

# Sumatra



Few isles tempt the imagination with the lure of adventure quite like the fierce land of Sumatra. The planet's sixth-largest island is vibrating with life – too often to the detriment of its disaster-hardened inhabitants, who live in the shadow of Sumatran Mother Nature: a mixed blessing of vast extremes.

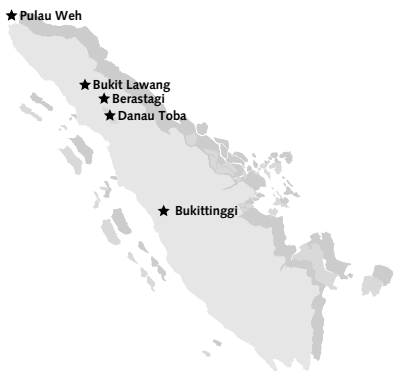
Eruptions, earthquakes, floods and tsunamis are regular headline grabbers, and are steep costs of living in one of the world's richest ecosystems. Steaming volcanoes brew and bluster while standing guard over lakes that sleepily lap the edges of craters. The resulting soil makes for an ocean of green topography that dominates every vista, filling the land with a feast of flora and fauna. Orangutan-filled jungles host not only our red-haired cousins, but all sorts of monkeys that swing in the tree tops. A lucky few may spot tigers or even the timid Sumatran rhino.

Then there are the beaches. The tempestuous, tectonic coastline creates a constant unravelling of clear barrels of surf onto deserted beaches across Sumatra, making the area one of the great isolated surf meccas of the world.

Consistent with Indonesia's social make-up, the massive island is a spicy broth of mixed cultures, from the devout Muslims in Aceh to the hedonistic Batak Christians and the matrilineal Minangkabau of Padang. All get along (most of the time) and are unified by a fear, respect and love of the wild and wondrous land of Sumatra.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Lounging away a few days on the cool shores of **Danau Toba** (p388) and sharing a few drinks with the fun-loving Batak folk
- Oglng our orangutan cousins in the wild jungles of **Bukit Lawang** (p378)
- Hiking up beyond the clouds to the steaming peaks of the volcanoes around the hill town of **Berastagi** (p384)
- Swimming with sharks and turtles in the coral garden off **Pulau Weh** (p409), an underwater paradise
- Cruising around the lush paddy fields in the verdant countryside around **Bukittinggi** (p431), where the matrilineal Minangkabau built soaring-roofed houses and the women told the men what to do

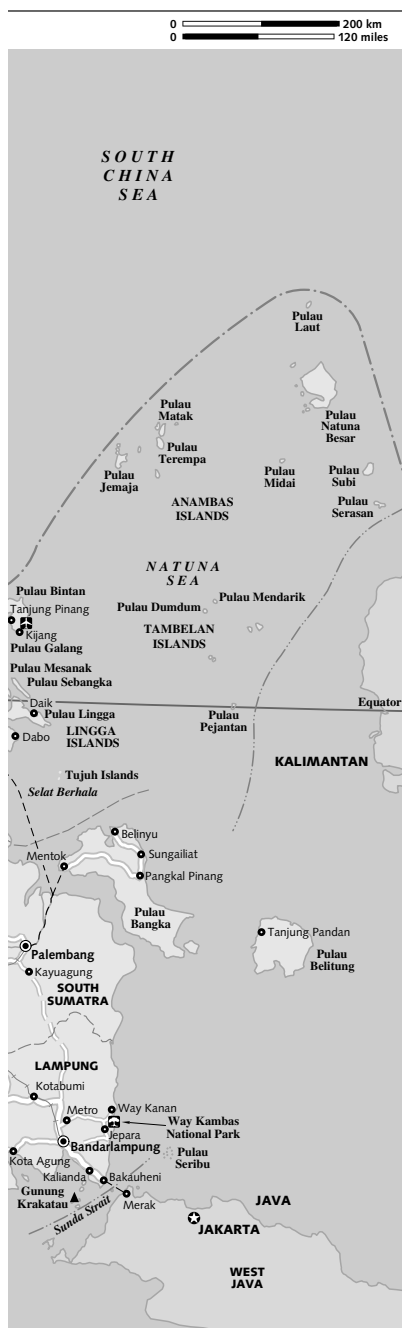


■ POPULATION: 40 MILLION

■ LAND AREA: 473,606 SQ KM

■ HIGHEST PEAK: GUNUNG KERINCI (3805M)





## History

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

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

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

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

In the early 19th century, the Dutch attempted to assert military control over all of Sumatra, a move met with resistance by its disparate tribes. In 1863, after three military

expeditions, the Dutch finally established authority over Pulau Nias. Treaties and alliances brought other areas of Sumatra under Dutch rule, including Bengkulu, which the British willingly traded for Melaka.

A peace may have been brokered, but the Dutch were never welcomed in Sumatra. The island contributed several key figures to the independence struggle, including future vice president, Mohammed Hatta and the first prime minister, Sutan Syahrir. Yet despite this Sumatra was as dissatisfied with Jakarta's rule as it was with that of the Dutch. From 1958–61, rebel groups based in Bukittinggi and the mountains of South Sumatra resisted centralisation, leading to clashes with the Indonesian military. Fiercely independent Aceh, though, proved to be Jakarta's most troublesome region. Aceh's separatist movement started in the late 1970s and continued until 2006 (see p403), with brief spells of quiet counterbalanced with repression by the Indonesian military.

No human conflict could compare to the destruction of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, in which a 9.0-plus-magnitude earthquake off the northwestern coast of Sumatra triggered a regionwide tsunami. In Aceh province, the land mass closest to the epicentre, waves almost 15m high rose up like the mythical *naga* (sea serpent) and swallowed coastal development and dwellers. The Indonesian death count was estimated at more than 170,000 people, mainly in Aceh. An 8.7-magnitude aftershock that followed several months later

was centred near the island of Nias; it destroyed the capital city and killed hundreds of people. Most of the destruction has since been cleared and the area is moving on, but aid workers have become familiar faces in both Aceh and Nias and will remain in the most severely affected regions for some time.

## Getting There & Away

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

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

## AIR

Medan is Sumatra's primary international airport, with frequent flights to mainland Southeast Asian cities such as Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Penang. In West Sumatra, Padang receives flights from Singapore and Kuala Lumpur several times a week. In eastern Sumatra, Palembang is linked to Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. The primary international carriers include Garuda Indonesia, Malaysian Airlines, Lion Air, Tiger Airways, Air Asia, Firefly and Silk Air.

## SUMATRA AU NATUREL

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

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

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

## VISA ON ARRIVAL

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

- Pulau Batam: airport and the ports of Nongsa, Sekupang, Waterfront City (Teluk Senimba) and Batam Centre (p454).
- Pulau Bintan: ports of Tanjung Pinang, Bandar Bentan Telani Lagoi and Bandar Sri Udana Lobam in Tanjung Uban (p458).
- Medan: Polonia airport and Belawan port (p376).
- Pekanbaru: airport and port (p450).
- Padang: airport and Teluk Bayur port (p424).
- Dumai: Yos Sudarso port (p451).
- Sibolga: port (p394).
- Palembang: airport (p466).

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

All Sumatran airports charge a departure tax of 75,000Rp to 150,000Rp for international flights.

## BOAT

Many travellers still heed the call of the sea and enter Sumatra by ferry from Malaysia. There are two primary port options: Melaka (Malaysia) to Dumai (Indonesia) or Penang (Malaysia) to Belawan (Indonesia). If you don't have a lot of time to explore Sumatra, Belawan is your best option, as it is a short bus ride from Medan (see p377), which sits at the centre of most tourist attractions. Dumai is on Sumatra's east coast and is a five-hour bus ride to Bukittinggi; see p451 for more information.

From Singapore, ferries make the quick hop to Pulau Batam and Bintan, the primary islands in the Riau archipelago. Mainly

Singaporean weekenders heading to beaches and resorts in the Riau islands use these water routes.

From Batam, boats serve the following mainland Sumatran ports: Dumai, Palembang and Pekanbaru. Only a few backpackers depart Batam for Sumatra because all of these ports but Dumai are a long way from postcard-worthy spots. See Pulau Batam (p454) or Pulau Bintan (p459) for more information on boat transfer between Singapore and beyond.

Ferries swim across the narrow Sunda Strait, linking the southeastern tip of Sumatra at Bakauheni to Java's westernmost point of Merak. The sea crossing is a brief dip in a day-long voyage that requires several hours' worth of bus transport from both ports to Jakarta on the Java side and to Bandarlampung on the Sumatran side. See p472 for more details.

Pelni-operated boats still paddle between Indonesia's islands, carrying freight and families.

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

## Getting Around

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

Sumatra's airports are inconspicuously modern and numerous, providing a quick and cheap means of arrival or escape.

## AIR

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

Domestic carriers include Merpati, Mandala, Lion Air and Sriwijaya. Nusantara Buana Air (NBA) and Susi Air fly to minor destinations that the bigger airlines don't bother with.

All Sumatran airports charge an airport departure tax (between 20,000Rp and 40,000Rp) that is not included in your ticket. Ticket agents are located in the smallest of towns and typically charge 10% commission.

As cheap and convenient taking domestic flights may be, it's also important to take into account the environmental impact of air travel (see the boxed text, p844 for more information)

### BOAT

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

The most commonly used routes link Banda Aceh with Pulau Weh, Sibolga with Pulau Nias, and Padang with Pulau Siberut (in the Mentawai Islands chain). In the less-visited areas of southeastern Sumatra, Jambi, Palembang and Pekanbaru are important towns for river transport. The Riau islands of Batam and Bintan are also linked to south-eastern port towns by ferry.

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

### BUS

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

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

Buses range from economy sardine cans to modern air-con coaches. At the top of the class structure are super-executive buses with reclining seats, deep-freeze air-con, toilets, and an all-night serenade of Scorpions albums. Many passengers come prepared with winter hats, gloves and earplugs.

Bus terminals in Sumatra can vary, from modern and organised to run-down and abandoned. In some towns, you can go straight to the bus terminal to buy tickets and board

buses, while other towns rely on bus company offices located outside the terminals. Ticket prices vary greatly depending on the quality of the bus and the perceived gullibility of the traveller. It pays to shop around and to ask at your guest house about reliable companies; do be aware that some accommodation act as booking agents and charge a commission for their services.

### LOCAL TRANSPORT

The usual Indonesian forms of transport – bemo or *opelet* (small minibus), becak (bicycle-rickshaw) and *bendi* (two-person horse-drawn cart) – are available in Sumatran towns and cities. The base rate for a bemo or *opelet* is 1500Rp to 4000Rp; the minimum fare is 7000Rp for becak and 10,000Rp for *bendi*.

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

### MINIBUS

For midrange and shorter journeys, many locals and travellers prefer to use minibus services, which can be more convenient than hustling out to the bus terminal. Some minibuses are in superb shape and provide door-to-door service, while others are a little rickety and shovel in more people than a clown car. Typically, tourists will end up paying more than the locals; negotiating a front seat ensures a little breathing room as the driver won't crowd his steering range.

### TRAIN

The only useful train service in Sumatra runs from Bandarlampung (p472) to Palembang, and then on to Lubuklinggau. There are also passenger trains from Medan to Pematangsiantar, Tanjung Balai and Rantauparapat – though these are rarely used by tourists.

## NORTH SUMATRA

For most visitors travelling through Indonesia on a race-against-time visa, this is the sole slice of Sumatra they'll taste. And with good reason: ogle the orangutans in Bukit Lawang, veer over the volcanoes of Berastagi and laze away on the shores of Danau Toba. All in, a well-trodden and worthy circuit that centres on Medan, the gateway metropolis of the north.

## SUMATRA IS BURNING

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

North Sumatra stretches from the Indian Ocean to the Strait of Melaka and from sea to shining sea it is anything but homogeneous. The rolling landscape varies from sweaty plains to cool highlands, while the houses of worship switch between the metal-domed mosques to the arrow-straight steeples of Christian churches. The coastal Malays, relatives of peoples from mainland Southeast Asia, live along the Strait of Melaka and are the largest ethnic group. In the highlands around Danau Toba are the delightful Batak, a group which is further subdivided into five classes. If you can name them all then you've either married into the clan or are destined to. Then there are the Pesisirs (central Tapanuli) along the Indian Ocean coastline and the megalithic culture of Pulau Nias (p395).

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

## MEDAN

☎ 061 / pop 2 million

Sumatra's major metropolis, and Indonesia's third-largest city, is somewhat mythical in travellers' circles, regularly popping up in 'What's the worst place you've ever visited?' conversations in global backpacker bars. As ever, with these things, perspective plays a huge part in the Medan experience. For most tourists, just off the boat from squeaky-clean, multicultural Malaysia, the pollution, poverty and persistent cat calls of 'Hello mister!' could be an unnerving jolt of dirt-under-your-fingernails Asia. However, if you've worked your way north through Sumatra, and are

a little more immune to the culture shock, it's easier to see past the grime and discover an amenity-filled, leafy and modern town with more than a hint of crumbling Dutch-colonial charm.

First impressions are often misleading. Just when you had Medan dismissed as a chaotic nightmare, you'll pass by one of the city's grand marble mosques, fading art-deco buildings or smiling locals and it's just enough to make you realise its a city worth hanging around for.

