago. In 1905 Kupang was ordered to bring the local chiefs to heel. The various kingdoms had to swear allegiance to Holland and submit to the authority of a Dutch Controller. In return they were given autonomy to rule their principalities and collect taxes for the Dutch administration.

Rebellions broke out across West Timor from 1906 onwards and the Dutch reacted swiftly. In Niki Niki, Dutch forces surrounded the royal compound, and the royal family self-immolated rather than yield to the Dutch. Rebellions continued right up to 1916, when the last kingdoms succumbed to Dutch rule. Although roads and schools were built, most of the population outside the regional centres had little contact with the Dutch, except for some aggressive, mostly Protestant, missionary activity. Control was limited, and the traditional rajas held sway under a Dutch hegemony.

It was a similar story in Portuguese Timor, which had become a separate colony from Macau in 1896. If anything, Portuguese authority outside the regional centres was even weaker than Dutch authority on the Dutch half of the island. Their power was often effectively opposed by the *liurai*, the traditional native Timorese rulers, and the Topasses. Real power was usually held by the *liurai*, who acted as Portuguese agents. Dominican missionaries were also involved in revolts or opposition to the government, and eventually a series of rebellions broke out from 1893.

The crunch came in 1910 when the Portuguese raised taxes and introduced a forced labour policy to increase plantation productivity. The intensity of the uprisings increased and continued until 1915 when the coloniser's bloody pacification was finally achieved. The colony had been on the decline even before WWI as the sandalwood trade fizzled out, and when Portugal fell into a depression after the war East Timor drifted into an economic torpor.

Still by the 1930s one commodity in East Timor was drawing the attention of powers far away: oil. Late in the decade both Japan and Britain engaged in low-level efforts to trump the other in gaining influence over the limpid Portuguese authorities. Shell had gained an oil concession in the east and the oil-poor Japanese were covetous. British efforts to convince the ostensibly neutral Portugal to form an alliance in the event of a Japanese attack were rendered moot by the quick succession of Japanese victories in the early days of the war.

## WWII

Following their attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii and invasion of Malaya in December 1941, the Japanese swept aside the colonial powers in their rapid march through Asia. Air attacks on West Timor in January 1942 were followed by a Japanese landing outside Kupang on 20 February. They quickly took the city. Australian soldiers had earlier landed in Kupang, but were soon pushed backed to Camplong, and those not captured joined Australian forces stationed in Dili. Although Portugal and its overseas territories were technically neutral, the Australian troops in Portuguese Timor inevitably drew the region into the conflict.

The few hundred Australians, known as Sparrow Force, carried out a guerrilla war that tied down 20,000 Japanese troops, of whom 1500 were killed. The Australians conducted hit-and-run raids on Japanese positions. Their success was largely due to the support they received from the East Timorese, for whom the cost was devastating, particularly after Australian personnel were driven to the south coast and evacuated in January 1943. The Japanese razed whole villages, seized food supplies and killed Timorese in areas where the Australians were operating. In other areas the Japanese incited rebellion against the Portuguese, which resulted in horrific repression when the Japanese left. By the end of the war, between 40,000 and 60,000 East Timorese had died. (In a historical echo, groups of Timorese protested Japanese offers of assistance in the years after 1999, citing the still-raw memories of the war.)

As elsewhere in Asia, the Japanese promised independence and an end to the yoke of colonialism. Their promises were well received, but it soon became obvious that the Japanese were even harsher masters. Forced labour was used to build Japanese bases, and as the war wore on food was appropriated, causing starvation in the countryside. When the war in the Pacific swung in favour of the Allies in 1944–45, Timor was isolated, causing further hardship.

## THE DUTCH DEPART, THE PORTUGUESE LINGER

After the Japanese surrendered on 15 August 1945, Australian forces occupied Timor until the Dutch and Portuguese returned to reclaim their colonies. Indonesia declared independence on 17 August 1945, but although Java was rocked by a bloody independence war, the eastern islands were largely calm. West Timor became part of the state of Negara Indonesia Timur, the Dutch plan to divide Indonesia under a Dutch government. When the Dutch finally decided to quit Indonesia in 1949, West Timor became part of the independent Republic of Indonesia, but not without some disturbances and calls for independence.

In East Timor a nascent independence movement had arisen, but Portugal swiftly reclaimed its old colony after the war, and it remained Portuguese until the tragic events of 1975. Neglected by Portugal, it was notable only for its modest production of high-quality coffee

and as a distant place of exile for opponents of Portugal's dictatorial Salazar regime. The ordinary Timorese were subsistence farmers using the destructive *ladang* (slash-and-burn) system, with maize being the main crop.

In 1926 a coup had brought Antonio de Oliveira Salazar to power in Portugal. He ruled with an iron hand until incapacitated by a stroke in 1968 (he died two years later). By this time Portugal vied with Ireland for the position at the very bottom of the Western European economic heap. A large part of the country's economy was tied up with maintaining Portugal's overseas empire. Britain's and Spain's far larger colonial empires had almost disappeared, as had the Netherlands' holdings. Portugal, despite economic stagnation at home, hung on to its colonial remnants. The struggles for independence in the African colonies of Angola and Mozambique were a major drain on the Portuguese economy, and this was a factor in the fall of the dictatorship. Equally important was that there were many Portuguese, including a large contingent in the military, who were in complete disagreement with their government's colonial policies. The time for European empires was over.

In April 1974 the 'carnation revolution' overthrew the dictatorship in Portugal. It was a remarkably peaceful takeover, taking its name from the flowers soldiers put on their weapons. In quick order Portugal fled from its African colonies, leaving a chaotic situation that would last for most of the rest of the century and cause unimaginable hardship. Although there had been no similar independence struggle in Portuguese Timor, disaster would also follow the Portuguese withdrawal.

## INDONESIA INVADES

With the real possibility of East Timor becoming an independent state, two major political groups, the Timorese Democratic Union (UDT) and the Timorese Social Democrats (ASDT, later known as Fretilin), quickly formed in the colony. A third group, known as Apodeti, was a minor player, but its stated preference for integration with Indonesia eventually turned it into little more than a front for Indonesia's goals. Although both major political groups advocated independence for East Timor, Fretilin gained the edge over the UDT, partly because its more radical social policies struck a populist chord with the desperately poor East Timorese.

Fretilin was regarded by the Indonesians as potentially, if not actually communist, and they used this as justification for their intervention on 11 August 1975. The UDT, fearful that it was falling behind its rivals, staged a coup in Dili, which led to a brief civil war with Fretilin from the outset and by the end of August, the bulk of the fighting was over and the UDT remnants withdrew to Indonesian West Timor. Fretilin proved surprisingly effective in getting things back to normal, but by the end of September Indonesia was gearing up for a takeover. East Timor and Fretilin now faced Indonesia alone; the Portuguese were certainly not coming back. Fretilin declared the independent existence of the Democratic Republic of East Timor on 28 November, but on 7 December the Indonesians launched their attack on Dili.

Indonesian troops had already been in East Timor months earlier. An incursion into the western part of the country in mid-October 1975, disguised as a local militia action, had in fact involved regular Indonesian troops. Five TV journalists from Australia in the village of Balibo were murdered to cover up the Indonesian participation, and the resulting Indonesian and Australian government denials have been an ongoing scandal (see p70 for more on this).

On 5 December 1975 Henry Kissinger and Gerald Ford met with President Soeharto in

### NICOLAU LOBATO

A founding member of Fretilin, Lobato was an early leader of the resistance. As it became clear that East Timor was not going to win support against Indonesia from Australia or the USA, and as Portuguese influence and power faded away, it was Lobato who rose to the challenge.

During the brutal arrival of the Indonesian army in Dili on 7 December 1975, many Timorese were dragged down to the wharf by Indonesian soldiers and summarily executed, including Lobato's wife, Isobel. Retreating into the mountains and forests of East Timor, Lobato led a resistance campaign that tied down tens of thousands of Indonesian troops for three years, until he was killed, in December 1978. Today, the international airport bears his name.

Jakarta and gave tacit approval to an invasion. Kissinger and others worried that scenes of the American-trained paratroopers jumping from American-provided planes while shooting American-supplied guns might hurt the image of the USA, so the Indonesians were told to act quickly to avoid prolonged scrutiny. (That Ford sent Soeharto a gift of golf balls during the invasion still enrages many Timorese.) Australia, Malaysia and Singapore are among the nations that knew of Indonesia's plans in advance and did nothing to stop the invasion.

On 7 December Operasi Seroja, a major amphibious and airborne invasion of the country, commenced. It's estimated that 2000 Timorese died in Dili during the first few days of the assault. From the start the Indonesians met strong resistance from Fretilin troops, who quickly proved their worth as guerrilla fighters.

## THE INDONESIAN PERIOD

By the end of 1975 there were 20,000 Indonesian troops in East Timor, and by April in the following year that number had risen to 35,000. Although East Timor was officially declared Indonesia's 27th province on 16 July 1976, Falantil, the military wing of Fretilin, kept up regular attacks on the Indonesians, even on targets very close to Dili, until at least 1977. Gradually, Indonesia's military strength and Fretilin's lack of outside support took their toll, and in December 1978 Nicolau Lobato, the Falantil leader, was killed by Indonesian troops. He was eventually succeeded by Xanana Gusmão.

The cost of the takeover to the East Timorese was huge. International humanitarian organisations estimate that during the hostilities, and due to the disease and famine that followed, at least 100,000 people died. Large sections of the population were relocated for 'security reasons' and lost contact with their ancestral sites. In 1978 the Indonesians took Mt Matebian, one of the last Fretilin strongholds, at great cost to East Timorese civilians in the area. This was the era of the 'encirclement and annihilation' campaign, made much easier for the Indonesians by the US-supplied ground-attack aircraft. In 1981, in the notorious 'fence of legs' operation, as many as 60,000 East Timorese civilians (the number cited by the UN's Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation) were

forced to form a continuous line and walk from the east and west, forcing Fretilin guerrillas towards the centre of the island. Even this failed to completely wipe out Fretilin.

By 1989 Fretilin had been pushed back to just a few hideouts in the far east of the island, and Indonesia was confident enough to open up East Timor to foreign tourists. Then on 12 November 1991, about a thousand Timorese staged a rally at the Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili, where they had gathered to commemorate the death of an independence activist two weeks earlier. Indonesian troops opened fire on the crowd, more than 100 were killed and East Timor was once again in the world headlines.

East Timor remained a political thorn in Indonesia's side through the 1990s. Although guerrilla activity was now isolated, the people continued to demonstrate, and dissent was accompanied by arrests and torture by the security forces. Student rallies were quickly crushed, but wider protests also occurred. Even the capture of Xanana Gusmão in 1992 didn't end the struggle. As with Nelson Mandela in South Africa, imprisonment simply underlined his importance.

In 1996 Bishop Carlos Belo of Dili and José Ramos-Horta, Fretilin's UN representative, were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their work in highlighting East Timor's struggle. The Indonesian government responded by reiterating its stance that it would never consider independence for East Timor. At that time Jakarta would not even contemplate making East Timor a *daerah istimewa* (special district), as was the case in Aceh and Yogyakarta, giving it limited self-rule within the Indonesian republic. The army had invested heavily in East Timor and, apart from its economic interests, it had lost thousands of soldiers in the war. It was stubbornly intent on controlling East Timor, despite talk

### AN UNKNOWN TOLL

Estimates of how many people died after the 1975 invasion range as high as 200,000. And although the number will never be known, official counts are chilling: an Indonesian government census conducted in 1980 put the population at 552,000, which was at least 100,000 fewer than the last Portuguese census in 1974.

## INDONESIAN IMPROVEMENTS

Indonesia's apologists like to point to the material benefits brought to East Timor during the 1975–99 occupation. When the Indonesians arrived in 1976, there were 20km of sealed roads. In 1994 they claimed the figure was more than 2000km. In the same period the number of schools had expanded from 51 to 815, and far more East Timorese went on to a university education. Per capita gross national product had increased by a factor of 10, and there were also notable improvements in literacy and life expectancy. Of course, the intention behind some of these improvements was less than dispassionate. Sealed roads and bridges over rivers made the army more mobile. Nevertheless, per square kilometre and per capita Indonesia probably spent more money on roads and other infrastructure in East Timor than anywhere else in the archipelago. It's estimated the per capita expenditure in East Timor was three to six times as high as it was in Java, the heartland of Indonesia.

Ironically much of the Indonesian improvements have been lost since independence. Roads and bridges – apart from the main route along the north coast – have fallen into extreme disrepair. Public buildings such as schools have also suffered, and you can't go far outside Dili without seeing the spectre of endless legions of electricity poles stripped bare of wire. The chaos of the last few years coupled with a paucity of funds is responsible for much of the decline, although much was also destroyed by the departing Indonesians. And a lot of the electrical infrastructure was stolen and sold by East Timorese traders to neighbouring Indonesian islands.

of troop withdrawals and moves towards a truly civilian administration. While the army remained in East Timor in large numbers, and remained a major political force in Indonesia, it seemed that East Timor would never be granted independence. All that changed with Indonesian President Soeharto's fall from power in 1998.

## MAKING A BREAK

In 1997 the Asian financial crisis spilled over into Indonesia and pushed the Indonesian economy to the edge of bankruptcy. In six months in early 1998 the Indonesian rupiah crashed from 2500Rp per US dollar to 17,000Rp per US dollar. Rioting and looting swept the nation. The army proved totally ineffectual in asserting control, and there was widespread fear of a repeat of the nationwide bloodbath that preceded Soeharto's takeover in 1966.

Finally, on 21 May 1998, Soeharto stood down and Vice-President BJ Habibie was sworn in as the new president. Despite releasing political prisoners and promising free elections and a fight against corruption, Habibie was still widely seen as being too close to Soeharto and his cronies.

A principal part of the turmoil was the unrest that rippled across the separatist-minded regions of Aceh, Irian Jaya and, of course, East Timor. At first Habibie stood firm, refusing to grant further regional autonomy, let alone independence. Then in early 1999 the presi-

dent made an abrupt about-turn: Indonesia prepared a referendum, overseen by UN observers, with the choice of autonomy or independence. Despite these laudable moves by Jakarta, pro-integration militia launched a bloody campaign of intimidation, with the tacit backing of the army. In his discussions with Habibie the question of security had been raised more than once by Australian prime minister John Howard. If the vote was for independence, could the Indonesian military be counted on to hold the line, to be impartial, to maintain security and law and order? When the UN Mission in East Timor (Unamet) leader Ian Martin suggested that the mission should include a UN peacekeeping force, Indonesian General Wiranto's answer was yes.

The pro-Indonesia militias might have ruled the streets of East Timor, but the 30 August 1999 vote went 78.5% in favour of independence. After the ballot announcement on 4 September, celebrations quickly turned to despair. All over the country, but particularly in Dili and close to the West Timor border, the militias went on a rampage. Far from trying to control the anti-independence militias it was clear that the Indonesian army was actively supporting them. As Dili and other cities went up in flames, 200,000 Timorese fled into the mountains. It was a repeat of the bloody events that followed the Indonesian invasion 24 years earlier.

The soon-to-depart Indonesians were instituting a *pembumihangusan*, a scorched-earth policy. Before peace was restored three-quarters of the buildings in East Timor had been destroyed.

Writing at the time, Noam Chomsky said: 'The tragedy of East Timor has been one of the most awesome of this terrible century.'

Massacres of civilians took place in Liquiçá, Maliana, Oecussi and Lospalos, but it was in Suai, in the southwest corner of East Timor, that the worst killing took

place. After rampaging through the town, the Indonesian troops encircled hundreds of refugees in the church. When three priests came out to negotiate, they were murdered. In the ensuing attack on the church, Human Rights Watch estimates that up to 200 civilians were killed (out of some 1400 killed nationwide).

There was one major difference from the Indonesian onslaught in 1975. This time the international media was observing what was happening. Despite Indonesian insistence that

they could bring the chaos under control, on 12 September President Habibie reluctantly requested the UN intervene, and the International Force for East Timor (InterFET) was authorised by a UN Security Council Resolution three days later.

On 20 September Australian troops flew in from Darwin, Australia, to spearhead the InterFET peacekeepers. Eventually the international force would number 5000 from Australia and another 6000 from other countries. Almost immediately the UN troops succeeded in restoring peace, and within weeks the last of the 15,000 Indonesian troops departed. Remarkably, there had been no clashes between the Indonesian forces and the UN peacekeepers.

East Timor, however, was devastated. Dili's infrastructure had been shattered: there was no water, no electricity, no phone service. Schools and other buildings were destroyed and today there is no part of the country where the remains of this destruction can't be seen. You will also be hard-pressed to meet any East Timorese who cannot name a list of loved ones killed in the slaughter.

## INDEPENDENCE PAINS

Unamet was quickly replaced by another in a series of acronym-laden UN agencies, UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (Untaet), which was charged with leading East Timor to independence. Led by Brazilian Sergio Vieira de Mello, who would tragically die in an attack on the UN compound in Baghdad in 2003, the UN successfully handed government over to East Timor less than three years after the independence vote. Independence came, officially, on 20 May 2002 with the inauguration of Xanana Gusmão as president of the new nation and Mari Alkatiri, long-time leader of Fretilin returning from exile in Mozambique, as prime minister.

In December 2002 Dili was wracked by riots as years of poverty and frustration proved too much for the nascent democracy. The economy was in a shambles and people were ready for things to start improving – and fast. But without any viable industry and no employment potential East Timor was reliant almost entirely on foreign aid.

Only a small UN contingent remained in East Timor by mid-2005. As the number of outsiders shrunk, the challenges of creat-

ing a new nation virtually from scratch became all too apparent. Government factions squabbled while the enormous needs of the people festered. Meanwhile without a common Indonesian enemy, tensions simmered between various political and regional factions. Fretilin splintered and old regional (east versus west) animosities played out. Prime Minister Alkatiri sacked one-third of the army in March 2006, and in the ensuing months of rioting over 150,000 people fled political violence that destroyed thousands of homes.

Alfredo Reinado, a leader of the sacked troops, took to the hills and was blamed by opposing factions for instigating much of the violence. Efforts by UN and Australian security forces to track him down only caused more unrest.

Relative peace finally returned after public demonstrations, and the resignation from the government of Ramos-Horta, which forced Alkatiri to quit. Large international forces from the UN, Australia and other countries returned to ensure peace. Ramos-Horta was then appointed prime minister in July 2006. Meanwhile, Rogerio Lobato, brother of the resistance martyr, was booted from his job as the Fretilin interior minister and eventually was sentenced to over seven years in jail for his role inciting riots after Alkatiri's removal (he later fled East Timor for medical treatment).

That East Timor has accomplished so much in such little time is extraordinary. In 2002 it was still effectively a one-party nation under the Fretilin party, which had led the struggle for independence during the entire Indonesian occupation. After the UN backed away from its role propping up the government in 2005 it was natural that divisions would occur.

The significance of the elections held in 2007, in which the Fretilin monopoly was replaced by 14 political parties representing a broad spectrum of politics, cannot be stated strongly enough. Given the turmoil, many predicted that the elections would be a disaster. Yet a funny thing happened on the way to the riot: things went off pretty smoothly, mostly due to the determination of the Timorese people. A mere five years after independence, they turned out in droves to elect a president and parliament in polls that were remarkably trouble free.

After two rounds of elections, José Ramos-Horta was chosen as president by 70% of voters

## WHO'S WHO PART ONE

East Timor's leading political figures were all part of the independence movement during the years of Indonesian occupation. Many of these former colleagues-in-arms are now fierce political rivals with sharply differing views on the country's future course. See also p17

### Mari Alkatiri

In 1975, with the Indonesian invasion imminent, Mari Alkatiri and José Ramos-Horta flew to Darwin to seek foreign backing for their new nation. In fact they were on their way to nearly a quarter-century in exile. Alkatiri had been a founding member of ASDT, the political organisation that later changed its name to Fretilin. He headed up Fretilin from Maputo in Mozambique for the next quarter-century, but that was only a part-time occupation. His day job was as an academic.