## History

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

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

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







<b>INFORMATION</b>		<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>		Taman Rekreasi	
ATM Complex.....	1 D4	Bukit Barisan Military		Seri Deli.....	44 D4
ATM Complex.....	2 D4	Museum.....	24 A3	Tip Top Restaurant.....	45 B2
Australian Consulate.....	3 A3	Istana Maimoon.....	25 C4	<b>DRINKING</b>	
Bank Indonesia.....	4 B1	Mesjid Raya.....	26 D4	Corner Café Raya.....	(see 38)
BCA Bank.....	5 A3	Tjong A Fie Mansion.....	27 B2	Medan Club.....	(see 40)
BNI Bank.....	6 B3	<b>SLEEPING</b>		<b>SHOPPING</b>	
Café Zelsy.....	(see 34)	Garuda Plaza Hotel.....	28 D4	Arts & Crafts Shops.....	46 B2
Danish Consulate.....	7 A4	Hotel Raya.....	29 D4	<b>TRANSPORT</b>	
Dedeq Net.....	8 D4	Hotel Sumatera.....	30 D4	Air Asia.....	(see 28)
DHL.....	(see 30)	Ibunda Hotel.....	31 D3	Buses to Ketambe.....	47 D1
Dutch Consulate.....	9 A5	JJ's Guesthouse.....	32 A5	Buses to Singkil	
Finnish Consulate.....	(see 7)	Polonia Hotel.....	33 B4	(Singkil Raya).....	48 D1
Gramedia Bookshop.....	10 A3	Ponduk Wisata Angel.....	34 D4	Garuda.....	49 B1
Gramedia Bookshop.....	11 C2	Ronna's Guesthouse I.....	35 D4	Garuda.....	50 A5
Indian Consulate.....	12 A4	Zakia Hotel.....	36 D4	Kartika Air.....	51 C3
Japanese Consulate.....	13 A4	<b>EATING</b>		Lion Air.....	52 C3
Main Post Office.....	14 B1	Bollywood Food		Malaysian Airlines.....	53 B3
Malaysian Consulate.....	15 A4	Centre.....	37 A3	Merpati.....	54 D4
North Sumatra		Corner Café Raya.....	38 D4	NBA.....	55 C4
Tourist Office.....	16 B2	Majestik Bakery & Cafe.....	39 D4	Silk Air.....	(see 33)
Norwegian Consulate.....	17 A4	Medan Club.....	40 A3	Sriwijaya Air.....	56 C3
Perdana Express.....	18 C3	Merdeka Walk.....	41 B2	Susi Air.....	57 B5
Rumah Sakit Gleneagles.....	19 B2	Pasar Ramai.....	42 D2	Tobali Tour &	
Sukma Tour & Ferry.....	20 D4	Ponduk Wisata Angel.....	(see 34)	Travel.....	(see 21)
Tobali Tour & Travel.....	21 D4	Sehat Vegetarian.....	43 D2		
Trophy Tours.....	22 C3				
US Consulate.....	23 C2				

several occasions during the 1990s, and to this day there is still a noted division in the community.

## Orientation

The sprawling city of Medan radiates out from the confluence of the Sungai Deli and Sungai Babura. Most backpackers head to the neighbourhood surrounding Mesjid Raya on Jl Sisingamangaraja (SM Raja) for accommodation. North of this area is the city centre, organised around Jl Pandu and Jl Pemuda. The historic district occupies Jl Ahmad Yani around Lapangan Merdeka (Freedom Sq). The manicured part of town is Polonia, west of Sungai Deli following the spine of Jl Imam Bonjol. Little India is sandwiched between Jl H Zainal Arifin, Jl Imam Bonjol and Jl Cik Ditiro.

## Information

### BOOKSHOPS

Apart from Bukit Lawang and Danau Toba, Sumatra has little English reading material on offer, and Medan's slim pickings is a bumper crop compared to other stops on the road.

**Gramedia bookshop** Medan Mall (☎ 415 4422; Jl MT Haryono); Sun Plaza (☎ 4501354; Jl H Zainul Arifin) Good for maps, nonfiction and the occasional paperback.

### INTERNET ACCESS

Medan has speedy warnets (internet stalls) across the city, and internet access is also avail-

able at most of the large shopping plazas. Prices range from 3000Rp to 5000Rp per hour.

**Café Zelsy** (Jl SM Raja; ☎ 9am-10pm)

**Dedeq Net** (Jl RH Juanda Baru; ☎ 9.30am-midnight)

## MEDICAL SERVICES

For an ambulance, dial ☎ 118.

**Rumah Sakit Gleneagles** (☎ 456 6368; Jl Listrik 6)

The best hospital in the city, with a 24-hour walk-in clinic and pharmacy, as well as English-speaking doctors and specialists.

## MONEY

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

**Bank Indonesia** (Jl Balai Kota)

**BCA bank** (Bank Central Asia; Jl H Zainal Arifin)

**BNI bank** (Bank Negara Indonesia; Jl Pemuda)

Try the following complexes for ATMs:

**ATM** (Yuki Plaza, Jl SM Raja)

**ATM** (Hotel Garuda Plaza, Jl SM Raja)

Shop around, as exchange rates can differ significantly from bank to bank. Medan typically offers the best rates on the island.

Outside of banking hours (see p823), there are moneychangers on the corner of Jl Sipiso-Piso and Jl SM Raja, as well as at travel agencies on Jl Katamso.

**POST**

**DHL** (☎ 453 2225; Jl SM Raja; ☒ closed Sun) Next door to Hotel Sumatera.

**Main post office** (Jl Bukit Barisan; ☒ 8am-6pm)

Located in an old Dutch building on the main square; internet, fax and photocopying also available.

**TELEPHONE**

International calls can be made at several wartel (private telephone offices) or international hotels around town; however, the line is often poor.

**TOURIST INFORMATION**

There is a basic tourist-information office immediately to the right as you exit at the international airport terminal.

**North Sumatra Tourist Office** (☎ 452 8436; Jl Ahmad Yani 107; ☒ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) Provides excellent information, brochures and maps. Also displays traditional North Sumatran costumes.

**TRAVEL AGENCIES**

Jl Katamso is packed with travel agencies that handle air tickets and ferry tickets.

**Perdana Express** (☎ 456 6222; Jl Katamso 35G) Sells Pelni and Penang ferry tickets.

**Sukma Tour & Ferry** (☎ 732 0421; Jl SM Raja 106) Sells Penang ferry tickets.

**Tobali Tour & Travel** (☎ 732 4472; Jl SM Raja 79C) For tourist buses to Danau Toba (80,000Rp, four hours).

**Trophy Tour** (☎ 415 5777; pttrophy@indosat.net.id; Jl Katamso 33D) Ticket agent for most of the airlines (1st floor), and tour operator (2nd floor).

**Dangers & Annoyances**

Medan can seem like an untamed town at times, but while normal big-city common sense is required, the locals are generally as friendly as village folk.

**Sights****ISTANA MAIMOON**

Having recently received a much-needed lick of paint, the **Maimoon Palace** (Jl Katamso; admission by donation; ☒ 9am-5pm) stands as grand as ever. Built by the sultan of Deli in 1888, the 30-room palace features Malay, Mogul and Italian influences. Only the main room is open to the public; it features the lavish inauguration throne. The back wing of the palace is occupied by members of the sultan's family. The current sultan, Aria Mahmud Lamanjiji, was only eight years old when he was installed as the 14th Sultan of Deli in 2005, replacing

his father, who died in a plane crash. He is the youngest sultan in Deli history. He currently resides in Sulawesi, and his role is purely ceremonial.

**MESJID RAYA**

The impressive **Grand Mosque** (cnr Jl Mesjid Raya & SM Raja; admission by donation; ☒ 9am-5pm, except prayer times) was commissioned by the sultan in 1906. The Moroccan-style building has towering ceilings, ornate carvings, Italian marble and stained glass from China.

**MUSEUMS**

The **Museum of North Sumatra** (☎ 771 6792; Jl HM Joni 51; admission 750Rp; ☒ 8.30am-12.30 & 1.30-4pm Tue-Sun) has a well-presented collection ranging from early North Sumatran civilisations to Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic periods to colonial and military history. Highlights include fine stone carvings from Nias and extravagantly carved wooden coffins.

**Bukit Barisan Military Museum** (Jl H Zainal Arifin 8; admission by donation; ☒ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri) has a small collection of weapons, photos and memorabilia from WWII, the War of Independence and the Sumatran rebellion of 1958.

**COLONIAL MEDAN**

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

**Tjong A Fie Mansion** ([www.tjongafieinstitute.com](http://www.tjongafieinstitute.com); Jl Ahmad Yani 105; admission incl guide 35,000Rp; ☒ 10am-5pm), the former residence of a famous Chinese merchant, mixes Victorian and Chinese styles. It is intentionally similar to Tjong A Fie's cousin's (Cheong Fatt Tze) home in Penang. At the time of research the mansion was opened to the public for the first time since it was built in 1860. The exquisite hand-painted ceilings, Tjong's huge bedroom, interesting art pieces, an upstairs ballroom (which now exhibits work by local artists) and Taoist temples make the pricey admission worthwhile. If you're a fan of 1950s pulp fiction, you'll love his son's collection in the Chinese guestroom.

Across the street is Tip Top Restaurant (see p376), a historic spot for sipping colonial nostalgia. Further north is Lapangan Merdeka, a

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

For more information about Medan's colonial architecture, check out *Tours Through Historic Medan and its Surroundings*, by Dirk A Buiskool, a long-time Medan resident. The author also operates **Tri Jaya Tour & Travel** (☎ 703 2967; www.trijaya-travel.com; tours 65,000Rp), which offers historic city tours.

## Sleeping

The majority of accommodation is on or near Jl SM Raja. Most budget options have cold water only.

## BUDGET

**Ronna's Guesthouse I** (☎ 732 4556; ronnasaloon@yahoo.com; Jl Tengah 33; r with/without bathroom 40,000/20,000Rp) Friendly bright-yellow guest house with simple but perfectly fine rooms that make a great choice for those on a tight budget.

**Zakia Hotel** (☎ 732 2413; Jl Sipiso-Piso 12; s/d without bathroom 30,000/45,000Rp, r with bathroom 60,000-80,000Rp, r with air-con 120,000-130,000Rp; 🏠) An old backpackers in the '90s, Zakia isn't a bad budget option but is in dire need of a refurb; none of its Western toilets have seats.

**ourpick Pondok Wisata Angel** (Hotel Angel; ☎ 732 0702; Jl SM Raja 70; s with fan & with/without bathroom 70,000/50,000Rp, s/d with air-con 130,000/150,000Rp; 🏠) The best backpacker option in town. Angel's clean rooms are a swirl of vivid blues and yellows, a colour scheme that almost succeeds in offsetting the noisy traffic. It has a sociable street-front cafe (see p376).

**Hotel Raya** (☎ 7366601; hotel-raya@gmail.com; s Jl RH Juanda Baru 200; r with/without air-con 85,000/65,000Rp; 🏠) A bit of an improvement on most of the other SM Raja cheapies, with large rooms looking out to the busy road.

**Wisma Hari Kota** (☎ 453 3113; Jl Lobak 14; r 77,000-100,000Rp, r with aircon 127,000-150,000Rp; 🏠) Only 10 minutes from the airport, this family-run guest house has a friendly vibe and comfortable rooms with street-facing balconies. Breakfast is included (except for the cheaper rooms).

**JJ's Guesthouse** (☎ 457 8411; www.guesthousemedan.com; Jl Suryo 18; s/d incl breakfast 100,000/180,000Rp; 🏠) In an old Dutch villa, JJ's has tidy boarding-house-style rooms run by a mannerly Dutch-speaking Indonesian woman. Opposite KFC; its lack of signage makes it tricky to find. The

gates are locked, so you'll need to ring the doorbell tucked inside the left-hand side of the gate.

## MIDRANGE

Hotel tax and breakfast are included in the quoted rates.

**Hotel Sumatera** (☎ 732 1551; Jl SM Raja 35; r without bathroom 135,000, with air-con 230,000-285,000Rp; 🏠) One of the comfiest sleeps out of the glut of hotels around SM Raja. You'll find that once you add another zero to the price tag the rooms in Medan start to look a lot better.

**Ibunda Hotel** (☎ 734 5555; Jl SM Raja 31; s 170,000Rp, d 220,000-300,000Rp; 🏠) A cheery spot, with minty green walls and new tiled baths.

## TOP END

Medan's best hotels all have the standard top-end facilities you'd expect, such as fitness centres, swimming pools and 24-hour room service. You'll also find many of the international chain hotels in town. All rates include tax and breakfast.

**Polonia Hotel** (☎ 414 2222; www.hotelpolonia.com; Jl Jend Sudirman 14; r 350,000-680,000Rp, ste 1,200,000Rp; 🏠 🏠 🏠 🏠) Excellent-value top-end choice located in the aristocratic section of Medan, close to the airport.

**Garuda Plaza Hotel** (☎ 736 1111; www.garuda plaza.com; Jl SM Raja 18; r 490,000-1,200,000Rp, ste from 2,500,000Rp; 🏠 🏠 🏠 🏠) Almost hip, Garuda Plaza is Medan's homage to Jakarta, with modern, corporate accents. Discounts of up to 40% are available.

**Hotel Deli River** (☎ 703 2964; Jl Raya Namorambe 129; r 700,000Rp; 🏠 🏠 🏠 🏠) Outside the city chaos, this family-run hotel is shaded by fruit trees and overlooks the Deli River. The hotel provides free transfers from the airport.

**Aryaduta Hotel** (☎ 457 2999; www.aryaduta.com; Jl Kapten Maulana Lubis 8; r 700,000-1,580,000Rp; 🏠 🏠 🏠 🏠) One of Medan's newest luxury hotels is international class, with all the frills you'd expect for the price and sprawling high-rise views across the city. Don't be put off by the above-mall location.

## Eating

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

Lots of simple warungs (food stalls) occupy the front courtyards of the houses in the little

lanes around Mesjid Raya; the menu is on display with a few pre-made curries, coffee, tea and sometimes juices.

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

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

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

**Sehat Vegetarian** (Jl Thamrin; dishes from 10,000Rp; ☎ 6am-9pm; ♻️) The place to go when you can't face another gado gado, this Chinese restaurant has a fascinating choice of unidentifiable vegetarian dishes.

**ourpick Merdeka Walk** (Lapangan Merdeka, Jl Balai Kota; dishes 10,000-15,000Rp; ☎ 5-11pm; ♻️) Inspired by Singapore's alfresco dining, this collection of outdoor cafes occupies Lapangan Merdeka with both fast food and proper restaurants. You can burn off the calories on a series of bizarre public-exercise equipment at the adjoining sports ground.

**Bollywood Food Centre** (☎ 453 6494; Jl Muara Takus 7; dishes from 12,000Rp) Lip-smacking Indian-style curries are a family affair at this blindingly bright restaurant in Little India (Kampung Keling). It also serves cold Bintang. Malay-Indian roti shops are located nearby.