In comparison to his fierce rival, the charismatic Xanana Gusmão, Alkatiri suffers in the popular imagination. His long exile in Africa simply doesn't compare to Gusmão's Jakarta incarceration, and he bears the additional burden of being a member of East Timor's tiny Muslim community, who trace their ancestry back to Arabic origins.

Alkatiri was prime minister in the first government after independence. However, he presided over an unwieldy collection of long-time Fretilin members and, as factions splintered, he seemed unable to provide solid leadership. The various crises of 2006 led to his resignation and replacement with Ramos-Horta. Out of power, he led the increasingly strident Fretilin party into the 2007 elections. Its numbers greatly shrunk by the emergence of other political parties and views, Fretilin won the most votes (29%) in the 2007 parliamentary election but was unable or unwilling to form a coalition to govern. Many criticised Alkatiri for his delayed calls for peace after Fretilin supporters rioted.

### Bishop Carlos Belo

Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo was born near Vemasse in 1948 and studied at a seminary in Dare in the hills above Dili. He was appointed head of East Timor's Catholic Church in 1983 after many years living abroad. At first the Indonesians approved of his appointment, thinking he would be easily manipulated, but Bishop Belo became virtually the only East Timorese able to speak out against Indonesian excesses from within the country.

In the ensuing years there were threats against his life, and he was constantly spied upon. He also became an unhappy witness to the assaults, murders and torture inflicted upon his people. In 1991 he sheltered protesters in his house after the Santa Cruz massacre, and in 1996 he shared the Nobel Peace Prize with the exiled José Ramos-Horta. In the upheavals following the 1999 independence referendum, his house was again a refuge for terrified Timorese, but he was eventually forced to flee, first from Dili to Baucau and then from East Timor to Australia. A few days later he returned to East Timor to lead the church in the new nation.

Many thought he would make an ideal first president at independence in 2002 but the years of struggle had taken their toll and he left the country for medical treatment. He resigned his post and today is a missionary in Mozambique.

in May 2007. One month later, parliamentary elections resulted in no party having a clear majority. Fretilin had the most votes but only received 29% of the vote. Xanana Gusmão's CNRT party got 24% of the vote with the rest of the count split between other parties. Eventually Gusmão was able to form a coalition with the other parties and was named prime minister, which infuriated Fretilin. In an all-too-familiar spectacle, Fretilin supporters rioted, causing damage in Dili and across the nation. Tens of thousands of people joined over 100,000 others living in camps.

Late in 2007 East Timor was making some progress towards normalcy and efforts were being made to get refugees to go home from the camps – no small feat given that more than 40% of the population lives on less than US50¢ per day and in the camps the rice has been free.

But tragedy again put East Timor in the headlines in February 2008, when Alfredo Reinado apparently led a group of his followers in a coup attempt. Ramos-Horta was shot several times as he returned from his usual early morning walk along Areia Branca Beach. Gusmão was in a motorcade that took gunfire but he was unhurt.

Details of exactly what happened were unclear. In gossipy Dili, stories abounded. 'What were Reinado's intentions?' was the main question. Answers were impossible, as he was killed at the scene by Ramos-Horta's security forces. Gusmão was critically wounded and was flown to a hospital in Darwin, Australia, where doctors saved his life, although he remained in critical condition for weeks.

#### READING UP – SHAKEDOWN

*Shakedown: Australia's Grab for Timor Oil* by Paul Cleary details the hard-nosed efforts by the Howard government to force East Timor to sign away oil and gas rights in the Timor Sea to Australia for a song. Among the memorable scenes in the book are Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs Alexander Downer pounding the table during negotiations and telling the East Timorese: 'we're a rich country, we can sit this out for 30, 40, 50 years'. Meanwhile, Alkatiri and other members of the Timorese negotiating team skulked around Canberra's gardens to discuss matters, fearing their mobile phones and rooms were bugged.

If there was a bright spot to this disaster, it was that the country remained mostly calm in the days after the shootings. The great popularity of Ramos-Horta helped undercut any popular support for Reinado. In the weeks that followed, security in the country was stepped up with the arrival of more Australian and UN forces, while key Reinado followers began turning themselves in. For his part, Ramos-Horta forgave Reinado and asked that his family be cared for by the government.

#### THE FUTURE

East Timor will continue to rely on foreign money as it struggles to establish an autonomous and viable economy.

Gas and oil deposits in the Timor Sea provide the main potential for East Timor's economy to develop without the assistance of foreign aid. The Bayu-Undan oilfield is in 80m-deep water about 250km southwest of Suai and about 500km northwest of Darwin. The field is estimated to have about 400 million barrels of oil and 3.4 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. The nearby Sunrise Field has even more.

Proud of its image as a benefactor of East Timor, Australia did not negotiate with the tiny country over revenues from the gas and oil fields. Through outright bullying (see left), the Howard government tried to keep payments to one of the world's poorest countries negligible. Only perseverance on the part of the Timorese won them an agreement that will provide US\$4 billion in the next few years and much more thereafter.

High in the hills above Dili is another resource: coffee. Some 250,000 people work (most only seasonally) to produce the country's much prized arabica beans, noted for their cocoa and vanilla characters. Shade-grown and mostly organic (because few can afford fertilisers and pesticides), Timorese coffee is prized by companies like Starbucks, and production is increasing.

Tourism has great potential for East Timor's economy, especially for ecotourism and adventure travel. A perception of stability is what is most needed for numbers to grow beyond the 1500 people who visit each year.

The assassination attempts of 2008 underscored the need for an international security contingent for years to come. The attacks also delayed yet again the government's efforts to begin tackling the major challenges in education, food, roads and more.

#### WHO'S WHO PART TWO

##### Xanana Gusmão

Independent East Timor's first president, the charismatic Xanana Gusmão, was a leader of the long independence struggle against Indonesia. The son of a schoolteacher, he was born in 1946 in the village of Manatuto, midway between Dili and Baucau. Gusmão at first was schooled by the Jesuits but left to work in the Portuguese administration and then joined the Portuguese army, where he served for three years.

In 1974, when it became evident that Portugal would quit the country, Gusmão joined Fretilin and retreated to the interior when the Indonesians invaded in 1975. After the death of Nicolau Lobato in 1978, he became head of the party and then commander-in-chief of Falantil, the military wing of Fretilin, in 1981. The guerrilla struggle against Indonesia ground on and on until a disaster in 1992. Gusmão was captured, taken to Jakarta and tried, and sentenced to life imprisonment, later commuted to 20 years.

The Jakarta prison soon proved to be a much more effective base than the forests of East Timor. His writings were smuggled out of jail, often by Indonesians sympathetic to the East Timorese cause, and in 1997 President Nelson Mandela of South Africa met with Gusmão. In February 1999, soon after Indonesian president Habibie announced plans for a referendum, Gusmão was transferred from jail to house arrest in Jakarta, and on 4 September was freed and returned to his country.

In the 2002 elections Gusmão was elected overwhelmingly. His second wife, Australian Kirsty Sword, was a conduit between Gusmão and the outside world during his imprisonment in Jakarta. During his time as president, Gusmão advocated an increasingly pragmatic approach to East Timor's relations with its neighbours Indonesia and Australia. For him the violent struggles of the past were over and, with his close ally José Ramos-Horta, he advocated policies that would grow the economy and spur investment. This caused a break with Fretilin, which favoured more radical social policies, and Gusmão became leader of the CNRT party. Although the party finished second in the 2007 parliamentary elections, Gusmão formed a majority coalition, which Ramos-Horta was only too happy to have form a government.

Gusmão survived the coup attempt in February 2008 unscathed (although his family had to hide under a bed in their compound) and impressed many by showing a firm hand in the days that followed.

##### José Ramos-Horta

East Timor's urbane, educated and polished Nobel Peace Prize-winning president was born in Dili in 1949. His mother was Timorese and his father Portuguese. The young Ramos-Horta worked as a journalist and became actively involved in raising Timorese political awareness, for which he was rewarded by the Portuguese with two years of exile to Africa. Once back in East Timor he became Fretilin's foreign minister when independence was declared in 1975. He was on a flight to New York to push his country's case before the UN when the Indonesian invasion took place.

For the next 20 years Ramos-Horta, whose sister and three brothers died during the long struggle with Indonesia, wandered the world as the number-one spokesperson for East Timor's independence.

Ramos-Horta was foreign minister in the first government after independence but resigned in protest over Alkatiri's role in the 2006 political crisis. He was subsequently named prime minister. He finished second in the first round of the 2007 presidential election but easily beat the Fretilin candidate in the run-off. A close ally of Gusmão, Ramos-Horta favours pragmatic politics and development in order to secure East Timor's future. Famously single, he has commented that all the women of East Timor could be his first ladies. In 1996 he shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Bishop Belo.

Many wondered if Ramos-Horta's near death in the February 2008 assassination attempt would alter his very-public persona, which spurned personal security – he could often be seen riding his bike around Dili. However, after the shooting he burnished his image by offering forgiveness to those responsible.

# The Culture

## THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

East Timorese are fiercely proud of their independence and very aware of how hard they've had to fight for it. They are also quite stoic in the face of adversity, something honed through decades of tragedy.

In many ways the population has been awakened to the possibilities ahead and that can explain some of the frequent internal upheavals. Without a common enemy in the form of the Indonesians, all manner of factions are vying for their place in the new East Timor. Old scores are being settled and areas of power and influence carved out. People are not hesitant to protest perceived wrongs and this has led to frequent clashes in Dili and elsewhere, especially in old Fretilin strongholds.

Despite the chaotic images shown in news reports, the Timorese are some of the friendliest people you will encounter. Normally polite in a simple way, you'll soon get hand fatigue from all the waving you'll be doing. Language issues aside, the Timorese are gregarious; in a nation this small, everybody seems to have one degree of separation.

There is a long memory but the Portuguese from colonial times are fading from consciousness, as are the Japanese from the war. It's much more complex regarding Indonesia: most adults in the country were educated in Indonesian-run schools and speak the language. And while almost everybody had a loved one killed during the occupation, many

others married Indonesians sympathetic to the Timorese cause.

Australia also poses a complex question. If any country could have stood up for East Timor's right to self-determination back in 1975 – but didn't – it was Australia. And Fretilin and others resent perceived Australian meddling in local affairs. Yet Australia's local importance, its leading role in trying to maintain peace from 1999 and the many Australians with a direct interest in, and friendship towards, East Timor are overwhelming.

Finally, many could learn lessons about stress reduction from the Timorese, who don't expect things to work very well and are very adept at patiently adapting to the myriad challenges faced daily.

## LIFESTYLE

For most people in East Timor the lifestyle now is what it's always been: subsistence. What you grow (or catch) is what you eat. Hopefully there's enough of it not only to keep you and your family alive but also to sell or trade. As you travel around the country, you'll see homes and villages unchanged for hundreds of years. Take away the T-shirts and the scenes are timeless. In the poorest areas, homes are built of simple materials, with not even corrugated metal or sheets of plastic in evidence. Animals such as pigs and goats share shelter from the rain with their owners. Incomes for the 75% of Timorese

## EAST TIMORESE CUSTOMS

Hospitality is important to the East Timorese. If you're offered food or drink when you meet somebody, it's important to at least taste it, but always wait for your host to take the first sip or bite. As a result of the long Portuguese period, shaking hands is expected. Women often cheek or air kiss, usually on both sides of the face. It's good form to greet others you pass on the street. And do as your mother once said: don't put your feet up on anything.

Always ask before taking photos or video of people, but usually the East Timorese are quite happy to be photographed – a sign that East Timor is not overrun with tourists. Say '*Bele?*' ('May I?' in Tetun) and you'll likely get a smiling '*bele, bele*' in response, which means 'yes, yes' in context. '*Labele*' would mean no and that the photo is taboo.

East Timor is a conservative, largely traditional culture with strong Christian values. Elders and church and community leaders are treated with deference. As a general rule, Christian names are only used among close acquaintances. Otherwise, use *Senhor*, *Senhora* or *Senhorina*.

## BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR WOMEN

As in most cultures, women are the backbone of East Timorese society. Managing their often huge broods while seeing to food and shelter is a constant challenge. That so many are also widows from the upheavals of the last 35 years is only another complication.

The Alola Foundation ([www.alolafoundation.org](http://www.alolafoundation.org)) is a large and influential organisation for women based in Dili. Its clout and commitment comes in no small part from its founder, Kirsty Sword Gusmão, the wife of Xanana and the former first lady of the country.

The Foundation's goals are many: education for women and their children, economic freedom for Timorese families, prevention of domestic abuse and much more. It has been a strident voice urging women to get involved in their country's future through political action and voting, and it has lobbied the government to provide for the many widows and victims of sexual and physical abuse resulting from the Indonesian occupation and the years since.

'Women are the glue in the life of families and communities in East Timor, and they are a priceless and underutilised resource,' says Gusmão. She adds: 'They have contributions to make in so many areas of the life of a nation and yet, unequal access to educational and employment opportunities, their financial dependence on men and traditional social and religious norms mean that the country too often fails to benefit from the skills, wisdom and nurturing instinct of women and girls.'

The foundation has large and growing staff, is active across the nation and has a long list of international donors. It also has an excellent shop selling crafts and *tais* (weaving) produced by local women (see p49 for details).

living off the land are far less than the national average of US\$800 a year; East Timor is Asia's poorest country.

It's life on the edge as one dry year can mean disaster. Food shortages are regular and, although you won't see anything close to the famines seen elsewhere, there's not much extra to go around. The UN and other organisations regularly import staples such as rice for distribution in rural areas.

Most towns and villages are simple affairs. A small market area and a few basic shops huddle near the ubiquitous church. Sundays are taken seriously and attending Mass is the social event of the week.

In Dili and, to a much lesser extent, Baucau there's a working class, thanks to government jobs and work with NGOs and the UN. In fact when international groups are busy there can be a shortage of people with professional and linguistic skills. Even drivers may find themselves with plenty of work and this is the one part of the country where you'll find consumer goods for sale. Unlike much of the rest of Asia, however, even Dili's streets are free of scooters and motorcycles – modes of transport beyond the reach of almost everyone. As elsewhere, life revolves around families and there is little social life outside the home or church. Weekend buses are packed with people going to other villages for family gatherings.

Unemployment is a permanent problem for many. Refugees from the countryside and scores of people with little education far outweigh even the available number of menial jobs. As if to prove every old conservative bromide, idle hands are the devil's tool, and the large numbers of idle young men and boys are responsible for much of the mischief and worse that occurs. At times content to play guitars and drink, at other times these bands of youths form angry, rock-throwing mobs. Many are in gangs prosaically named 'martial arts groups'. These are not the kimono-clad, brick-choppers you might imagine but rather they closely resemble gangs found elsewhere in the world. With lurid names taken from violent movies and rap songs, the gangs act out on the frustration felt by many. Offering its young people hope for the future through jobs, development and education is just another item on East Timor's long to-do list.

Literacy hovers at around 50%, with over 75% of children now attending primary school. The government has made education a priority, especially when the oil money starts rolling in.

## POPULATION

East Timor has at least a dozen indigenous groups. The largest of these groups, the Tetun people (about 25% of the population), live

around Suai, Dili and Viqueque, as well as in West Timor. The next largest group (around 10% of the population) are the Mambai, who live in the mountains of Maubisse, Ainaro and Same. Other groups each account for 5% or less of the population. The Kemak live in the Ermera and Bobonaro districts around Maliana. The Bunak also live in Bobonaro and their territory extends into West Timor and the Suai area. The Fataluku people are famous for their high-peaked houses in the Lautem district around Lospalos. More groups are scattered among the interior mountains.

The Dawan and Tetun languages are related to other Austronesian languages in western Indonesia, from where these primarily Malay people migrated. However, the population of the whole island of Timor is of very mixed descent, with a strong Papuan influence. This is particularly true of East Timor, where many people have noticeably Melanesian features. Many of the East Timorese languages are of the Trans-New Guinea family, related to those of Maluku and Irian Jaya to the northeast. The ethnic diversity is much greater in East Timor than in West Timor.

East Timor's population has several times suffered disastrous declines. A 1938 survey calculated the population at 480,000, but 10 years later the population was only 425,000. This massive drop was due to the deaths of many thousands of Timorese during the 1942–45 Japanese occupation of WWII. By 1975 the population was up to nearly 700,000, only to again fall disastrously with the Indonesian occupation. Some estimates for this period count as many as 200,000 deaths, many of them from starvation when people

were moved off their land or were unable to plant their crops due to the ongoing struggle between the Indonesian military and the East Timorese resistance forces. There were, again, considerable numbers of deaths during the 1999 Indonesian withdrawal.

A young country with a booming birth rate, life expectancy for East Timorese males is about 64 years (compared to Australia's 78); it's somewhat more for females. Women give birth on average to over seven children, one of the highest rates in the world. The population could easily double in the next decade, exacerbating the country's many challenges.

## MEDIA

The *Timor Post* and the *Suara Timor Lorosae* are daily local newspapers, mainly in Indonesian but with some news in Tetun. They're sold by street vendors in Dili. Since the newspapers are barely distributed outside Dili, they have comparatively little influence in the country and, as one local journalist told us, are not exactly paragons of journalism. Newspapers and magazines from outside the country are not available.

Far and away the most important branch of media is radio, with a national broadcaster Radio de Timor Leste (RTL) and a host of community stations. The Catholic Church's very popular radio station, Radio Timor Kmanek (RTK), is the only community station that was on the air before the 1999 referendum. It has since been joined by more than a dozen other stations either in local communities or in Dili. The stations are funded by local communities supported by various aid agencies, NGOs and churches. There is virtually no advertising revenue available in East Timor to fund commercial radio stations. A handful of stations repeat Australian and Portuguese radio broadcasts.

The national public TV station is Televisao de Timor Leste (TVTL), which produces a small amount of local content, mostly musical performances of pop tunes that are popular locally. Due to a lack of electricity and the cost of TVs, the station is little seen outside Dili, thus denying the country its nightly newscast, which steadfastly expands its airtime to present any speech given by a local politico.

## RELIGION

In a development familiar to people who watched places like Poland during the Communist era, the Catholic Church greatly increased its importance during the Indonesian occupation. Under the Portuguese the country was Christian and Catholic, but religion was part of the colonial structure, not part of people's local lives. That all changed under Indonesian rule. For a start Indonesia required the East Timorese to declare their religious affiliations, in part to reveal who was atheist and hence likely to be communist. That pushed a large part of the population to declare their Catholicism. At the same time the Catholic Church became a focus of East Timorese aspirations, a position underlined by Bishop Belo's 1996 Nobel Peace Prize.

Today it's estimated that about 90% of the East Timorese population is Catholic. The remainder are Protestant, Muslim and Buddhist, although animism still underlies much of East Timor's Christianity. Indigenous religions revolved around an earth mother, from whom all humans are born and to whom they return after death, and her male counterpart, the god of the sky or sun. These were accompanied by a complex world of ancestor, nature and evil spirits. The *matan do'ok* (medicine man) is the village mediator with the spirits, and he can divine the future, cure illness and ward off evil spirits. The *macair lulik* is the chief priest attached to the royal courts – as well as bringing rain, in times past he officiated over war rituals that ensured the bravery of the warriors and the collection of many heads. Many people believe in various forms of black magic and it's not uncommon for people to wish evil spells upon their rivals.

## ARTS

Traditional arts have taken a beating during the last few decades, but the Timorese are a creative lot and arts are beginning a recovery, particularly among young people. Many take their inspiration from public figures such as Xanana Gusmão, who outside of politics is a noted author, poet and painter.

One local art form, the beautiful weaving known as *tais*, survived recent history and is very popular with those looking for something to take home from East Timor as well as with serious collectors.