**Ponduk Wisata Angel** (Jl SM Raja 70; mains 15,000-20,000Rp) With a laidback backpacker vibe, this cafe could almost pass for a beachside shack if it weren't for the insanely busy traffic along SM Raja. It does tasty Indonesian dishes and decent Western food. Sells cold beer.

**Corner Café Raya** (cnr Jl SM Raja & Sipiso-Piso 1; dishes 15,000-40,000Rp; ☎ 24hr) A Western-themed cafe serving breakfast fry-ups and burgers as well as Indonesian dishes.

**Tip Top Restaurant** (Jl Ahmad Yani 92; dishes 15,000-50,000Rp; ♻️ ♻️) Only the prices have changed at this old colonial relic, great for a drink of bygone imperialism. It offers tasty Indonesian, Chinese and Western dishes, including a good steak menu. The desserts are delicious.

**Medan Club** (Jl Kartini 36; dishes 30,000-80,000Rp) Wealthy and well-dressed expats sip cocktails and dine from the broad international menu, which includes Mexican, French and American dishes.

**Traders** (Jl Kapten Pattimura 423; mains 60,000-230,000Rp, Japanese menu 35,000-120,000Rp; ☎ noon-midnight; ♻️) The very plush Traders is the perfect spot to blow your dining budget on sushi, snail chowder, lobster dishes or Australian Angus steaks. If you can somehow fit more food in, try the Avocado Mousse cake.

## Drinking

**Corner Café Raya** (cnr Jl SM Raja & Sipiso-Piso 1; ☎ 24hr) Cold beer and Western sports served to a heady mix of seedy sex-pats and fresh-faced backpackers, which makes its location directly opposite the Mesjid Raya mosque a little puzzling.

**Traders** (Jl Kapten Pattimura 423; ☎ noon-midnight) The front bar-restaurant has sport on the TV and is busiest on weekends, especially on two-for-one Friday night and all-you-can-drink beer on Sunday (90,000Rp). Out the back is a swanky blue neon-lit bar with pool tables and live music.

**Medan Club** (Jl Kartini 36) A local institution, the Medan Club is still the place for many well-to-do locals to socialise on weekends.

## Shopping

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

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

## Getting There & Away

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

### AIR

Medan's Polonia Airport is 2km south of the city centre. Remember that there is an airport tax for departing flights (see the boxed text on p847).

There are daily international flights from Medan to Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Penang. Domestic flights connect Medan

to Jakarta, Banda Aceh, Pekanbaru, Padang, Batam, Pontianak and Gunung Sitoli.

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

**Air Asia** (☎ 733 1988; www.airasia.com; Jl SM Raja 18) Inside Garuda Plaza Hotel; has flights to Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur.

**Garuda** (☎ 455 6777; Jl Monginsidi 340); Jl Balai Kota 2 (☎ 453 7844; Inna Dharma Deli, Jl Balai Kota 2) Jakarta, Banda Aceh.

**Kartika Air** (☎ 452 2433; Jl Katamso 37) Batam, Jambi, Palembang.

**Lion Air** (☎ 457 1122; Jl Katamso 41) Jakarta, Banda Aceh, Batam, Palembang, Penang.

**Malaysia Airlines** (☎ 451 9333; www.malaysiaairlines.com; Hotel Danau Toba International, Jl Imam Bonjol 17) Kuala Lumpur, Penang.

**Merpati** (☎ 736 6888; www.merpati.co.id/EN; SM Raja 92A) Pulau Simeulue, Sibolga, Gunung Sitoli.

**NBA** (Nusantara Buana Air; ☎ 453 4680; Jl Katamso) Singkil, Kutacane.

**Silk Air** (☎ 453 7744; www.silkair.com; Polonia Hotel, Jl Sudirman 14) Singapore.

**Sriwijaya Air** (☎ 455 2111; www.sriwijayaair-online.com, in Bahasa Indonesia; Jl Katamso 29) Jakarta, Banda Aceh, Batam, Pekanbaru.

**Susi Air** (☎ 785 2169; www.susiair.com; domestic airport) Pulau Simeulue, Meulaboh, Silangit.

## BOAT

High-speed ferries (one way/return 140/210 Malaysian ringgit; five hours; noon Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday) depart from the port of Belawan, 26km from Medan, to the Malaysian city of Penang.

A complimentary bus transfer to Belawan from Medan is available. There is a 35,000Rp surcharge for harbour tax. Tickets can be bought from agents on Jl Katamso or Jl SM Raja (see p374). Arriving in Belawan from Penang, the bus transfer to Medan is *not* included in the price. You can take the green *opelet* 81 between Belawan and Medan (8000Rp).

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

## BUS

There are two major bus terminals in Medan: Amplas, serving southern destinations, and Pinang Baris, serving northern destinations. For long-distance travel, most people deal

directly with the bus ticketing offices located outside of the terminals.

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

**ALS** (☎ 786 6685) Serves Bukittinggi (economy 115,000Rp, air-con with/without toilet 150,000/135,000Rp, 22 hours)

**Kurnia** (☎ 786 4177) Runs buses with air-con and toilets to Parapat (22,000Rp, four hours), Jambi (250,000Rp, 30 hours) and Palembang (280,000Rp, 40 hours).

**Pelangi** (☎ 787 8822) Runs buses to Pekanbaru (air-con/super-executive 140,000/190,000Rp, 12 to 14 hours), Banda Aceh (air-con/executive 120,000/200,000Rp, 12 hours), Jambi (air-con/executive 265,000/370,000Rp, 28 to 30 hours) and Palembang (air-con/executive 290,000/370,000Rp, 40 hours).

There are frequent public buses to Parapat (economy/air-con 12,000/22,000Rp, four hours, 6am to 6pm), the jumping-off point to Danau Toba. Minibuses (80,000Rp, four hours, frequently up until 6pm) also leave from **Tobali Tour & Travel** (☎ 732 4472; Jl SM Raja 79C).

**Pinang Baris bus terminal** (Jl Gatot Subroto), 10km west of the city centre, serves northern destinations. Get there by taxi (40,000Rp) or by *opelet* 24, 37 or 64 (5000Rp).

There are frequent public buses to both Bukit Lawang (15,000Rp, three hours) and Berastagi (15,000Rp, 2½ hours) every half-hour between 5.30am and 6pm.

Although there are buses to Banda Aceh from Pinang Baris, it's easier to get to Banda Aceh from the Pelangi ticket agent near Amplas.

A minibus departs at 8pm daily for Singkil (80,000Rp, 10 hours), the departure point for boats to the Banyak Islands. Buses depart from **Singkil Raya** (☎ 081 26560739; Jl Bintan), past the caged-bird warehouses. Here you'll also find buses to Ketambe (100,000Rp, eight hours). Take *opelet* 53 from Jl SM Raja to Medan Mall.

## TRAIN

Rail services are very limited, with just two trains a day to Tanjung Balai (economy only, 10,000Rp). There are four trains daily to Rantauparapat (business/executive 40,000/60,000Rp).

## Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

It is cheaper and less of a hassle to sail past the throng of taxi drivers to the becak queue at the airport gate (becak aren't allowed inside the airport). It should cost 10,000Rp to reach the hotel district on Jl SM Raja. If you like to haggle, a taxi ride should cost around 30,000Rp.

### PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Medan's got more *opelet* than you can shake a spoon player at. They cost 3000Rp for most in-town destinations. Here are a few helpful routes: white Mr X from Jl SM Raja to Kesawan Sq, Lapangan Merdeka and the train station; and yellow 64 from Maimoon Palace to Sun Plaza.

For becak, expect to pay about 8000Rp for most destinations. But they'll ask you to pay more than double that.

## BUKIT LAWANG

☎ 061 / pop 30,000

Lost in the depths of the Sumatran jungle is this sweet little tourist town built around the popularity of its orangutan-viewing centre. But Bukit Lawang has much more to offer beyond our red-haired cousins. It's very easy to while away a few days lounging in the many riverside hammocks, listening to the mating calls over the gushing river and watching the jungle life swing and sing around you. The surrounding jungle is one of the most biodiverse regions in the world, and is home to eight species of primate plus tiger, rhino, elephant, pangolin, leopard and cobras (though most of the larger mammals are very rarely seen).

Tourists, almost exclusively, come here to check out the orangutans. The conservation program has been operating on the eastern edge of the Gunung Leuser National Park since the 1970s. The national park is one of the orangutan's last remaining strongholds, with more than 5000 thought to be living in the wild here.

Since the village is only 96km northwest of Medan, Bukit Lawang is also one of the easiest places from which to make the leap into the jungle, a diverse and rugged forest criss-crossed by clear, fast-flowing rivers. Many tourists slip-slide through the mud and undergrowth on multiday treks and hobble back to the village to recuperate.

Bukit Lawang was extensively damaged by a flash flood in November 2003, which killed 239 people and destroyed much of the river-front development. The essentials of the town and tourist infrastructure have been rebuilt but the community is still grieving for lost relatives and livelihoods.

## Orientation & Information

The nearby village of Gotong Royong, 2km southeast of Sungai Bohorok, has effectively become the new town centre. About a kilometre north of the bus stop, the stretch of riverside accommodation begins.

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

**Leuser Netwave** (per hr 25,000Rp; ☎ 10am-10pm), at the top of a hill, has pricey and often unreliable internet connection. A few other internet cafes were opening up at the time of research.

### Bukit Lawang Guide Association (☎ 7am-2pm)

Located across the street from the visitor centre, this place distributes a rate sheet for hikes.

### Bukit Lawang Visitors Centre (☎ 8am-3pm)

Displays of flora and fauna found in Gunung Leuser National Park, plus a book of medicinal plants and their uses. Past visitors often record reviews of guides in the sign-in book.

**PHKA permit office** (park entrance; ☎ 8am-10am & 3-4pm) Timed with the orangutan feedings, the rangers open up this office to collect permit fees; don't bother arranging permits in town. If you're taking another entrance to the park, guides can arrange permits for you.

## Dangers & Annoyances

Not so much a danger as an annoyance: there are 140 guides and rarely more than a dozen tourists in town, which means that the guide harangue starts on the bus before you've even left Medan. A friendly stranger hops aboard and makes a beeline to the nearest available seat. They are full of Bukit Lawang titbits and just so happen to be going in the same direction, or, imagine that, they're a guide. They'll then escort you to a guest house, sit you down and sign you up for a trek. The trick is to be polite and feel no obligation to book anything unless you want to.



## RED-HEADED COUSINS

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

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

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

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

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

## Sights

### ORANGUTAN FEEDING CENTRE

Bukit Lawang's famous orangutan centre was set up in 1973 to help primates readjust to the wild after captivity or displacement through land clearing. Much of the original duties of the centre have been moved to more remote locations, but twice-daily feedings are still provided to semidependent orangutans. These events are open to the public (no guide required) and provide one of the closest views of the forest ape outside the confines of a zoo.

During the centre's decades-long operation, it has introduced 200 orangutans into the jungle and many of them have successfully mated with the wild population. Many of the animals have been kept as caged pets; the centre teaches them how to forage for food in the wild, build nests, climb trees and other essentials for survival after release. The orangutans are also treated for diseases that they contracted during contact with humans. The most recent release of an orangutan into the wild was in 2005.

Once the apes are on their own in the wild, the centre still provides supplementary feedings in case of awkward transitions or demanding circumstances. The feedings provided by the centre consist of milk and bananas and are considered a fairly bland diet compared with the diversity of food found in the forest. The semi-wild apes who appear at

the centre's 'welfare' platform are typically nursing or pregnant females in need of an extra source of nutrition.

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

The feeding platform is located on the west bank of Sungai Bohorok within the park boundaries, about a 20-minute walk up from the village. The river crossing to the park office is made by dugout canoe. Permits are required to enter the park (20,000Rp) and are available from the **office** (☎ 8am-10am & 3-4pm) at the foot of the trail to the platform. If you have a camera/video camera you'll have to pay an additional 50,000/150,000Rp at the office, with no refunds if orangutans don't come to the feeding platform – during peak fruit season they often don't.

Since 1996 the centre has been closed to new arrivals, as the park is considered to be saturated with orangutans. A replacement quarantine centre, just outside Medan, opened in 2002 to carry on the rehabilitation efforts, but it is not open to the public. Originally funded by World Wildlife Fund and Frankfurt Zoological Society, the centre now falls under the management of the Indonesian government, which does not provide adequate financial resources. Park rangers are not paid in a timely fashion and permit money is sent



directly to Jakarta. Despite these problems, the rangers are dedicated to their jobs and often supplement their incomes and their hands-on experience by working with foreign researchers.

Outside Gunung Leuser National Park, orangutans can be found in the Tanjung Puting and Kutai National Parks; in the

Gunung Palung, Bukit Raja, Sebangau, Danau Sentarum and Betung Kerihun national parks in Kalimantan; as well as in neighbouring Sarawak and Sabah in Malaysia.

For more information about Sumatran orangutans try the **Sumatran Orangutan Society** (SOS; [www.orangutans-sos.org](http://www.orangutans-sos.org)) and the **Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme** ([www.sumatranorangutan.com](http://www.sumatranorangutan.com)).

## Activities

### TREKKING

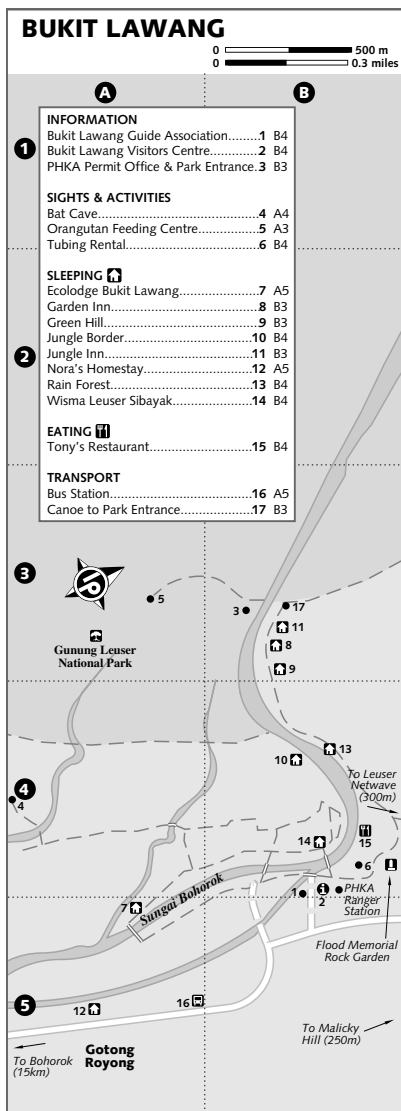
Treks into the Gunung Leuser National Park require a guide and can last anywhere from three hours to two days. Most people opt for two days so that they can spend the night in the jungle, which increases their likelihood of seeing orangutans and other critters in the wild. It is best to hike in a small group and to set off as early as possible.