## Tais

*Tais* is the Tetun word for weaving, and East Timor's beautiful *tais* are much prized. Traditionally, women weave *tais* on simple backstrap looms. The patterns are produced by wrapping sections of the vertical threads in string before the dyeing process. This keeps the dye off the thread and, like the Indonesian *ikat* process, where threads are dyed prior to weaving, produces the pattern after the dyed threads are woven into the finished *tais*. Various regions of East Timor have their own distinct *tais* styles with designs and dye colours only found in that area. An expert can instantly pinpoint where a particular pattern originates.

*Tais* are woven as long fringed strips for use as shawls, tablecloths, baby slings, blankets or scarfs. A *mane tais* for a man is used like a sarong, while a *feto tais* for a woman is sewn into a tube and worn like a dress. A *salendang* is a *tais* woven as a sash.

*Tais* were used in ritual exchanges and in burial ceremonies, and these important uses ensured that expert weavers attained great importance in their local communities. During the Portuguese era, the production of *tais* was seen as an old, traditional, backward (*astrado*) symbol of Timorese life. In the 1950s some Portuguese priests ordered mass burnings of ritual *tais*. *Tais* production actually increased during the Indonesian era. Textiles and weaving have always been important arts in Indonesia, and many Indonesian military personnel took *tais* back with them when they departed East Timor. Some pieces were marked as *kenang kenangan Timor Timur* (souvenir of East Timor).

A single *tais* might take a woman up to six months to produce. Although Western collectors are taking an interest in *tais*, they remain a family activity for the East Timorese. Traditionally, a woman was expected to bring a selection of her own work to her marriage, like a dowry. Because weaving *tais* has traditionally been women's work, aid organisations have been encouraging the development of *tais* weaving, distribution and sales. Producing *tais* on the traditional backstrap looms is time-consuming and limits the dimensions of pieces. Now, even in remote villages, you'll find busy communal looms.

In Dili and places like Com where there's a trickle of tourists, women will stop you in the street to show you their *tais*. Most are genuine but quality can vary greatly. Worse, a

### NAME THAT COUNTRY

East Timor is still most commonly used as the country's name in the English-speaking West. However the Portuguese version of East Timor, Timor-Leste, is gaining widespread use and is the name used in UN English-language references. It's the one favoured by the government and many of the English-speaking expats and NGOs living in Dili.

You'll also see Timor Lorosae (also Loro Sa'e and Loro Sae), which can be translated as 'Timor Where the Sun Rises' in Tetun.

few faux *tais* have been noted; imported – like rice – from China. See p49 for recommended places to buy *tais*.

The website [www.etimortais.org](http://www.etimortais.org) has information about traditional *tais* and a 'virtual museum' of pieces from Ainaro, Bobonaro, Ermera, Lospalos, Oecussi and Suai.

### Dance & Music

Bits of rock, country, hip-hop, rap and even reggae can all be heard in East Timor's modern music. Guitars are popular and if there were garages there would be a lot of garage bands, especially in Dili. Rather you might say there are lots of under-tree bands across the country.

History and current events are at the heart of many lyrics. Some bands have become fairly well known outside East Timor, most notably the Dili Allstars (see below). The group 5 Do Oriente fled to the hills after the Indonesian invasion and returned to Dili in 1978 to give a concert. Three of the five members disappeared immediately thereafter and were never heard from again. Today founder Toto Lebre leads a new group of musicians who perform traditional chants, revolutionary songs and Portuguese-accented ballads. Ego Lemos is

a Dili-based musician who regularly tours Australia. Groups like Sincustic can be heard in some Dili bars (see p48 for details).

No important East Timorese social gathering is complete without a band performing the types of cover songs that have been the staple of legions of globe-trotting Filipino bands to the north. Usually a generator will be found for the synthesizer and the ballads can continue long into the night.

Should you stumble upon a festival featuring traditional dancing and music, you are in for a rare treat. The *likurai* was primarily a Tetun dance used to welcome warriors returning from battle. Women danced with a small drum (*babadok*) tucked under their arms, and circled the village compound where heads taken in battle were displayed. Today it is performed by unmarried women as a courtship dance. The *tebedai* dance is a circle dance performed throughout Timor, and it is accompanied by a drum.

### Architecture

The traditional houses of East Timor vary from the large conical Bunak houses (*deuhoto*) in the west to the unique and iconic Fataluku houses in the east. The tall, elongated Fataluku

### COCKFIGHTING

Partly a gambling event, cockfighting is probably East Timor's *numero uno* spectator sport. Fighting cocks are prized pets, cared for, lovingly groomed and fussed over, raised for their brief moment of death or glory. You'll see them tethered by the roadside, where passing traffic and general activity will entertain them, or you might see them gently sparring in practise sessions where their fighting qualities are studied and the betting odds fine-tuned before the next big event. Beautifully crafted baskets are sometimes used to transport fighting cocks to events; their tail feathers stream out the back and a carry handle on top makes them easy to transport.

When their big day arrives, a razor-sharp metal spur is tied to one leg, and the opponents are pushed up against each other and teased to stir up their anger. Meanwhile the owners and spectators shout bets as the noise builds before the birds are released. Once they're let go, the action can be over in seconds: one bird jumps above the other and kicks out, the blade does its dirty work and in a scatter of blood and feathers the loser goes down or limps off in disgrace. It's quite brutal and not palatable to many Westerners but it's a key part of social life here, as it is across Indonesia and other parts of Asia.

houses have stilts supporting a main living room and are topped by a high, tapering thatched roof. A few have been built for display purposes but you'll find many still in use on the road to Tutuala and in the region of Lautem and Lospalos (see p60 for details).

In Oecussi the hills are dotted with the traditional *lopo* and *ume kebubu* houses of the Dawan people, while all the way from Dili to the south coast you'll find the circular houses and conical roofs of the Mambai people. In Maliana, capital of the Bobonaro district and home to the Kemak people, you'll see rectangular stilt houses.

### Arts & Crafts

Basket weaving is an important skill. Along the coast road between Dili and Manatuto village, craft workers hang their work out by the roadside to sell. Manatuto is also noted for its pottery work. On Atauro Island, directly north of Dili, a number of villages have their own distinct crafts, including wood carving and basket work.

See p42 for details of Arte Moris, an idiosyncratic and intriguing art school, gallery and social centre for a new generation of Timorese artists. It's home to the performance group Bibi Bulak, among others.

### EAST TIMORESE MUSIC *Gil Santos*

East Timor's turbulent history and proud traditions are reflected in its multilayered music. Almost 450 years of foreign occupation have brought influences from Europe, North and South America, Asia, Africa and the South Pacific.

Timorese traditional music is known as *tebe* or *tebe-dai*. It is widely played, and is little changed from pre-occupation times. In 1974, during the decolonisation from Portuguese rule, traditional music was used to raise political and social awareness. *Tebe-dai* is performed on ceremonial occasions such as government or church events, the opening of *uma lulik* (traditional sacred houses), the rice harvest and to receive foreign dignitaries.

The second generation of East Timorese music is *koremotan*. It is strongly influenced by country and western, and Portuguese folk. Groups of five to nine musicians sing and play violin, acoustic bass and guitar, banjo or mandolin and a drum. It is mainly performed at *koremotan* parties, although sometimes you'll see it at concerts or on TV. Well-known bands performing *koremotan* are the Smith Bothers and Estrela do Mar (fronted by the legendary Chico Mau-Lohi).

The third generation of music is contemporary East Timorese rock, which displays influences as diverse as rock and roll, country, blues, reggae, African music, Asian ballads, and just about everything ranging from classical music to heavy metal.

There are also individual artists who over the years have been very influential. Their work is best described as Indonesian ballads sung in Tetun. They include Anito Matus, Tony Pereira, Helder (also known as Alele) and Aida Soares. Your best chance of seeing them play is at a wedding or a private function – see if you can invite yourself along to join the celebrations.

*Gil Santos is an East Timorese musician and political activist. He's one of the founders of one of East Timor's best-known contemporary bands, the Dili Allstars ([www.diliallstars.com](http://www.diliallstars.com)), who regularly tour Australia and Europe.*



# Environment

East Timor can seem like a wild, environmental paradise. But looks can be deceiving. The thin population in many areas makes it seem almost untouched, but except for some remnants of rainforest in the east, much of the country has been logged at one time or another. The rugged mountainous landscape is beautiful to the beholder but a frustration to the farmer. Almost half of East Timor's land has a slope of 40 degrees or greater, which puts much pressure on the flatter land to produce crops.

East Timor's offshore reefs are rightly vaunted and remarkably untouched. Inland, the pressures of centuries of subsistence living mean that the country is not known for being home to any large mammals. However, in the air there are hundreds of bird species, many not yet fully studied.

## THE LAND

Timor is less than 400km north of Australia, separated from that continent by the Timor Sea. To the northwest lie the Indonesian islands of Flores, Solor, Adonara, Lomblen, Pantar and Alor, separated by as little as 50km of the Sawu Sea, while to the northeast the Indonesian islands of Kisar and Wetar are separated from Timor by the Wetar Strait. Wetar is only 18km northeast of Atauro.

The total area of East Timor is 15,007 sq km. That figure includes the completely separate enclave of Oecussi (about 800 sq km) on the north coast of West Timor, the island of Atauro (140 sq km), just 30km north of Dili, and tiny Jaco Island (8 sq km), just a stone's throw off the extreme eastern tip of Timor.

The island of Timor is very different from the other islands of Nusa Tenggara, the chain of Indonesian islands running west from Timor to Bali. The line of volcanoes known as the inner Banda Arc, which runs the length of the Indonesian archipelago from Sumatra to Flores (the next island west of Timor), skirts Timor and continues north to the islands of Maluku. Timor itself is not volcanic in origin, but Atauro Island is part of the inner Banda Arc, and its higher peaks were formed by submarine volcanic activity.

Timor is part of the Australian continental shelf. The 'Timor Trough' to the south of the island is a buckle or fold of the Australian tectonic plate caused by the island of Timor being pushed up as it slides over the Eurasian plate to the north of the island. These technicalities are all part of the continuing disagreement over Timor Sea oil and gas deposits. Parts of Timor emerged from the ocean up to 40 million years ago, but the island fully emerged only four million years ago, and is therefore composed mainly of marine sediment, principally limestone. Even Timor's highest peaks are home to marine fossils. Collision with the Banda Trench to the north resulted in a rapid uplift in the centre of the island, producing a significant mountain range that continues to grow. The highest mountains in Timor are much higher than anywhere in Australia, for instance.

Apart from the lowland hills in the southwest around Kupang in Indonesian West Timor, rugged mountains run the length of the island. Several peaks are higher than 2000m, the highest being Mt Ramelau (Gunung Tatamailau, 2963m) in the western part of East Timor near Maubisse. The highest peak in the eastern part of East Timor is Mt Matebian (Gunung Malobu, 2315m), southeast of Baucau. On the south side of East Timor the coastal plains are 20km to 30km wide, whereas on the north side they are relatively narrow with many stretches of coastline where the mountains fall directly into the sea. Although there are no major highland valleys, there are stretches of highland plains like the perched plain where the Baucau airport was built, just west of Baucau. There are similar plains around Lospalos and the fertile rice-growing region around Maliana.

Many of the rivers, which comprise broad-braided channels, completely dry up in the dry season, then turn into temporary raging torrents, flash-flooding after heavy rain. Three of the main permanent rivers flow into the sea on the north coast of East Timor. The Laçlo reaches the sea just west of Manatuto, the Loes (called Marobo further upstream) enters the sea between Maubara and Atabae, and the Seical originates from Mt Matebian and ar-

rives at the sea just west of Baucau. Many of the south-coast rivers have huge floodplains, making them very difficult to cross during the wet season.

The only lake of any size is Ira Lalaro towards the east end of the island. The lake appears to have changed considerably in size over the years, perhaps even drying up completely, but remarkably little is known about its history. East Timor also has many springs, including those in the Baucau area and Uato Carbau. Hot springs are present on Atauro Island, near Bobonaro and south of Baucau.

Rocky, limestone soils combined with the steep nature of the topography and low, sporadic rainfall make agriculture difficult, resulting in food and water shortages, particularly during the dry season. The dry north coast is very barren in the dry season when the winds from Australia are blocked by the mountains. But Timor has many microsystems, and the central mountains range from dry rocky hills to thickly forested peaks. As you cross over to the southern coastal plain, the countryside is generally lush with a diversity of landforms and vegetation types.

## WILDLIFE

East Timor is squarely in the area known as Wallacea, a kind of crossover zone between Asian and Australian fauna and flora, and one of the most biologically distinctive areas on earth. Originally the Wallace Line, the dividing line drawn by the deep submarine trench between Bali and Lombok, was proposed by Sir Alfred Russel Wallace in 1859 as a clear line separating the Asian zone from the Australian one. Later it was realised that there is considerable overlap between the two zones, and the Wallacea region was redefined. For example, marsupials, the most iconic Australian mammals, are found in Timor but so are monkeys, which are common in Asia but not found at all in Australia.

East Timor's curious mix of Asian and Australian species is characteristic of Wallacea. The island's isolation has resulted in a number of endemic species. In general the wildlife is poorly known. New species will be discovered and described in the future as scientific effort increases. Unfortunately population pressures and periods of deprivation during WWII and then during the independence struggle have had a significant impact on the island's wildlife, so the survival of many

species is threatened. The numbers of mammals and reptiles in the wild are limited, as are the opportunities for spotting them. Birds are easier to see.

## Animals

### MAMMALS

Cave deposits reveal that Timor once boasted the most amazing rat fauna on earth, including a 7kg giant rat species, but the introduction of such species as deer, monkeys, wild pigs, civets and other rats (not to mention humans!) might be linked to their demise. Native mammals include more than 30 bats, shrews and at least two rats. The 10 or so species of fruit bats are important in dispersing the seeds of forest trees.

The spotted cuscus is a tree-dwelling marsupial principally found on the Cape York Peninsula of northern Australia and on the islands of New Guinea and Maluku. The animal's perpetually startled look comes from its large circular eyes, ideally configured for its nocturnal lifestyle. Cuscus move through the trees with slow deliberateness, using their prehensile tail for extra security by wrapping it around branches. Although the animal's diet is mainly fruit and leaves, they will also eat birds, bird eggs, insects and lizards. They are solitary animals; encounters between cuscus usually result in noisy squabbles and even outright fights. Usually it is only males that sport the distinctive spotted coat. The cuscus is rather like a tropical version of the possums common in the southern states of Australia. Unfortunately for the cuscus, for the Timorese it's usually associated with one adjective: delicious. Along with the rusa deer, cuscus are eagerly pursued by local hunters, and are most often observed dead, hanging on the end of a stick on their final journey home to the cooking pot!

Domestic animals include water buffalo, cattle, horse, pigs, goats, chickens, ducks, dogs, cats and the odd sheep. You're most likely to spot geckos, monkeys (if you're lucky), domestic animals and perhaps deer, which are very shy.

### REPTILES

East Timor has a number of striking reptiles, including the tokay gecko (one of the largest in the world). The reticulated python reaches 8m to 9m in length and is the world's longest snake. There is a host of small native geckos,

skinks and other snakes, including the dangerous and beautiful green pit viper. One species of dragon lizard has even learned to fly (or at least to glide for 30m to 50m between trees).

Remarkably, estuarine crocodiles, which play a key role in Timor's creation myths and are traditionally considered to be ancestors, have managed to survive in some coastal habitats despite human population pressures. It's said there are crocodiles in Lake Ira Lalaro, but if they do exist, it's unclear what type they are. There's a lot of exaggerated talk about crocodiles in East Timor (see p76).

A number of species of sea turtles come ashore on East Timor to lay their eggs, particularly in the far east.

## BIRDS

East Timor has more than 240 species of birds, including at least 31 species occurring only on Timor and neighbouring islands. Seven species are endemic to Timor, but more are certain to be added as further research is carried out. The Lautem district at the eastern end of the island is particularly noted for its bird life, along with a strange mix of Australian, Asian and Wallacean species. What better place to see Australian honeyeaters, lorikeets and cockatoos with Asian sunbirds, shrikes and flycatchers, and Wallacean fruit doves and flowerpeckers? The buff-banded thick-knee warbler is unique to Timor; its ancestors are thought to have come from islands east of Papua New Guinea.

Because East Timor has been relatively closed off from the outside world for so long, bird-watchers are vitally interested in the country's bird life. Recent studies have revealed that East Timor has relatively abundant numbers of five globally threatened pigeon species: the yellow-crested cockatoo, the Timor green pigeon, the Timor imperial pigeon, the black cuckoo dove and the Timor sparrow. East Timor is the best place in the world to see these species. The Timor sparrow is also classified as vulnerable, and the critically endangered yellow-crested cockatoo is one of the rarest birds in the world.

The capture of birds for sale to foreigners and locals alike is a serious problem. For particular species, capture for sale is prohibited and the fines are hefty. However, with limited resources, enforcing the regulations is a challenge.

The Threatened Birds of Asia website ([www.rdb.or.id](http://www.rdb.or.id); look for Timor-Leste in the list of countries) gives information on East Timor's threatened species. East Timor's official tourism website ([www.turismotimorleste.com/en/activities/birdwatching](http://www.turismotimorleste.com/en/activities/birdwatching)) has an excellent illustrated guide to local birds by noted ornithologist Colin Trainor.

## MARINE LIFE

In contrast to the severe impact humans have had on East Timor's flora and land fauna, the picture is much better in the surrounding seas. For a variety of reasons, including the island's lack of natural harbours, the Timorese have never been great fishers, even during food shortages. Lack of interest in fishing has, until recently at least, spared East Timor from the extremely destructive fishing practices, such as dynamite and poison fishing, that have devastated reef areas in other parts of Southeast Asia. Unfortunately, dynamite fishing has become much more common. Foreign visitors like to eat fish, and pay well for it, so the East Timorese provide it.

As a result of the lack of exploitation, scuba divers find untouched coral reefs and diverse and prolific marine life. East Timor's coral reefs are home to the high diversity of marine life common on other tropical reefs around the world. Manta rays and whale sharks are sometimes encountered along the north coast. Marine mammals include a variety of dolphins and whales; divers going out to Atauro Island may encounter large groups of dolphins and pilot whales as they cross the strait between Dili and Atauro.

One delightful surprise for many a diver or shore-watcher are the dugongs that can be found in marshy areas of Atauro Island and the East Timor coast. Weighing up to 300kg and measuring up to 3m in length, these graceful, slow-moving creatures feed on sea grass, all but oblivious to activities around them.

There's a big difference between the sea off the north and south coasts. Along the north coast the sea tends to be more placid, and there are far more reef areas. All the scuba diving at present takes place off the north coast. The south coast has less protective reef, and the seas tend to be wilder. Intrepid surfers have a chance to be explorers here.

## Plants

Although there has been massive deforestation, East Timor is climatically in the dry tropics, like much of neighbouring northern Australia, and it's unlikely that the island was densely forested before human activity had a serious impact. The vegetation pattern always varied widely from the damper low-lying southern plains to the moist and cool highlands and then down to the drier savannah vegetation of the north coast. Visitors commented about the deforestation in the hills around Dili two centuries ago, and today it certainly looks weedy, over-burnt and eroded. Tropical forest has been reduced to small patches. The best examples of evergreen forest and tropical dry forest are to be found in Lautem district.

Mangroves, an important habitat for wildlife, grow patchily all along the north coast and occur on the south coast also. Elsewhere there are differences in the flora between the north and south coast, in the eastern region of the country compared to elsewhere, and in the mountain areas. The area north of the central mountains is dominated by dry land species, like the locally common eucalypt, the Timor white gum (*Eucalyptus alba*) and the tamarind tree (*Tamarindus indicus*). Some parts of northern East Timor look remarkably like northern Australia. The moister southern area and the eastern part of the country have a wider variety of plant species, including commercially valuable woods like teak. The uplands and mountain areas are dominated by more eucalyptus species (including *urophylla*, a species that doesn't occur in Australia) and ferns. Thickets and plantations of palm trees, such as the *lontar* or *rontal* and *gebang* palm, dominate in some dry coastal regions.