Choosing a guide can be a tricky task as there are so many and the choice can be intimidating. Despite the pressure, take your time in choosing a guide. Talk to returning trekkers and decide how much jungle time you really need.

If you just want a few souvenir pictures and stories, find a guide you like. People who trekked with guides from the village have mainly positive feedback, with the greatest kudos going to the nightly meals and campfire socials. Common complaints range from guides who don't know enough about the flora and fauna, the bunching together of treks, and the feeding of orangutans.

Guide rates are fixed by the Sumatra Guide Association. For a minimum of three people it's €15 for a three-hour trek; €25 for a day trek; and €60/50 with/without rafting for a two-day trek including overnight camping in the jungle. Add €25 per extra day in the jungle. 'Rafting' back to town, which actually involves rubber tubes tied together, is a popular option that allows you to trek deeper into the jungle and makes for a fun and relaxing way to finish your trek. Prices include a visit to the feeding centre, basic meals, guide fees, camping equipment and the park permit. Camping involves a tarpaulin sheet thrown over bamboo poles, with everyone sleeping in the same tent.

A word of warning: trekking in the jungle is no stroll in the park. You'll encounter steep slippery ascents and precipitous drops amid intense humidity, so a good level of fitness is



## SAVE THE ORANGUTANS

A tragic paradox of Bukit Lawang is that the tourist presence, which keeps the viewing and rehabilitation centre running, is killing the orangutan population. It's a vicious circle, because the tourists are needed to maintain Bukit Lawang as a profitable and protected region. However, orangutans are extremely susceptible to human disease, and the semi-wild orangutans that come into contact with humans every day are passing on diseases across the orangutan population. Just a mild cold can potentially kill an orangutan. Without the orangutans, there is no jungle, as their seed-filled faeces are needed to maintain and spread the plant life. There are no reliable figures available, but a great number of orangutans – young, old, wild and semiwild – are dying from some form of human illness, in particular influenza. Infant mortality is estimated to be as high as 75%.

Respected conservation scientist and owner of Green Hill lodge, Andrea Molyneaux, recommends these tourist guidelines for protecting the orangutan population in Bukit Lawang.

- The recommended maximum number of people per trekking group is seven: this controls the risk of human impacts and optimises your viewing experience.
- At the feeding platform you are allowed to stay for a maximum of 30 minutes. If you meet orangutans when trekking stay with them for no longer than 10 minutes.
- Visitors who are sick (eg cough, diarrhoea) should not go trekking or to the feeding platform. Please report any sickness to your guide or a ranger and your visit can be rescheduled. Rangers and guides can refuse a visit to anyone showing obvious signs of illness.
- Healthy visitors should not be closer than 10m to orangutans.

Observe the following etiquette when you are close to orangutans:

- Do not call the orangutans.
- Do not feed or give them drinks.
- Do not smoke, eat, drink, cough, sneeze or spit.
- Always stay in a close group and never lose contact with your guide.
- When possible you should sit when watching the orangutans.
- Show respect by being as silent as possible and using good body language (no shouting, no sudden movements, no making monkey sounds etc).
- Do not use flash photography. It will not be effective anyway.
- Do not approach or try to touch them and NEVER come between a mother and her baby.

When you are in the rainforest, abide by these guidelines:

- It is forbidden to enter the rainforest without a guide.
- Do not pressure your guide to get closer to animals, shake trees or give them food so you can take photographs.
- If you feel your guide has behaved inappropriately inform the guide office.
- Do not leave any litter in the forest, eg tissues, water bottles, cigarette butts, food scraps. It must be carried outside of the forest then disposed of. This includes fruit skins (such as banana, orange, rambutan), which may carry your germs.
- If you must defecate you should dig a hole at least 2ft deep. You can borrow a parang/machete from your guide. All faecal material and tissue must be buried.
- Do not disturb or collect anything from the forest such as flowers, insects, seeds etc.

Some of these may seem extreme but so is the situation, and due attention to these rules by tourists is vital if we are to maintain the orangutans' existence in and around Bukit Lawang.

## THE NOTORIOUS MINA

The most well-known inhabitant of Bukit Lawang's jungle is a fiery female orangutan named Mina, who's earned a reputation among locals as the most feared, yet most loved, of the orangutans. She's known for her aggression towards humans – it seems every guide has a tale of a violent encounter with Mina at some point or another. At last count she'd attacked some 64 guides! Yet from the guides you'll hear nothing but love for this bad girl of the jungle, as nearly all run-ins result from tourists not heeding to guides' advice, and getting too close. Once held captive as a pet, the 29-year-old Mina is one of the first orangutans released into the wild here, and her aggression is largely a result of her expectation of being fed by humans. She is the perfect case study as to why tourists should ensure that they take the proper precautions by never feeding or coming too close to these magnificent apes.

essential. The trails can be well-worn paths or barely visible breaks in the underbrush. Pack at least two bottles of water per day. If you don't have trekking shoes, and have small feet, in town you may be able to buy a pair of cheap but reliable shoes with studded soles, the same as most guides wear.

## SHORT WALKS

There are a number of short walks around Bukit Lawang that don't require guides or permits.

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

The most interesting is a 20-minute walk, signposted from the Ecolodge Bukit Lawang, to a **bat cave**. This 2km walk passes through rubber plantations and patches of forest, and by a children's foster home. A lot of the trees are durian, so take care in late June and July, when the spiked fruits crash to the ground (there are signs warning people not to linger). You'll need a torch (flashlight) to explore the cave.

## TUBING

A shed along the river en route to the orangutan centre rents inflated truck inner tubes (10,000Rp per day), which can be used to ride the Sungai Bohorok rapids. On weekends, the river near the bridge resembles a water theme park, with Indonesian tourists having the time of their lives. Don't underestimate the river, though; currents are extremely strong and when the water is high, tubing is officially off limits, though few will tell you this. Tube at your own risk.

## Sleeping

The further upriver you go, the more likely you are to ogle the swinging monkeys and apes from your porch hammock. You won't find hot water or air-con at any of the guest houses. The following are listed in geographic order from south to north.

**Nora's Homestay** (☎ 081 36207 0656; r 40,000-50,000Rp) Nora's little cluster of bamboo huts between the rice fields and the main road is an old backpacker favourite with a reputation for being Sumatra's friendliest guest house. Many readers swear by it, despite the prettier-located guest houses upriver. Nora is very helpful with local information, though these days she's mostly found at Rain Forest (see below).

**Ecolodge Bukit Lawang** (☎ 081 2607 9983; http://ecolodge.yelweb.org; r ind breakfast s 130,000-275,000Rp, d 155,000-300,000Rp) Popular with package tourists, the village's most upmarket lodging has a range of hotel-style rooms. There are many commendable attempts at ecofriendly business: an organic garden provides produce for the restaurant, a medicinal-plant garden preserves the pharmaceutical aspects of the jungle, and there's recycling. Children under 10 stay free.

**Wisma Leuser Sibayak** (☎ 0813 6101 0736; r 50,000-60,000Rp) A basic cheapie that's worth a stay if you've arrived at night and don't fancy trekking up through the jungle path in the dark. Its rickety bridge across the river is rather frightening, though.

**Rain Forest** (☎ 081 362070656; d 30,000-40,000Rp) Nora (or 'Mama', as she calls herself) has recently opened this new spot on the river. The big house has rooms as close as you'll find on the water at bargain prices. Nora also has cooking classes for 100,000Rp, including meal.

**Green Hill** (☎ 081 26364 3775; www.greenhill-bukitlawang.com; dm 30,000Rp, r with/without bathroom incl

breakfast 150,000Rp/60,000Rp) For a few more rupiah you get a lot more than what's offered by most of the competition. Run by English conservation scientist Andrea Molyneux and her Sumatran husband, Green Hill has two lovely stilt-high rooms ideal for couples, where the en suite bamboo-shoot showers afford stunning jungle views while you wash. Also has dorms and cheaper rooms available.

**Garden Inn** (☎ 0812 6355 6285; fadill36@gmail.com; r 50,000-150,000Rp) A popular backpacker choice. The lovely high rooms look over the river and the jungle, plus there's a sweet little cafe for swapping monkey-spotting tales.

**Jungle Inn** (☎ 0813 6550 5005; superdjo@yahoo.com; d 50,000-450,000Rp). The last guest house along the strip near the park entrance, Jungle Inn is an old favourite of many a reader. One room overlooks a waterfall, while another incorporates the hill's rock face, and the bathroom sprouts a shower from living ferns. Its only downsides are the sometimes unreliable information provided by staff and overcharging for treks.

At the time of research, a new ecolodge called **Jungle Border** was about to open across the river from Rain Forest guest house, with five bungalows at the edge of the jungle, organic food and a yoga centre planned.

## Eating

All the guest houses along the river en route to the park entrance serve Western food, barbecued fish, nasi goreng (fried rice), fruit salads and a laidback ambience. Here is also where the guides camp out for new arrivals.

**Tony's Restaurant** (mains 25,000Rp, pizzas 40,000-63,000Rp) Located further up the river, Tony's fires up tasty pizzas in a riverfront shack.

## Getting There & Away

There are direct buses to Medan's Pinang Baris bus terminal every half-hour between 5.30am and 5pm (10,000Rp, four hours). Minivans (15,000Rp, three hours) also leave for Medan throughout the day.

## TANGKAHAN

This is the place for a truly wild and off-the-map adventure. Having ticked off seeing the orangutans in Bukit Lawang, in-the-know ecotourists are now trickling north to experience the jungle aboard elephants in this undiscovered retreat.

Towards the end of the 1990s a few foreign ecologists and conscientious locals decided to

take a stand against the palm-oil loggers that working in this wild part of northern Sumatra. Armed with a few rifles and machetes, and using elephants to patrol the jungle against loggers and poachers, the locals have gradually lobbied the government into declaring the region a protected area. Fast forward a decade and the once-doomed region is still home to all manner of apes, monkeys, lizards and, of course, elephants. Not so much a village as a bus stop, a park entrance and a handful of basic riverside bungalows on the wild banks of the Kuala Buluh River, Tangkahan has a tiny community of amiable loggers-turned-guides selling an experience as close as you'll get to Tarzan living on this untamed isle.

## Sights & Activities

For many, the elephants are the main draw here: you can give them their morning bath (20,000Rp) or be taken on an elephant-back trek (one hour, 250,000Rp). But it's also a wonderful place to relax in the wild, exploring the jungle and taking isolated morning dips in the river. At the time of research there were also plans to offer four-day elephant treks from Tangkahan into Bukit Lawang.

Grade III white-water rafting is also a popular activity (450,000Rp).

## Sleeping

There are only four places to stay in the area, with little to separate each one. **Green Lodge** (r 100,000Rp), situated by the elephant-washing area, has simple wood cabins. On the other side of the river (listed in the order you'll find them once you've crossed the river), **Mega Inn**, **Bamboo Lodge** and **Jungle Lodge** all have fairly basic en suite bungalows with river views from 80,000Rp. All of the guest houses serve simple meals.

## Getting There & Away

There are three direct buses that depart daily to Medan's Pinang Baris terminal (20,000Rp, four hours). To get to Tangkahan from Bukit Lawang, take one of the many buses to Binjai (10,000Rp, 2½ hours), from where it is possible to change for a bus to Tangkahan (15,000Rp, 2½ hours). Alternatively, any of the local guides will take you direct from Bukit Lawang on a moped (150,000Rp, three hours) – be warned that the road is treacherous. Most Medan-based travel agents can arrange 4WD transport (600,000Rp, 2½ hours).

## BERASTAGI

☎ 0628 / pop 600,000

Escaping from the infernal heat of sea-level Medan, the colonial Dutch traders climbed high into the lush, cool, volcanic hills, took one look at the stunningly verdant, undulating landscape and decided to build a rural retreat where Berastagi (also called Brastagi) now stands.

Today weekendening Medan folk and backpackers alike sigh a crisp, clear breath of relief when they arrive in this quaint agricultural escape situated high among Sumatra's steaming volcanoes. Though the town itself is not overly pretty, a concrete jungle set amid beautiful surrounds, as an agricultural trade centre its markets are always humming with activity, and modern-day snake-oil hawkers fill the sidewalks with 'big city' amusements for isolated country folk. On Sunday, the largely Christian community takes the babies and bibles out for worship.

Beyond the town are the green fields of the Karo Highlands, dominated by two volcanoes: Gunung Sinabung to the west and the smoking Gunung Sibayak to the north. Though you won't find lava in either Sibayak or Sinabung, each still has the feel of everything you hoped to experience from an active volcano, with steamy gases gushing from the fumaroles like a mad scientist's laboratory. These volcanoes are a day hike apiece, making them two of Sumatra's most accessible volcanoes, and the primary reason why tourists get off the bus here.

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

## Orientation

Berastagi is essentially a one-street town spread along Jl Veteran. The colourful Tugu Perjuangan (Combat Memorial), commemorating the Bataks' struggle against the Dutch in the 1800s, marks the centre of town. The hill to the northwest is Bukit Gundaling, a popular picnic spot.

## Information

**BNI bank** (Jl Veteran) With ATMs.

**BRI bank** (Jl Veteran) With ATMs.

**Sibayak Trans Tour & Travel** (☎ 91122; dicksonpelawij@yahoo.com; Jl Veteran 119) Books plane tickets and has information about local and onward travel.

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

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

**Tourist Information Centre** (☎ 91084; Jl Gundaling 1;

☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) Has maps and can arrange guides.

**D'Z@S Net** (Jl Perwira; ☎ 7am-midnight) Decent-speed internet.

## Sights & Activities

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

## TRADITIONAL VILLAGES

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

## Kampung Peceren

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

## Lingga

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

There are regular *opelet* to Lingga from Kabanjahe (8000Rp).