## SANDALWOOD

For the Portuguese the fragrant sandalwood tree (*Santalum alba*, family *Santalaceae*) was one of Timor's prime attractions, and the colonists' ruthless exploitation of the once plentiful tree has set the pattern for the island's ecological devastation. There are about 10 species of *Santalum* in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific.

At the time of the colonial power's first arrival in Timor, the tree was still plentiful, even though it had already been traded by the Timorese for hundreds of years. Within

a couple of centuries of colonisation it had all but disappeared.

Sandalwood trees grow to about 10m in height and are partial parasites on the roots of other tree species.

Sandalwood oil, extracted from the tree and its roots by steam distillation, is used for perfumes, lotions, soap, candles and incense, for aromatherapy and in a variety of local medicines. It takes about 30 years for the slow-growing trees to reach a usable size. The oil from fully mature trees is much more valuable.

The number of sandalwood trees has been drastically reduced not only in East Timor but throughout the Indonesian archipelago. The picture is not much better in Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific, where the tree has been discovered only fairly recently and is already being thoughtlessly exploited, with many trees being cut down before they are fully grown. Sandalwood is particularly prized in southern India, and it is sometimes said the tree was first introduced there from Timor, although sandalwood is mentioned in the Ramayana (a South Asian epic poem) around 2000 BC. East Timor does not have sandalwood plantations, as India does, supplying large exports of sandalwood oil to the Middle East, another important market.

## NATIONAL PARKS & PROTECTED AREAS

The entire eastern tip of East Timor and the waters offshore have been designated as Ninós Konis Santana National Park, the nation's first national park. It's named for a Tutuala native and commander of Falantil who died in 1998.

The park covers 123,000 hectares, including 55,000 hectares of the Coral Triangle – which includes the reefs around Jaco Island (p63). Many consider this the richest and most diverse area of coral reefs in the world. On land the park's boundaries include the last remaining bits of rainforest on East Timor and the region.

For now the national park designation carries little practical meaning in that there's no money to develop facilities or even to enforce protections. But it's thought that, as East Timor inevitably develops, national park designation should help manage the impacts. The branch of the New South Wales government responsible for parks in the Australian state has signed on as an advisor.

### RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

East Timor is undeveloped for tourism, and visitors need to be mindful that their behaviour can have a significant impact on this fragile environment. Because formal protection for areas and species is low-profile and under-resourced, you need to keep environmental impact in the forefront of your mind as you travel – there won't be any prominent educational signs, information centres or uniformed park rangers to remind you to 'do the right thing'. Please consider the following:

- Don't buy any products associated with endangered species or environments, such as turtles, protected birds and mangrove roots. If you are offered these things for sale, politely decline.
- Be an observer of the natural world only – don't touch, take, break, kill, purchase or otherwise interfere with coral, fish, turtles or other sea creatures. The same goes for terrestrial animals such as birds, monkeys, cuscus and other wildlife. Be particularly careful of trees and fish in mangroves – these are fish breeding grounds and are critical as a local food source.
- Water is an extremely precious resource here – it's in short supply, and health problems caused by a lack of clean water kill people. Don't do anything that might result in pollution to a watercourse eg going to the toilet, leaving litter or using soap.
- Be mindful of East Timor's waste-disposal problem. If you're in the countryside and there is no waste management, carry all litter out.
- Don't be tempted to play with fire – even a romantic beach bonfire contributes to deforestation (and squanders the scarce resource of fuel wood that the East Timorese rely on for cooking) and air pollution.
- Do leave your empty beverage cans out in prominent places. People recycle them for cash.

In the south the salty marshlands around Sungai Clere (see p75) have also been designated for protection. Other areas were designated for protection in 2000 by the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (Untaet). These are protected by law in East Timor and have been established to protect a range of species and natural, environmental and cultural values both on land and in the sea, including all coral reefs, wetlands and mangroves, and historic, cultural and artistic sites. Some of the areas designated include the following:

**Mt Matebian** (see p58) This 2373m peak in the east of the country, also known as Mt Malobu, is near the village of Baguia and is also a popular climb. It includes oddly shaped limestone pinnacles, eucalyptus woodland and small remnant tropical forest patches.

**Mt Ramelau** (see p73) East Timor's highest mountain, also known as Tatamailau, is south of Dili. The 2963m peak is climbed from the village of Hatubuilico. The mountain above 2000m and approximately 20,000 hectares of the surrounding forest are protected.

**Other mountains** Protection is extended to half a dozen other mountains, including Mt Saboria (2495m), just north of Mt Ramelau, and Mt Mundo Perdido ('Lost World', 1775m), to the west of Mt Ramelau and south of Baucau.

**Tasitolu Peace Park** (see p43) This tiny catchment, just a 15-minute drive west of Dili, covers three saline lakes

that provide a great habitat for resident and migratory waterbirds. Each year hundreds of wader birds arrive from Russia during the northern winter. The area is currently degraded, but rehabilitation is planned, as is management that emphasises cultural values and environmental education.

### ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The human impact on East Timor's flora and fauna has been severe, and it is estimated that, at the very least, two-thirds of the country has suffered severe deforestation. On a more positive note, the most extensive patches of natural tropical forests on Timor occur in East Timor, and these provide key habitat for remaining populations of threatened and endemic wildlife, some of which are of international significance.

Deforestation, in conjunction with burning, livestock grazing and seasonal heavy rains on a steep topography and fragile soils, has contributed to erosion, soil loss, landslides and water-quality problems, which endanger precious coral reefs and fishing grounds. Burning off is currently the main cause of deforestation and habitat loss. It also hampers efforts at revegetation (new plantations are often damaged by fire), adds to air pollution and contributes to soil destabilisation as the

natural vegetation is destroyed. Fuel-wood collection is a problem as there are no affordable alternative fuels for cooking. Habitat change and increased erosion result.

Air pollution, access to fresh water, unregulated development (by industry and tourism; there are few resources to monitor development) and waste disposal are of concern in urban and potential tourism areas throughout East Timor. The household waste issue is particularly evident in Dili.

Schemes are already emerging for hydro-electric dams to generate power.

Given the levels of poverty it will prove a tough act to balance preserving what East Timor has with what it needs. Dili-based **Permaculture Timor-Leste** (☎ 723 6093; ego\_rockstar@hotmail.com) is a good example of a group that is using a pragmatic approach to preserve East Timor's resources. It works to teach farmers about sustainable agriculture in a way that both respects and draws on their cultural traditions. Its message is: 'Any action that damages, pollutes or destroys East Timor's natural environment is doing the same to East Timor's people.'

# Food & Drink

In a country where just obtaining food can be a problem, there is not a lot of concern over specific food styles. In fact only in Dili (and a couple of places in Baucau) will you find a real selection of places to eat. However, markets are common throughout the country and often have a few simple food stalls.

## STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

Visitors to East Timor will probably eat in much the same meal sequence – breakfast, lunch, dinner – as they would at home. In rural East Timor meal times are less likely to be so clearly organised, although the Portuguese influence is ingrained enough for the Timorese generally to believe that there should be three meal times a day. Meals are often a mix of whatever produce is available plus packaged noodles, rice or other starch. Pork, chicken or beef are usually included.

Outside of Dili, you'll find only a few restaurants. Even the simple shops selling prepared food at markets are only affordable to a small percentage of the population. However, the markets themselves are quite colourful and worth checking out, even if you don't need a carrot or a live chicken. You can't help but be impressed at the artful displays of even the most meagre offerings.

You'll encounter a host of staples, some of which are more closely associated with Papua New Guinea and the Pacific rather than the ubiquitous rice of Southeast Asia. They could include cassava (*aifarina* in Tetun), sago (*akar*), sweet potato (*fehuk midar*), yams (*kumbili*), taro (*talas*) and breadfruit (*kulu tunu*). Potatoes (*fehuk*) are a reminder of the Portuguese era, and maize (*batar*) is another staple familiar to Western visitors. Bread (*páo* in Portuguese; *paun* in Tetun) can be surprisingly good. Look for green-hued pistachio bread, doughnuts and baguettes. In most markets, you'll find various combinations of maize (corn) and beans that are ready for quick preparation in a cooking pot.

Despite Timor's long coastline, the East Timorese are not noted for their fishing expertise. Nevertheless fish is generally available in Dili and will usually be very fresh.

As you're driving around the country, you'll see emerald-green rice terraces and fields. However, East Timor still relies on aid agencies and Chinese imports for much of its rice supply.

Along with the usual range of tropical fruits there are a number of unusual ones for which there is no English translation. They include the snake-skinned *salak* (the same name is used in Indonesia), which has a texture akin to crossing an apple with a walnut. *Jambulan*, known to the Indonesians as *jambalang*, has a sweet-sour flavour and looks like a purple olive. The slightly sour but succulent *uha* looks like a pear but certainly doesn't taste like one. *Aidák* is like a lychee, while *saramalé* is pumpkin shaped but smaller – usually about the size of your thumb – and has a mildly sour flavour.

## MELTING POT

The cuisines of three countries – China, Indonesia and Portugal – have a major influence on what you'll find to eat in East Timor.

### Indonesia & China

The 25 years of Indonesian occupation obviously had a major influence on East Timor's cuisine, but in fact Indonesia has always played an important role in what arrives on the East Timorese table. If an eating place rises to something more than boiling up some rice with a hunk of fish or a mix of vegetables, then the style is likely to be a blend of Chinese and Indonesian recipes. Eating places may well be referred to by Indonesian terms: a *warung* is a simple street stall, and a *rumah makan* (literally 'eating house') is a fancier restaurant. Some standard Indonesian dishes or regional styles you might encounter include the following:

**ayam goreng** – fried chicken  
**cap cay** – stir-fried vegetables  
**gado gado** – vegetables with peanut sauce; a very popular Indonesian dish  
**gulai ayam** – curried chicken  
**gulai kambing** – curried goat  
**ikan bakar** – grilled fish  
**jagung bakar** – grilled corn  
**mie goreng** – mie or mee are noodles and goreng means fried, so mie goreng will be noodles fried up with whatever's going

**mie rebus** – noodle soup

**nasi campur** – rice with a selection of meat and vegetables on one plate

**nasi goreng** – Nasi is Indonesian for rice and nasi goreng, 'fried rice', is the standard Indonesian dish. The rice will be fried up with vegetables, meat or fish, and there might even be a fried egg on top.