## Dokan

The charming little village of Dokan is approximately 16km south of Kabanjahe. Traditional houses are still in the majority and most are in good condition. Entry is by donation. You can get here by the occasional direct *opelet* from Kabanjahe (5000Rp).

## AIR TERJUN SIPISO-PISO

These narrow but impressive **falls** cascade 120m down to the north end of Danau Toba,





## IN THE KNOW ON VOLCANOES

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

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

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

Alternatively, you can catch a local bus (5000Rp) to Semangat Gunung at the base of the volcano, from where it's a two-hour climb to the summit. There are steps part of the way, but this track is narrower and in poorer condition than the one from Berastagi.

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

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

## Gunung Sinabung

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

Most guest houses recommend taking a guide (200,000Rp to 300,000Rp), as hikers have gotten lost and died. The path up the mountain from Danau Kawar is fairly well trodden by locals, but relying on a guide takes the guesswork out of timing your return to town or reading changing weather conditions. The climb takes six to eight hours depending on your skill and the descent route.

To reach the trailhead, take an *opelet* to Danau Kawar (7000Rp, 1½ hours). Entry fee is 2500Rp. There is a scenic camp site surrounding Danau Kawar for those travelling with gear.

## Sleeping

Jl Veteran sees extremely heavy traffic and many rooms in the centre of town are very noisy. Most provide detailed maps of Berastagi and the Karo Highlands.

## BUDGET

**Sibayak Losmen Guesthouse** (☎ 91122; dicksonpelawi@yahoo.com; Jl Veteran 119; r with/without bathroom 60,000/40,000Rp; ☑ ☑) Nice cheapies with a lot of Indonesian personality make this place feel more like a homestay. Wi-fi in the lobby.

**Wisma Sunrise View** (☎ 92404; Jl Kaliaga; r 50,000-60,000Rp) Here you'll find very basic rooms perched on the little hill that earns Sunrise its namesake view. It's just far enough outside of town to be a convenient stroll.

**Wisma Sibayak** (☎ 91104; Jl Udera 1; r with bathroom 80,000-125,000Rp, r without bathroom 50,000-60,000Rp; ☑) Tidy and spacious rooms in the two-storey building have great views. The restaurant has traveller comment books and knowledgeable staff.

**Sibayak Multinational Resthouse** (☎ 91031; Jl Pendidikan 93; r 100,000-120,000Rp) A nice quiet option away from the town centre. Multinational has a manicured garden and rooms with hot showers. The hotel is a short *opelet* ride north of town on the road to Gunung Sibayak.

## MIDRANGE & TOP END

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

**Brastagi Cottage** (☎ 91345; Jl Gundaling; d incl breakfast 450,000-550,000Rp, tr 730,000Rp) Another quiet, out-of-town possibility with a range of stylish rooms. There are great garden views. Discounts of 20% available.

**Hotel Internasional Sibayak** (☎ 20152; www.hotel.sibayak.com; Jl Merdeka; d incl breakfast 750,000-900,000Rp, cottages 1,000,000Rp, ste 2,000,000-3,000,000Rp; ☑) Wooden floors, generous beds, read-the-newspaper toilets: there's a lot right about the International, except the price. Offers up to 40% discount – if you can eke out one of these, then you'll earn a shiny frugal star.



## Eating & Drinking

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

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

**Café Raymond** (Jl Trimurti 49; mains 8000-20,000Rp) ☎ 7am-midnight) Berastagi's local bohemians hang out at Café Raymond, which serves fruit juices, beer and Western food.

**Smiley's Café** (Jl Perwira 1; ☎ 8am-8pm; mains 10,000-23,000Rp) A rickety little cafe serving cheesy lasagne, local dishes and useful tourist advice.

## Getting There & Away

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

To reach Danau Toba without backtracking through Medan, catch an *opelet* to Kabanjahe (3500Rp, 15 minutes) and change to a bus for

Pematangsiantar (15,000Rp, three hours), then connect with a Parapat-bound bus (15,000Rp, 1½ hours). It's a little bit of a pain but it gets you there eventually.

Berastagi is the southern approach for visits to Gunung Leuser National Park. To reach the park, catch a bus to Kutacane (50,000Rp, five hours).

## Getting Around

*Opelet* to the surrounding villages leave from the bus terminal. They run every few minutes between Berastagi and Kabanjahe (3500Rp), the major population and transport centre of the highlands. Local *opelet* are most easily waved down from the clock tower in town.

## PARAPAT

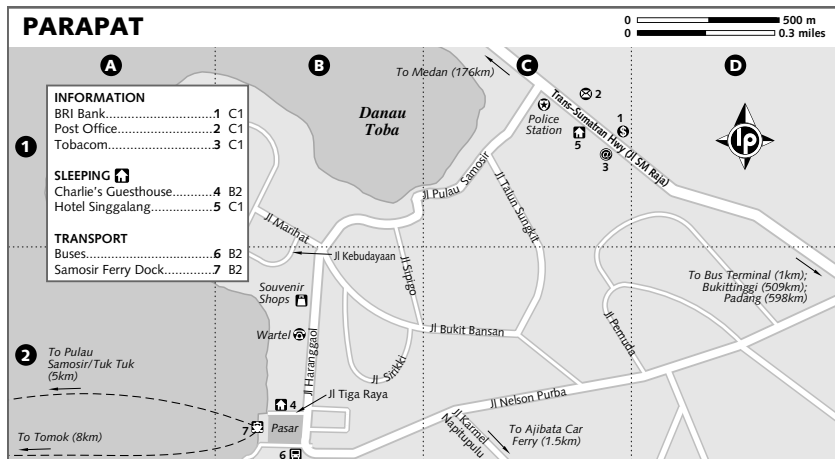
☎ 0625

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

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

## Information

There is a string of moneychangers and a war-tel along Jl Haranggaol.



**BRI bank** (Jl SM Raja) Has an ATM.

**Tobacom** (Jl SM Raja 84; per hr 3500Rp; ☎ 8am-10pm)  
Internet cafe.

**Post office** (Jl SM Raja)

## Sleeping & Eating

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

**Charlie's Guesthouse** (☎ 41277; Jl Tiga Raya 7; r 50,000Rp) Beside the ferry dock, Charlie's is cheap and close. It's run by a local Toba music legend.

**Hotel Singgalang** (☎ 41260; Jl SM Raja 52; r without bathroom 80,000Rp) A big Chinese-run place with basic rooms and a downstairs restaurant.

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

## Getting There & Away

### BOAT

For details of ferries to Samosir, see p394.

### BUS

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

Buses to Medan (22,000Rp, five hours) are frequent, although services taper off in the afternoon. There are also minibuses (70,000Rp) that deliver passengers to Jl SM Raya in Medan. Other destinations include Sibolga (70,000Rp, six hours), Bukittinggi (economy/superexecutive 160,000/200,000Rp, 15 hours) and Padang (executive 220,000Rp, 17 hours).

## Getting Around

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

## DANAU TOBA

☎ 0625 / pop 517, 000

Danau Toba has been part of traveller folklore for decades. This grand ocean-blue lake, found high up among Sumatra's volcanic peaks, is where the amiable Batak people reside, largely untouched by the rest of the world. The secret of this almost mythical place was opened up to travellers by the intrepid, and Tuk Tuk – the village on the lake's inner island – became as much a highlight for

Southeast Asian shoe-stringers as Haad Rin and Kuta. It was almost overrun with tourism: wild full-moon parties would kick off, and travellers in beach-bum mode would get 'stuck' on the island for months on end. Yet the world seems to have forgotten about Toba all over again, and the lazy, low-key lakeside days have returned to the Batak people, who warmly open their arms to the trickle of travellers that come.

Expect a chorus of 'horas' ('welcome') to greet you at every turn, as the locals quietly strum away the afternoon on their guitars while passing around a flagon of jungle juice – the locals are proud, debaucherous Christians who love a drink.

For European and American missionaries this was once the 'heart of darkness', and the first evangelists met their makers by the tips of spears. Good timing brought survival and fame to a German missionary named Nommenson, whose arrival preceded a bumper crop, which encouraged the Bataks' King Sidabutar to incorporate the Christian faith with the community's animist beliefs.

The resulting blend of traditional culture and imported religion, observable in the Batak countryside, is the reality behind those exotic tales of mannered missionaries and cannibalistic natives.

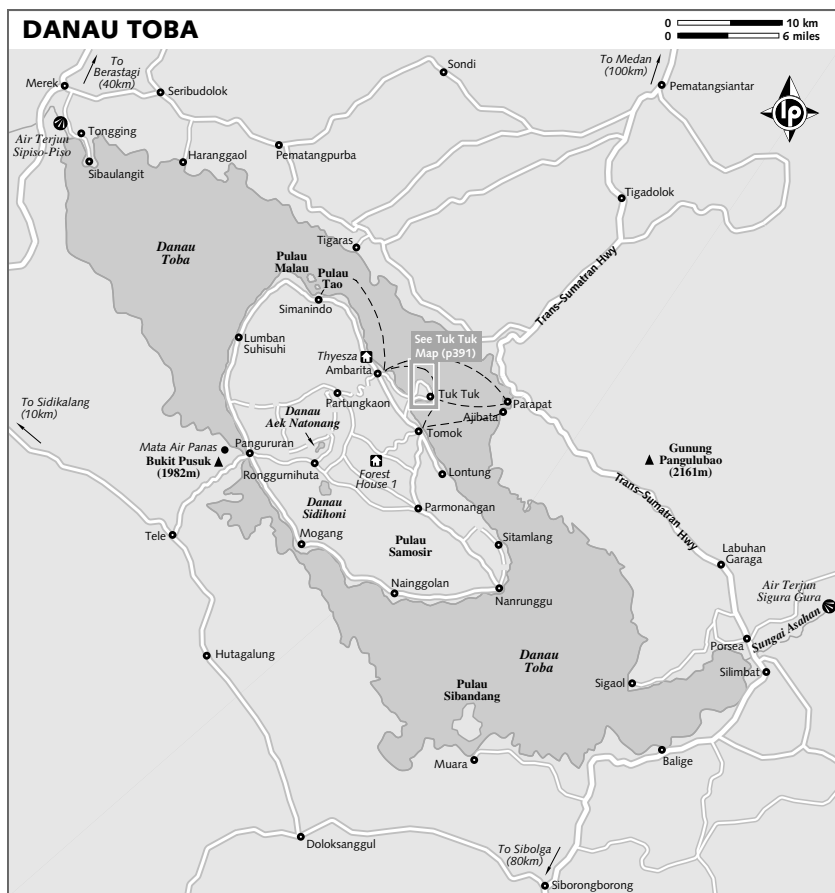
## Orientation

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

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

## Information

The following facilities are all located in Tuk Tuk (Map p391). There is a small police



station at the top of the road leading to the Carolina Cottages (p392).

### BOOKSHOPS

Better load up on reading material in Toba, because the rest of Sumatra is a desert for the printed word. **Penny's Bookstore** and **Gokhan Library** have used and rental books, plus DVD hire for rainy days.

### INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access (10,000Rp per hour) is available at many of the guest houses.

### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Health centre** (☎ 451075) Small 24-hour place close to the turn-off to Carolina Cottages,

at the southern end of the peninsula. It's equipped to cope with cuts, bruises and other minor problems.

### MONEY

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

### POST

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

### Sights

The following sights and activities are located around Danau Toba (see map above).

## THE BATAKS

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

The Bataks are a Proto-Malay people descended from Neolithic mountain tribes from northern Thailand and Myanmar (Burma) who were driven out by migrating Mongolian and Siamese tribes. When the Bataks arrived in Sumatra they trekked inland, making their first settlements around Danau Toba, where the surrounding mountains provided a natural protective barrier. They lived in virtual isolation for centuries.

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

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

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

The majority of today's Bataks are Protestant Christians, although many still practise elements of traditional animist belief and ritual. The Bataks believe the banyan to be the tree of life; they tell a legend of their omnipotent god Ompung, who created all living creatures by dislodging decayed branches of a huge banyan into the sea.

Music is a great part of Batak culture and a Batak man is never far from his guitar. The Bataks are also famous for their powerful and emotive hymn singing. Most of their musical instruments are similar to those found elsewhere in Indonesia – cloth-covered copper gongs in varying sizes struck with wooden hammers; a small two-stringed violin, which makes a pure but harsh sound; and a kind of reedy clarinet.

## KING SIDABUTAR GRAVE

The Batak king who adopted Christianity is buried in Tomok, a village 5km southeast of Tuk Tuk. The king's image is carved on his tombstone, along with those of his bodyguard and Anteng Melila Senega, the woman the king is said to have loved for many years without fulfilment. The tomb is also decorated with carvings of *singa*, mythical creatures with grotesque three-horned heads and bulging eyes. Next door in death is the missionary who converted the tribe, the career equivalent of boy-band stardom. Next in the row is an older Batak royal tomb, which is used as a multi-lingual fertility shrine for childless couples, according to souvenir vendors.

The tombs are 500m up a narrow lane lined with souvenir stalls.

## STONE CHAIRS

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

The 300-year-old **stone chairs** (admission 2000Rp, guides 20,000Rp; ☎ 8am-6pm) is where village matters were discussed and wrongdoers were tried. A second set of megaliths in an adjoining courtyard is where the accused were bound, blindfolded, sliced and rubbed with chilli and garlic before being beheaded.

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

## MUSEUM HUTA BOLON SIMANINDO

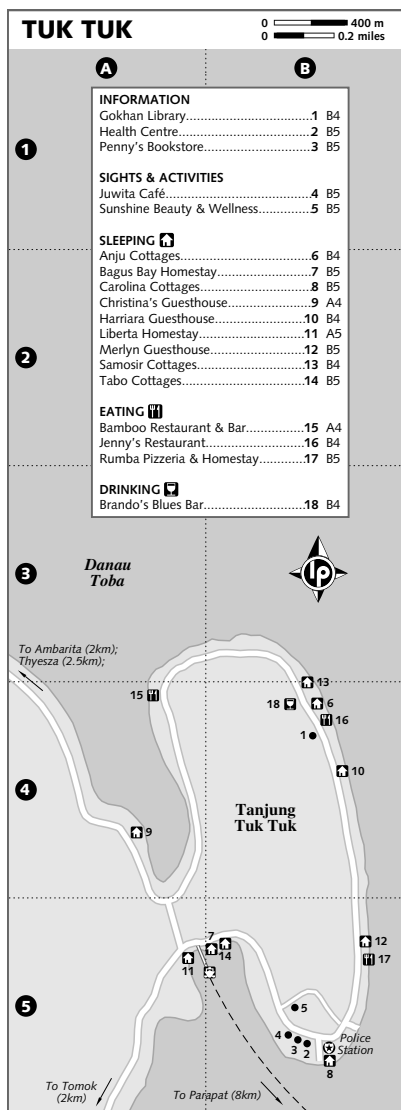
At the northern tip of the island, in Simanindo, there's a fine old traditional house that has been restored and now functions as a **museum** (admission 30,000Rp; ☎ 10am-5pm). It was formerly the home of Rajah Simalungun, a Batak king, and his 14 wives. Originally, the roof was decorated with 10 buffalo horns, which represented the 10 generations of the dynasty.

The museum has a small, interesting collection of brass cooking utensils, weapons,

Dutch and Chinese crockery, sculptures and Batak carvings.

Displays of traditional **Batak dancing** are performed at 10.30am from Monday to Saturday if enough tourists show up.

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



## SIMANINDO TO PANGURURAN

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

## Activities

In Tuk Tuk, **Sunshine Beauty & Wellness** (☎ 451 108; ☎ 8am-8pm) will turn beasts into beauties with facials, after-sun treatment and traditional massages (60,000Rp to 80,000Rp).

## CYCLING & MOTORCYCLING

Pulau Samosir's sleepy roads make the island perfect for exploring by motorbike or bicycle. Zipping through the scenic countryside enclosed by lush volcanic mountains and the stunning lake is the highlight of many who visit here. The rice paddies and friendly villages are cultivated around sober Protestant-style churches and tombs merging traditional Batak architecture and Christian crosses.

## SWIMMING

Danau Toba reaches a depth of 450m in places and is refreshingly cool. The best swimming on the south coast is said to be at Carolina Cottages, while many cottages on the north coast maintain weed-free swimming.

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

## TREKKING

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

The central highlands of Samosir are about 700m above the lake and on a clear day afford stunning views of mist-cloaked mountains. The top of the escarpment forms a large plateau and at its heart is a small lake, Danau Sidihoni. Samosir's vast tracts of jungle have long since vanished and the only forest you will pass through on either walk is pine, and even this is only in small areas. However, there are many interesting cinnamon, clove and coffee plantations and some beautiful waterfalls.

Most people opt for the short trek from Ambarita to Pangururan. It can be done in a day if you're fit and in a hurry, though it's best to stay overnight in one of the villages. The path starts opposite the bank in Ambarita. Keep walking straight at the escarpment and take the path to the right of the graveyard. The three-hour climb to the top is hard and steep. The path then leads to Partungkaon village (also called Dolok); here you can stay at **Jenny's Guest House** (r 5000Rp) or **John's Losmen** (☎ 0813 7678 7733; r 5000Rp). From Partungkaon, it's about five hours' walk to Pangururan via Danau Sidihoni.

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

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

## Courses

The clouds that come steaming in off the surrounding mountains often bring cloudy and rainy days to Toba. A good way to pass a day indoors is by turning your hand to Indonesian and Batak cooking. **Juwita Café** (☎ 451 217) has four-hour cooking classes for 250,000Rp, held in an outdoor kitchen with magnificent views of the lake.

## Festivals & Events

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

## Sleeping

The best sleeping options are along the north and south coasts, where little guest houses are

tucked in between village chores: washing the laundry on the rocks and collecting the news from neighbours.

All of the places listed here are located in Tuk Tuk (Map p391).

**Bagus Bay Homestay** (☎ 451 287; www.bagus-bay.page.tl; r with bathroom 75,000-150,000Rp, r without bathroom 20,000-30,000Rp; 📍) Rooms in traditional Batak houses overlook avocado trees and a children's playground. The cheaper rooms are more like prison cells. At night its restaurant is a lively spot for young travellers.

**ourpick Liberta Homestay** (☎ 451 035; liberta\_homestay@yahoo.com.co.id; r with bathroom 40,000-70,000Rp, r without bathroom 25,000Rp; 📍) This place may have only limited lake views, but a chill universe is created here by a lazy-day garden and arty versions of traditional Batak houses. Crawling around the balconies and shortened doors of the rooms feels like being a deck hand on a Chinese junk. The popular Mr Moon is a great source of information, including for onward travel to North Sumatra and Aceh.

**Merlyn Guesthouse** (☎ 451057; r 30,000-35,000Rp; 📍) Situated right on the lake; rooms in traditional Batak-style houses here are as cheap and charming as you'll find. Has hot water.

**Christina's Guesthouse** (☎ 451 027; www.xs4all.nl/~wiltheo/christina; r 30,000-45,000Rp, f 80,000Rp) Cheap and laid-back, Christina's is comfortable like a well-worn pair of jeans.

**Anju Cottages** (☎ 451 265; r 40,000-50,000Rp) Next door to Samosir Cottages, Anju is a peaceful option right on the waterfront.

**Carolina Cottages** (☎ 451 210; www.carolinacottage.laketoba.blogspot.com; d 48,000-110,000Rp, f 250,000Rp; 📍 ☎) Considered Tuk Tuk's swankiest (a relative term) sleep, Carolina is neat and orderly, perhaps too much so for dishevelled types. But its economy rooms are an eagle's eyrie with a hilltop perch in a polished Batak-style building. There's good swimming here, with a diving board. Wi-fi available in the restaurant.

**Samosir Cottages** (☎ 451 170; www.samosircottages.com; r 50,000-375,000Rp; 📍) A good choice for travellers who want to hang out with young like-minded folk and boisterous young staff, plus the swimming is pretty good.

**Harriara Guesthouse** (☎ 451 183; r 60,000-80,000Rp) A great spot on the lake with good swimming and a pleasant flower garden. From its sparkling rooms, you'd never guess this place was 22 years old.

## PUPPET MASTERS

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

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

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

**Thyesza** (☎ 700 0443; www.flowerofsamosir.com; r 60,000Rp, r with hot water & breakfast 150,000Rp) Located out of town just past Ambarita, Thyesza is a great choice for those wanting some added peace and quiet away from Tuk Tuk's backpacker scene. Rooms are immaculate, and there's an option to stay in a Batak house. Offers free transport from Tuk Tuk on arrival.

**Tabo Cottages** (☎ 451 318; www.tabocottages.com; r incl breakfast 60,000-285,000Rp, ste 350,000-650,000Rp; 📶) The professionals' choice, Tabo Cottages has a resort feel with modern rooms set in a beautiful garden. Lots of expats from Jakarta and Aceh bring the family here for a weekend getaway. Has a popular vegetarian restaurant and German bakery, and wi-fi in the lobby.

## Eating

The guest houses tend to mix eating and entertainment in the evening. Most restaurants serve the Batak speciality of barbecued carp (most from fish farms), sometimes accompanied by traditional dance performances.

The following restaurants are all located in Tuk Tuk (Map p391).

**our pick Jenny's Restaurant** (mains 20,000-45,000Rp) One of the busiest places on the island and with good reason. The smoky grilled fish fresh from the lake is simply the best in town. The fruit pancake is also highly recommended.

**Bamboo Restaurant & Bar** (mains 20,000-50,000Rp) With incredible lake views, Bamboo is a stylish place to watch the sun sink away, with cosy cushion seating, a down-tempo mood and a reliable menu. Does good cocktails, too.

**Rumba Pizzeria & Homestay** (mains 20,000-70,000Rp)

On Saturday Rumba's will stay open late to show English Premiership football, served with delicious pizza where you pick your own ingredients. Also has magic mushrooms (legal in Danau Toba) on its menu.

## Drinking

**Brando's Blues Bar** (☎ 451084) There is a handful of foreigner-oriented bars, such as this one in between the local jungle-juice cafes. Happy hour is until 10pm.

## Entertainment

On most nights, music and spirits fill the night air with the kind of camaraderie that only grows in small villages. The Toba Bataks are extremely musical and passionate choruses erupt from invisible corners.

Today the parties are all local – celebrating a wedding, a new addition on a house or the return of a Toba expat. Invitations are gladly given and should be cordially accepted.

Bagus Bay and Samosir Cottages (see opposite) both have traditional Batak music and dance performances on Wednesday and Saturday evenings at 8.15pm.

## Shopping

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

Around Tuk Tuk there are numerous wood-carvers selling a variety of figures, masks, boxes and *porhalaan* (traditional Batak calendars), as well as some traditional musical instruments.



## Getting There & Away

### BOAT

Ferries between Parapat and Tuk Tuk (7000Rp) operate about every hour from 8.30am to 6pm. Ferries stop at Bagus Bay (35 minutes); other stops are by request. The first and last ferries from Tuk Tuk leave at about 7am and 4pm, respectively; check exact times with your hotel. When leaving for Parapat, stand on your hotel jetty and wave a ferry down.

Five ferries a day shuttle vehicles and people between Ajibata, just south of Parapat, and Tomok. There are five departures per day between 7am and 9pm. The passenger fare is 4000Rp. Cars cost 75,000Rp, and places can be booked in advance at the **Ajibata office** (☎ 41194) or the **Tomok office** (☎ 451185).

### BUS

See Parapat (p388), the mainland transit point, for information on bus travel to/from Danau Toba.

On Samosir, to get to Berastagi you'll have to catch a bus from Tomok to Pangururan (12,000Rp, 45 minutes), from where you take another bus to Berastagi (27,000Rp, three hours). This bus goes via Sidikalang, which is also a transfer point to Kutacane and Tapaktuan (on the west coast).

## Getting Around

Local buses serve the whole of Samosir except Tuk Tuk, which is an inconvenience for those wanting to explore the island, although the peaceful, well-maintained roads are perfect for travelling by motorbike or bicycle. You can rent motorcycles in Tuk Tuk for 75,000Rp a day, which includes petrol and a helmet. Bicycle hire costs from 25,000Rp per day.

Minibuses run between Tomok and Ambarita (3000Rp), continuing to Simanindo (6000Rp) and Pangururan (12,000Rp). The road through the neck of the peninsula is a good spot to flag down these minibuses. Services dry up after 5pm.

## SIBOLGA

☎ 0631 / pop 90,000

The departure point for boats to Nias, Sibolga is a west-coast port town renowned for its touts. As tourist numbers decline, the hassles have diminished to a fish boil of touts when you step off the bus or boat.

Most boats like to get in and out of Sibolga as soon as possible, so it's best to arrive as early in the day as possible to ensure a place on a boat departing that day.

## Information

**BNI bank** (Jl Katamsi) It is advisable to change money here or to use the ATM, as options on Nias are limited.

**Post office** (Jl Tobing; ☎ 8am-6pm) Internet access available (per hr 5000Rp).

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

## Dangers & Annoyances

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

A more serious scam involves being detained on suspicion of carrying drugs. Some travellers have reported being searched and intimidated by groups of uniformed officials demanding exorbitant bribes before releasing travellers.

Don't leave your bags unattended or with a 'helpful' guide.

## Sights

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

## Sleeping & Eating

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

**Hotel Pasar Baru** (☎ 22167; cnr Jl Imam Bonjol & Raja Junjungan; d with fan 100,000Rp, d with air-con 180,000-250,000Rp; 🍽️) A decent enough place to sleep in a pinch.

**Hotel Wisata Indah** (☎ 23688; Jl Katamsi 51; r incl breakfast from 350,000Rp; 🍽️ 🚿) The only upmarket hotel in town. Wisata Indah has a pool, comfortable rooms and sea views. Nonguests can use the pool and showers for a day-use fee.

There are plenty of Padang restaurants and coffee shops directly across the street from the harbour.

## Getting There & Away

### BOAT

Ferries to Nias leave from the harbour at the end of Jl Horas. There are two port options for

Nias: the capital city of Gunung Sitoli, which is at the north of the island and a three-hour bus ride from the surf break; or Teluk Dalam, which is in the south and a 15-minute ride away.

Boats to Teluk Dalam are the obvious choice but they don't run every day. **PT Simeulue** (☎ 21497; Jl Sultan Bustani) runs a ferry to Teluk Dalam (11 hours).

If you arrive in Sibolga between Monday and Saturday, catch a Gunung Sitoli-bound boat (economy/air-con/cabin 69,000/103,000/155,000Rp, eight to 10 hours), which departs at 8pm every day but Sunday. **ASDP** (☎ 21752), in front of the harbour, runs a modern passenger- and car-ferry. The air-con class is the best value: seats recline, the room is fairly cool and generally quiet.

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

Theoretically you don't have to pay extra to carry surfboards on either service but this is not always the case.

## BUS

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

There are frequent departures for Bukittinggi (90,000Rp, 12 hours), Padang (125,000Rp, 14 hours), Medan (85,000Rp, 11 hours) and Parapat (60,000Rp, six hours).

There are also minivan services that shuttle folks between Sibolga and Medan (95,000Rp) – prices are highly negotiable.

## PULAU NIAS

The Indian Ocean roars onto Indonesia, arriving in one of the world's most spectacular surf breaks here on lonely Nias: a sizeable but solitary rock off the northern Sumatran coast. Surfers have been coming here for decades for the wave on superb Sorake Bay, which has deservedly kept this far-flung island on the international surfing circuit. The ancient megalithic monuments and traditional architecture will satisfy the hunger of any culture vulture.

At any one time, no more than a gaggle of surfers can be found paddling offshore, where, famously, you can while away the wait for your set ogling the sea turtles that dance and spin under the crystal-clear water below.

The locals have a reputation for being somewhat unfriendly. Apparently, the surfers back in the '70s weren't that respectful and there's been a surfer/local divide ever since. Grossly exaggerated tales of rip-offs and macho tussles don't help the reputation of either side, especially when the reality is that most folk get along just fine. But, as always, there are exceptions.

The tragic 2004 tsunami and the following aftershock, four months later, resulted in the deaths of over 600 people and the flattening of the capital city. The recovery program here hasn't been anywhere near as rapid as in Aceh; the local frustration is evident and sometimes gets taken out on tourists. Patience and understanding are absolute requirements for all on Nias.