**Padang food** – The Padang district of West Sumatra has exported its cooking style all over the Indonesian archipelago and beyond, and there are plenty of places offering Padang food in Dili. Padang food is usually displayed in bowls in the window of the establishment or in a display case. There's no menu: an assortment of bowls is arrayed on your table, you choose the ones that look appetising and you're billed for what you eat. Padang food is usually eaten with the fingers of your right hand.

**rendang** – classic Padang beef or buffalo curry dish

**sate ayam** – chicken on satay sticks

**soto ayam** – chicken soup

**soto madura** – soup with beef

## Portugal

Portuguese culinary influence is fairly limited in the hinterlands. Dili, however, has a few excellent Portuguese restaurants, and the *pousadas* (inns) in Baucau and Maubisse also feature Portuguese dishes on their menus. Portuguese food generally consists of much meat or fish with potatoes or rice, with vegetables playing a very secondary role. Some classic dishes you might encounter include the following:

**arroz de marisco** – seafood rice

**caldeirada de peixe** – fish stew

**caldo verde** – potato soup, sometimes with sliced sausage

**canja de galinha** – chicken broth

**feijão com grão** – beans with chickpeas

**frango no churrasco** – char-grilled chicken

**pratos completos** – complete plates, one-pot dishes

**pratos do dia** – dish of the day, a 'soup, main course and coffee' lunchtime special

**sopa de legumes** – vegetable soup

**sopa de peixe** – fish soup

**sopa do dia** – soup of the day

## DRINKS

The true Timorese drink is coffee; it's preferred strong and black, and usually also served hot and sweet. It's known as *kafé Timor* in Tetun, and a package of coffee beans is an excellent souvenir. Tea is *xa* in Tetun and pronounced much like 'char'.

As in many places in the developing world, great care should be taken with water. Purified

water in environmentally suspect plastic bottles is readily available in any town – for most people not prepared to purify their water, this is the only realistic source of drinking water. Canned soft drinks are found in markets, but the dodgy power situation means that they are often warm. Treat ice (and any liquid on the tops of cans) with extreme suspicion.

Beer is also found almost everywhere, although in rural areas you will have to do a little research to find a cold one. Some of Australia's less salubrious brews such as Victoria Bitter (VB) are found anywhere expats gather. However, you'll easily find tastier options like Singapore's Tiger and Indonesia's Bintang.

Although there are Australian wines in the fancier restaurants and bars of Dili, Portuguese wine never completely disappeared, and you'll find a wide choice, including that most iconic variety, Mateus Rosé.

One of the few local drinks you'll likely encounter is *sopi*, a powerful distilled palm wine known as *tuaka* in Tetun or *tua mutin* if it's white palm wine. *Tua Timor* is a traditional alcoholic drink, while *tua sabu* is a much stronger traditional brandy-ish concoction. Sold at roadside stands, these brews share shelf-space, used-water-bottle packaging, and some say flavour, with petrol.

## WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

Dili has all manner of restaurants, cafés and bars. You can get a surprising range of international food, from sushi to Indian, much of it quite good. Waterfront restaurants and bars often serve a melange of fare familiar to travellers everywhere: pizza, pasta, burgers, Asian noodle dishes, satay and the like. You can also find this selection at the very few restaurants scattered around the country catering to foreigners.

On Dili's back streets you can find more basic Indonesian-style *warungs* and *kakilimas* (street vendors) serving basic rice and meat dishes, fried chicken and satay to lunchtime crowds of locals with jobs. Similar spots exist near the markets in larger towns, but few locals can afford even a dollar or two for a meal.

Markets outside Dili may not operate every day, although there will usually be a couple of vendors around. Dili has large supermarkets with all manner of imported goods. Elsewhere small shops have packaged foods like candy, crackers and noodles. If you are planning

**COFFEE: BLACK GOLD**

If Timor has one product for which it's renowned, it's coffee, the number-one money earner for as many as 44,000 families – perhaps 250,000 people, or a quarter of East Timor's population. For these coffee-growing families, it's a cash crop that provides as much as 90% of their income. In most cases these are essentially subsistence farmers with just a hectare or two of coffee plants. Although thousands of East Timorese are involved in the harvesting and processing each season, the actual number employed full time in the coffee business is only a few hundred.

About 80% of East Timor's coffee is fine quality arabica (cheaper coffee is usually *robusta*), and most of it is organically grown and meets the Fair Trade guidelines, which means it can be sold at a premium price. In fact the organic label is a default: the East Timorese simply cannot afford to use fertilisers or other growth aids.

The altitude where most of the coffee is grown, combined with East Timor's climate, with its short but intense wet season and long dry season, makes for excellent coffee. About half of the country's coffee is grown in the Ermera district, but coffee is also grown in the districts of Manufahi, Ainaro and Liquiçá, while smaller amounts come from Aileu and Bobonaro. Drive a few kilometres into the hills south of Dili and you will soon see coffee growing right along the road.

One of the main customers for East Timor's coffee is Starbucks. The coffee is blended into the chain's Verona coffee ('full and creamy, with a sweet finish', it claims), although its website indicates that Verona features 'an array of Latin American and Indonesian coffees', and no mention is made of East Timor.

After oil, it is hoped that coffee will play an important role in the country's future. Like so many other things locally, the industry's past – like coffee in an old percolator – has had numerous ups and downs. During the Portuguese era up to 600kg per hectare was grown. Due to a lack of pruning and replanting and other woes of the Indonesian era, that figure fell to only 100kg to 200kg per hectare. In contrast, the world's most efficient coffee producers are obtaining up to 2000kg per hectare. Several NGOs and other aid agencies continue to help the Timorese industry rebuild. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded the creation of Cooperativa Café Timor (CCT), a non-profit business that handles coffee exports.

The US-based advocacy group Just Coffee ([www.justcoffee.coop](http://www.justcoffee.coop)) lobbies for Fair Trade coffee, and buys and promotes coffee from producers around the world. It regularly leads tours to East Timor that include an intensive look at the coffee industry and culture as well as meetings with local luminaries.

extended travel in the countryside, it's best to bring provisions from Dili. Although many guesthouses offer simple meals, their availability is not assured.

Along the main roads, look for roadside stands selling fruit, vegetables, various drinks and a variety of other prepared treats for the quick consumption of travellers. Common and tasty, *saboko* is a mixture of sardines, spices and tamarind leaves wrapped up in a palm leaf and cooked over a fire.

**VEGETARIANS & VEGANS**

Many places in Dili have a range of vegetarian dishes on the menu. Otherwise, if you can communicate with the kitchen, you should be able to get meat-free dishes in most restaurants. To request vegetarian meals, try '*saya hanya makan sayuran*' (Indonesian) or '*sou vegetariano/a*' (Portuguese).

**HABITS & CUSTOMS**

In Dili most places are roughly open from 8am to 9pm; however, they may close at sunset during times of upheaval. Elsewhere, hours at the few places serving meals can be quite variable, although most are open for lunch.

If you're travelling around the country with a driver or guide, buy their meals when you eat. At any place serving food, tips are not expected, but in a place like East Timor anything extra you give the staff or owners (if they're locals) will feed more than just one person.

**EAT YOUR WORDS**

In most places in Dili you can usually get by with English. Elsewhere Tetun may well be necessary, although in most places Indonesian is still the most useful language to know. For more language and pronunciation info, see p103.

**Useful Phrases (Indonesian)**

<b>Where's a...?</b>	... di mana?
<b>restaurant</b>	rumah makan
<b>food stall</b>	warung
<b>night market</b>	pasar malam
<b>street stall</b>	kaki lima
<b>toilet</b>	wc (way-say)
<b>What is that (this)?</b>	Apa itu (ini)?
<b>Do you have a menu in English?</b>	Apakah ada daftar makanan dalam bahasa Inggris?
<b>I'm a vegetarian.</b>	Saya hanya makan sayuran.
<b>That was delicious, thank you.</b>	Enak sekali, terima kasih.
<b>How much (money)?</b>	Berapa harga?

**Indonesian-English Glossary**

<b>ayam</b>	chicken
<b>bakar</b>	grilled
<b>bakmi</b>	rice noodles
<b>bakso</b>	meatball soup
<b>buah</b>	fruit
<b>daging</b>	meat
<b>dingin</b>	cold
<b>enak</b>	delicious
<b>es</b>	ice
<b>gulai</b>	curried
<b>ikan</b>	fish
<b>jagung</b>	corn
<b>kacang tanah</b>	peanuts
<b>kambing</b>	goat
<b>kelapa</b>	coconut
<b>kentang</b>	potatoes
<b>kerupuk</b>	prawn crackers
<b>mie</b>	noodles
<b>nasi</b>	rice

<b>panas</b>	hot (temperature)
<b>pedas</b>	hot (spicy)
<b>pisang</b>	banana
<b>pisang sambal</b>	chilli sauce
<b>sate</b>	food skewered on satay sticks, chargrilled and served with peanut sauce
<b>sayuran</b>	vegetables
<b>soto</b>	soup
<b>telur</b>	eggs; <i>nasi goreng</i> or <i>nasi campur</i> will often include an egg
<b>telur goreng</b>	fried egg
<b>telur rebus</b>	boiled egg

**Portuguese-English Glossary**

<b>almôndegas</b>	meatballs
<b>arroz</b>	rice
<b>atum</b>	tuna
<b>batatas</b>	potato
<b>bife</b>	steak
<b>bife de atum</b>	tuna steak
<b>bife de frango</b>	chicken steak
<b>cabrito</b>	goat
<b>carne</b>	meat
<b>costeletas</b>	cutlets
<b>cozido</b>	boiled
<b>frango</b>	chicken
<b>frito</b>	fried
<b>grlhado</b>	grilled
<b>ovo</b>	egg
<b>pão</b>	Portuguese bread rolls
<b>peixe</b>	fish
<b>porco</b>	pork
<b>sopa</b>	soup

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