## History

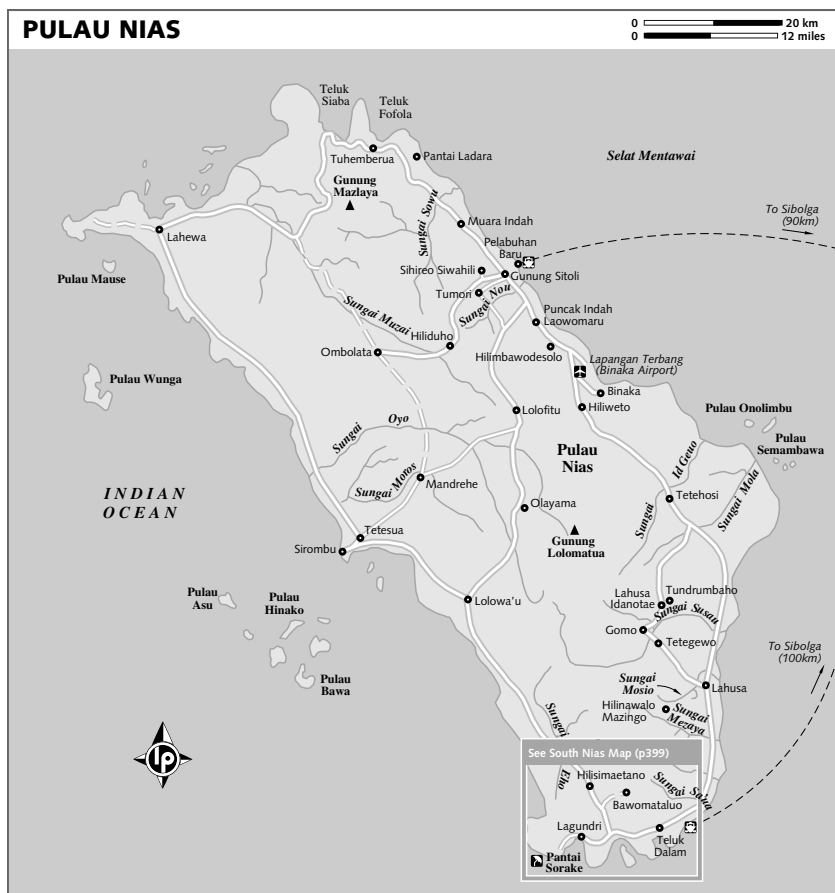
Local legend tells it that Niassans are the descendants of six gods who came to earth and settled in the central highlands. Anthropologists link them to just about everyone: the Bataks of Sumatra, the Naga of Assam in India, the aborigines of Taiwan and various Dayak groups in Kalimantan.

Nias history is the stuff of campfire tales in which locals practised headhunting and human sacrifice long after the rest of the world started fainting at the sight of blood.

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

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

When the people weren't warring, they were farming, a tradition that continues



today. They cultivated yams, rice, maize and taro, despite the thick jungle, and raised pigs as a source of food and a symbol of wealth and prestige; the more pigs you had, the higher your status in the village. Gold and copper work, as well as woodcarving, were important industries.

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

The island did not come under full Dutch control until 1914. Today's population of about 639,000 is spread through more than 650 villages, most inaccessible by road.

## Orientation & Information

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

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

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

## Dangers & Annoyances

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

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

**Merpati** (☎ 061-736 6888; www.merpati.co.id/en) has daily flights from Medan to Binaka airport, 17km south of Gunung Sitoli. Surfboards cost an extra 30,000Rp.

### BOAT

There are boats every night except Sunday from Gunung Sitoli to Sibolga. In theory, all services leave at 8pm, but in practice they seldom set sail before 10pm. Ticket prices are 69,000/103,000/155,000Rp for economy/air-con/cabin. **ASDP** (fax 0639-21554; Jl Yos Sudarso) has an office at the harbour in Gunung Sitoli.

Boats to Sibolga also leave from Teluk Dalam every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Boat tickets to Sibolga can be bought at **PT Simeulue** (☎ 081 216 7033; Jl Saunigaho). Tickets cost 80,000/100,000Rp for economy/cabin class. **Pelni** (☎ 0639-21846; Jl Chengkeh) has as an irregular monthly boat to and from Padang.

## Getting Around

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

From Gunung Sitoli, there are minibuses to the southern market town of Teluk Dalam (60,000Rp, three hours), which has transport to Lagundri, 13km away. You can also arrange transport directly to Sorake (75,000Rp). You will probably be charged extra to take a surfboard but always whittle down the initial quote as low as a smile can get. Services dry up in the afternoon, so aim to leave before noon.

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

## GUNUNG SITOLI

☎ 0639

Gunung Sitoli, on the northeastern coast of Nias, is the island's main town. It was badly damaged by the 28 March 2005 earthquake and reconstruction only really got underway

in the last couple of years, at a pace that's agonisingly slow for the locals.

## Orientation & Information

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

**Bank Sumut** (Jl Hatta) MasterCard-accessible ATM.

**BRI bank** (☎ 21946; Jl Imam Bonjol; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) ATM available.

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

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

## Sights

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

If you're curious about viewing more examples of Nias' cultural heritage, see p400.

## Sleeping & Eating

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

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

**Miga Beach Bungalows** (☎ 21460; d incl breakfast 200,000-300,000Rp; 🍴) About 1.5km out of town, Miga sits right on a small beach with comfortable rooms.

**Harmony Cottages** (☎ 22157; r incl breakfast 450,000Rp; 🍴) Near Miga, a lovely jungle-clad, family-run place with simple but clean rooms.

To get to these hotels, catch an *angkot* from the bus terminal (2000Rp). A becak will cost about 15,000Rp. These hotels are 14km from the airport and can arrange transport for 30,000Rp per person.

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

## EARTH SHAKER

Hardly at the centre of international events, remote Sumatra isn't exactly renowned for its influence on the rest of the world. That is, until you tally up all the times that violent natural disasters on the island have literally shaken the planet.

Take for instance the 1883 eruption of Krakatau, 40km off the southern Sumatra coast. This volcanic explosion was equivalent to that from 200 megatonnes of TNT, more powerful than the A-bomb dropped on Hiroshima. So much ash was hurled into the atmosphere that the sky was darkened for days and global temperatures were reduced by an average of 1.2 degrees Celsius for several years.

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

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

Few landmasses can claim to have literally moved the planet in the same way as Sumatra.

## TELUK DALAM

☎ 0631

This squat little port town is as loud and chaotic as much larger cities. You'll need to pass through Teluk Dalam for transit connections to the beach or to pick up provisions.

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

## PANTAI SORAKE & TELUK LAGUNDRI

☎ 0630

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

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

## Dangers & Annoyances

Times are tough here – not that hardship is an annoyance, but it creates disparity between a tourist's expectations for a holiday and the

locals' economic concerns. Many generous people who have a relationship with Nias have sponsored the rebuilding of local houses and bungalows destroyed by the tsunami, ostensibly in exchange for free accommodation, but more importantly as true grassroots giving. By circumventing aid organisations, many people can see tangible results from their disaster donations. The downside is that some locals view every new arrival here as a possible donor and the sales pitch can come from your losmen or from a stranger you meet on the beach, blurring the line between charity and con game. Unless you have a relationship with a family, it is not advisable to expect that your donation will be spent as promised. Be wary about donating to people you do not know, as the money may not be spent as promised.

Renting surf gear on the island is still a source of unexpected headaches. Be sure you pay a fair price; if it is too cheap, you'll probably pay for it at the end with inflated damage costs.

## Activities

### SURFING

Surfing is to Nias what honeymooning is to the Maldives. It's the island's tourism *raison d'être*. Sorake's famous right consistently unrolls between June and October. Access to the wave is a quick paddle from the Keyhole, a break in the coral reef that lies between the beach and the bay.





## OFFSHORE SURFING

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

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

Sirombu on Nias' west coast is the jumping-off point for the islands. Ask around to see if any public buses will be heading there; otherwise you can charter transport for about 500,000Rp.

From Sirombu there are cargo boats (80,000Rp). You can also charter boats (500,000Rp, maximum of 10 people) from local fishermen at Teluk Dalam and save yourself the hassle of getting to Sirombu.

Bawa has several simple losmen (70,000Rp per night), including one run by an Indonesian named German. Bring your own food.

Surfers on Nias are saying that the earthquake adversely affected the waves on Asu. Now the ride is good only if the swell is high. Tours can be organised through **Sumatran Surfariis** ([www.sumatransurfariis.com](http://www.sumatransurfariis.com)).

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

balconies. **JJ Losmen**, the last in the row, has freshly varnished wooden rooms.

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

## TRADITIONAL VILLAGES

For hundreds of years, Nias residents built elaborate villages around cobble-stoned streets lined with rows of shiplike wooden houses. The traditional homes were balanced on tall wooden pylons and topped by a steep, thatched roof. Some say the boat motif was inspired by Dutch spice ships. Constructed from local teak and held together with hand-hewn wooden pegs, the houses are adorned with symbolic wooden carvings. The technology of traditional architecture proved quite absorbent and these structures fared better in the 2005 earthquake than modern concrete buildings.

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

Within the island there is geographic diversity in the traditional house building. In northern Nias, homes are freestanding, oblong structures on stilts, while in the south they are built shoulder to shoulder on either side of a long, paved courtyard. Emphasising

the roof as the primary feature, southern Niassan houses are constructed using pylons and cross-beams slotted together without the use of bindings or nails.

## Gomo & Around

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

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

## Hilinawalo Mazingo

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

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

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

### Bawomataluo

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Hilisimaetano

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

### Botohili & Hilimaeta

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

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

## ACEH

Over the years, this far-flung corner of the Indonesian archipelago has grabbed headlines for all the wrong reasons. Earthquakes, tsunamis, civil war and sharia law are the main associations people have with Sumatra's most northern state. The reconstruction from the Boxing Day tsunami that put this place on television screens around the world is near completion. However, the social wounds incurred by the natural disaster and previous civil war will take much longer to heal. Post-tsunami Aceh is still tender, guns have been laid down (for now), a degree of autonomy has been granted and there is now an air of new beginnings across the province.

For the visitor, politics and disasters are somewhat of a smokescreen. Intrepid travellers to the region are unearthing one of the few remaining undiscovered gems of Southeast

### TRAVELLING TO ACEH

No special permit or permission is required to visit Aceh province. At one time foreign visitors were limited but since the 2004 tsunami these restrictions have been eased at the entry points to Aceh. Confusion does arise if you enquire with Indonesian embassies or outside of the island of Sumatra, as the Indonesian government has not yet disseminated an official decision on the matter. At the time of research a visa on arrival (VOA) at Banda Aceh airport was still not possible, though it was said to be very likely in the near future.



war was declared in 1871. It was 35 years before the fighting stopped and the last of the sultans, Tuanku Muhamat Dawot, surrendered.

In 1951 the Indonesian government incorporated Aceh's territory into the province of North Sumatra. The prominent Islamic Party was angered at being lumped together with the Christian Bataks, and proclaimed Aceh an independent Islamic Republic in September 1953. Prolonged conflict ensued, and in 1959 the government was forced to

give Aceh 'special district' status, granting a high degree of autonomy in religious, cultural and educational matters. Despite this special status the government strengthened its grip on Aceh's huge natural-gas reserves.

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

## SHARIA LAW

Aceh considers itself the home and origin of Islam in Southeast Asia, with Islamic roots dating as far back as the 13th century. It prides itself on being the most strictly Islamic state in Indonesia. Since it was granted 'special autonomy' in 2002, Aceh has the power to apply sharia law to Islamic people, which contrasts with the traditionally moderate and secular attitude of the rest of Indonesia. A bill was passed on 14 September 2009, making sharia law official in Aceh. The most controversial amendment was the introduction of capital punishment for committing adultery, as well as a law prohibiting homosexuality. It's important to be informed and understand as much as possible about the local custom and laws that are exclusive to this unique state.

The main laws include:

- Muslims (male and female) must wear clothing in line with Islamic teaching
- the consumption, production and sale of alcohol is prohibited
- gambling is prohibited
- *khalwat* (proximity, where intimate contact is possible, between a male and female who have no marriage or kin relationship) is prohibited
- wealthy Muslims must pay *Zakat* (alms for the poor) to the Islamic treasury
- unmarried couples committing adultery can be sentenced to 100 lashings
- married people committing adultery can be sentenced to death by stoning
- homosexuality is prohibited.

So what does this mean for you? As far as Westerners are concerned the law is somewhat unclear, and it is generally up to the interpretation of the sharia police. Initially, Westerners and non-Muslims had been excused from observing most of the laws, but since 2006 the laws have become more applicable to everyone, especially if a Westerner is obstructing a Muslim from observing a law. For example, there have been instances of Western men being arrested for socialising with Muslim women (on a positive note, this means that this is one of the few parts of Southeast Asia where sleazy expats are nonexistent). Generally, Westerners are left to get on with it and tourist and aid-worker hang-outs tend to serve beer without recriminations, but technically it's still illegal and comes with the punishment of 40 lashes.

Under Acehese law, punishments vary from a small fine to four-year sentences or even the death penalty, depending on the crime. Public (sometimes televised) canings attended by thousands of onlookers have drawn criticism from across the nation and within Aceh itself, as people fear that law makers are veering towards a more extreme state. Many of the objections from within Aceh come from women, some of whom claim that the manner in which the laws and punishments are enacted by the sharia police is sexist and unjust. However, international accusations that Aceh is a 'mini-Taliban' state are also gross exaggerations of the truth. Basically as long as visitors to the region act in a respectful fashion, you'll have no problems whatsoever.

By 1990 the area had been designated a 'special combat zone' and eight years of near-military rule followed. Amnesty International has reported years of human rights abuses perpetrated during this time. In the following years the army launched further attacks, while GAM intimidated whole villages into giving support to the rebel forces. Deaths, tortures, disappearances and arbitrary arrests occurred on a daily basis, with each side blaming the other. The ordinary people of Aceh were the real losers: tens of thousands of them were displaced and living in fear of both sides.

At the turn of the millennium, several steps towards peace were made: a brief ceasefire was declared in 2000, and in 2002 Jakarta granted a 'special autonomy' law allowing the province to keep up to 70% of oil and gas revenues and, controversially, implement sharia law. Peace talks were also initiated for the first time since the conflict began, and progressed for a year and a half before crumbling. For two years afterwards, all of the progress toward normality was quickly reversed. Martial law was declared in 2003, paving the way for a full-scale military assault on the separatists – the biggest military operation in Indonesia since the 1975 invasion of East Timor.

The 2004 tsunami provided the necessary counterpoint to open up the sealed province to relief organisations and to renew peace talks between Jakarta and the rebels. On 15 August 2005, a peace accord was signed in Helsinki and many of the important steps of the agreement have been met: GAM rebels successfully surrendered their weapons and the Indonesian troops have withdrawn from the province. Although optimism for a stable Aceh is tangible, some fear that the biggest obstacle to a lasting peace is steering the former GAM rebels into lives as productive citizens rather than low-level criminals. It remains very much a 'watch this space' region.

## BANDA ACEH

☎ 0651 / pop 210,000

Indonesian cities are rarely coupled with pleasant descriptions, but Banda Aceh breaks the mould. The sleepy provincial capital is an extremely pleasant spot to spend a few days. The village-like atmosphere and dusty, unobtrusive streets make for laid-back, easily explored town filled with cheery faces. The proud folk rarely betray the tragedy that they must have experienced during the Boxing

Day tsunami; looking at the reconstructed city today it's impossible to reconcile it with the distraught images of 2004. In Banda Aceh alone, 61,000 people were killed and development outside of the city centre was reduced to a wasteland in a matter of a few hours. Today you'd hardly guess that anything had happened.

For a few years the city was awash with aid workers, who not only helped rebuild the pretty town you'll find today but also kick-started the economy to catering to nongovernmental organisations (NGOs). Prices soared as foreign expense accounts paid for taxis, steak dinners and overpriced hotel rooms. There is certainly a lull in the city now that the NGOs have gone, which, positively, means the city's infrastructure is well recovered, but sadly the NGO-inflated miniboom is over. However, now that Aceh has greater control over its resources, in particular oil, the town is relatively affluent and the streets, the homes and especially the mosques are well maintained and looked after.

Banda Aceh is a fiercely religious city and the ornate mosques are at the centre of daily life. In this devoutly Muslim city, religion and respect are everything. The hassles are few and the people are easygoing and extremely hospitable to visitors (Muhammad was a traveller, after all).

## Orientation

Banda Aceh is split in two by Sungai Krueng Aceh. In the southern part of the city is its best-known landmark, the Mesjid Raya Baiturrahman. Behind the mosque is the huge Pasar Aceh Central (central market), and adjoining the market is the main *opelet* terminal.

The residential neighbourhood in the southeast corner is referred to as Geuceu Komplek, and is home to some of the Banda Aceh's politicians and wealthy inhabitants.

North of the river is the city centre, where much of the rebuilding was concentrated and new homes now stand. The commercial spine is Jl Panglima Polem.

## Information

### INTERNET ACCESS & POST

**Country Steakhouse** (off Jl Sri Ratu Safiatuddin;

☎ noon-10pm) This restaurant has free wi-fi access for laptops.

**Jambo Internet** (Jl Panglima Polem 2; ☎ 24hr)

## BANDA ACEH

Not to Scale

### INFORMATION

Bank Danamon.....	1	B1
BCA Bank.....	2	C1
BIJ Bank.....	(see 2)	
Country Steakhouse.....	(see 19)	
Jambo Internet.....	3	C2
Pante Pirak Net.....	4	C2
Post Office.....	5	D2
Regional Tourist Office.....	6	C2
Telkom Wartel.....	7	C1
Wartel.....	8	B1

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Gunongan.....	9	A4
Kherkhof.....	10	A4
Mesjid Raya Baiturrahman.....	11	A2
Museum Negeri Banda Aceh.....	12	B4
Rumah Aceh.....	(see 12)	

### SLEEPING

Hotel 61.....	13	C1
Hotel Medan.....	14	B1
Hotel Palembang.....	15	B1
Hotel Prapat.....	16	B1
Hotel Wisata.....	17	B1
Sulthan Hotel.....	18	B1

### EATING

Country Steakhouse.....	19	B2
Pante Pirak Supermarket.....	20	B2
Pasar Malam Rek.....	21	B1
PP Cafe & Restaurant.....	22	C2
Rumah Makan Asia.....	23	A1
Tropicana Seafood.....	24	B1

### DRINKING

Chek Yoke.....	25	B2
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### TRANSPORT

BP Travel.....	26	B1
Buses to Medan.....	27	C3
Garuda.....	28	C1
Labi-Labi Terminal.....	29	B2
Public Buses.....	30	A2

**Pante Pirak Net** (Jl Dhimurthala 19; ☎ 9am-10pm)

Next door to PP Cafe & Restaurant.

**Post office** (☎ 29487; Jl Bendahara 33; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) A short walk from the centre; also has internet.

### MEDICAL SERVICES

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

### MONEY

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

**BCA bank** (Jl Panglima Polem)

**BIJ bank** (Jl Panglima Polem)

**Bank Danamon** (Jl Sri Ratu Safiatuddin)

### TELEPHONE

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

**Wartel** (Jl Panglima Polem 11)

### TOURIST INFORMATION

**Regional tourist office** (Dinas Parawisata; ☎ 23692; Jl Chik Kuta Karang 3) On the 1st level of a government building; the staff are exceptionally friendly and have free copies of an excellent guidebook to the province.

### Sights & Activities

#### MESJID RAYA BAITURRAHMAN

With its brilliant white walls and liquorice-black domes, the **Mesjid Raya Baiturrahman** (admission by donation, headscarf required for women; ☎ 7-11am & 1.30-4pm) is a dazzling sight on a sunny day. The first



section of the mosque was built by the Dutch in 1879 as a conciliatory gesture towards the Acehnese after the original one burnt down. Two more domes – one on either side of the first – were added by the Dutch in 1936 and another two by the Indonesian government in 1957. The mosque survived intact after the 2004 earthquake and tsunami, a sign interpreted by many residents as direct intervention by the Divine. During this time the mosque served as an unofficial crisis centre for survivors, and bodies awaiting identification were laid on the public square in front of the mosque. The best time to visit the mosque is during Friday afternoon prayers, when the entire building and yard are filled with people.

### GUNONGAN & KHERKHOF

All that remains today of Aceh's powerful sultanates are on view at **Gunongan** (Jl Teuku Umar; ☎ 8am–6pm). Built by Sultan Iskandar Muda (r 1607–36) as a gift for his Malay princess wife, it was intended as a private playground and bathing place. The building consists of a series of frosty peaks with narrow stairways and a walkway leading to ridges, which represent the hills of the princess' native land. Ask around for someone to unlock the gate for you.

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

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

Directly across the road from the Gunongan is the **Kherkhof** (Dutch Cemetery; Jl Teuku Umar; ☎ 8am–6pm), the last resting place of more than 2000 Dutch and Indonesian soldiers who died fighting the Acehnese. The entrance is about 250m from the clock tower on the road to Uleh-leh. Tablets set into the walls by the entrance gate are inscribed with the names of the dead soldiers. The cemetery suffered some flooding from the tsunami.

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

### MUSEUM NEGERI BANDA ACEH

The **Museum Negeri Banda Aceh** (☎ 23144; Jl Alauddin Mahmudsyah 12; admission 1000Rp; ☎ 8.00am–noon & 2–4pm Tue–Sun) has displays of Acehnese weaponry, household furnishings, ceremonial costumes, everyday clothing, gold jewellery, calligraphy and some magnificently carved *recong* (Acehnese daggers) and swords. It also has a display of a baby two-headed buffalo.

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

### MARKETS

Market lovers will enjoy the bustle at the colourful **Pasar Aceh Central**, which is just north of the Mesjid Raya between Jl Chik Pante Kulu and Jl Diponegoro. Also, the goods at **Pasar Ikan** (fish market; Jl SM Raja) define freshness: boats ease into the river and unload their cargoes of shark, tuna and prawns right onto the vendor carts.

### TSUNAMI LANDMARKS

It doesn't make for sunny postcard fodder, but seeing the place with your own eyes allows for personal and sacred memorials, and helps feeble imaginations understand the scale of the disaster. Many of the most moving images of the tsunami will be erased in the coming years: the freighter ships deposited miles inland will be disassembled, the empty landscape will be rebuilt, the amputated families will form new connections. But what will remain is an ancient human custom: housing the dead so the living can remember.

The most famous of the tsunami sights are the **boat in the house** in Lampulo, and the 2500-tonne **power-generator vessel** that was carried 4km inland by a wave. At the time of research there were plans to open a **Tsunami Museum** in 2010.

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

### VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

More than 1000 schools in Aceh were destroyed or damaged by the tsunami. Libraries were ruined, sports equipment swept out to sea, computer equipment lost. And then there's the human toll: some estimates claim

## TSUNAMI RELIEF

The December 26 2004 tsunami killed more than 170,000 people in Aceh and destroyed infrastructure along 800km of coastline.

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

Since then, rebuilding of homes and infrastructure has been slow, but according to the BRR (Aceh-Nias Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency) the majority of reconstruction has been completed. After four years of overseeing the massive task of rebuilding the earthquake- and tsunami-ravaged Aceh province, BRR officially closed down in April 2009.

BRR's chairman, Kuntoro Mangkusubroto, said during the agency's final press conference here that through cooperation with regional governments, donor countries, UN agencies and NGOs, and a US\$3.25 billion budget, BRR had managed to rebuild Aceh as planned.

'The target was achieved. All numbers in the blueprint were achieved', he said. 'In the first blueprint, we were supposed to build 90,000 houses. But as of today, 140,304 housing units have already been constructed'.

In April 2009 the BRR stated that some 400 tsunami victim families were still living in temporary shelters. According to BRR many contractors had run away with the construction funds, forcing the reconstruction and rehousing to take much longer than initially anticipated.

During its four-year mandate, BRR built 13 airports and airstrips, 23 seaports, 1115 medical facilities, 1759 schools, 3696km of road, 363 bridges and 996 government buildings. It also assisted 195,726 small- and medium-sized enterprises, trained 155,182 workers and 39,663 teachers, and rehabilitated 1012.4 sq km of farmland.

There is an air of bitterness at the pace and standard of the disaster relief. Many of the locals claim that the homes have been built poorly and are only partly finished, many without electricity or running water.

The reality is that, while slow, the reconstruction is impressive. Most visitors to Aceh will probably agree that what's been done is quite remarkable, despite what some may say, and as Joachim Von Amsberg – the country director for the World Bank, which helped fund and supervise reconstruction efforts – stated in 2009, 'It's easy to make a big story out of the failures, but this actually is a success story. Aceh and Nias have been built back, and in some cases have been built back better'.

that 2500 teachers were killed and a third of the tsunami deaths were children. Rebuilding lives in Aceh also means rebuilding educational facilities.

**Forum Bangum Aceh** (FBA; ☎ 45204; www.forum.bangunaceh.org) is the leading local NGO formed by Aceh residents to work directly and effectively with affected communities. The group has two ongoing projects: microeconomic packages to get businesses up and running, and educational outreach. To volunteer here you'll need to get an application form from the website, and positions are subject to availability. Because FBA is a small organisation, it is more responsive to short-term volunteers than the larger NGOs. Whatever your area of expertise, FBA will find a place for you.

## Sleeping

The influx of international aid workers jacked up the prices but not the standards of the few hotels left in town since the tsunami; there's very little for budget travellers.

**Hotel Palembang** (☎ 22044; Jl Khairil Anwar 49; r with fan 70,000-100,000Rp, with air-con 120,000Rp; 🍷) A basic place with dark, uninspiring rooms.

**Hotel Prapat** (☎ 22159; Jl Ahmad Yani 19; d with fan/air-con 100,000/200,000Rp; 🍷) One of the more affordable spots. From the outside Prapat has the feel of a cheap, run-down motel, but rooms are good value with Western toilet and clean sheets.

**Hotel Wisata** (☎ 21834; Jl Ahmad Yani 19-20; r 125,000-450,000Rp; 🍷) With a streamlined art-deco facade, Wisata has decent clean rooms with tiled floors and ultrasoft beds. Some rooms have ornate Victorian-style plaster ceilings.

**LOCAL VOICE: RAHMADHANI SULAIMAN (DANNY), TSUNAMI SURVIVOR**

Rahmadhani Sulaiman (aka Danny) is Aceh's tourism promotion director, and a survivor of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami.

**What were you doing on the day the tsunami hit Aceh?** My family and I were enjoying the sunshine together on a beautiful Sunday morning. We couldn't expect this to happen. At around 8am people start running, screaming 'Water come! Water come!'. We started running even though we couldn't see water. Many locals rushed to the higher elevation of the hills. From here we could see the water and that something was very wrong with the sea, though we didn't realise it was a tsunami. After a while people slowly came down from the mountains, and it's then we saw bodies and debris everywhere. I will never forget people screaming, crying and running without clear direction. It was a dreadful situation. Rumours were that entire islands were wiped out. There was no power, and no real information. Everything was so quiet except for crying. Life suddenly became so empty and frustrating. I and neighbours were encouraged to locate the injured people, and dead bodies to take them to safe places to be buried later. It was so frightening for me, but they are my people.

**What happened in the ensuing days?** Sanitation became very bad. Everyone was haunted with the image of the devastating tsunami. We could only try to survive and depend on each other. We had a little remaining food, but when finished – there was no more. People were searching for food, and there was high competition – lots of demand and little supply. After day three of tsunami, I tried to seek my family in Banda Aceh, so I borrowed my friend's motorcycle. I saw thousands of dead bodies in the city. On the left, in the centre, and the right. Everywhere was horrible. My wife and young sons were with me. They were not prepared for the sight of so many dead bodies. Not to mention the smell. Things that were supposed to be in the sea were in the street! We couldn't believe it to see ships in the roofs of houses and in hotel car parks. Finally, after a long time, we found our family member stranded in a safe place. It was such an emotional, important meeting.

Life wasn't so healthy, so we tried to escape the house because things were getting unbearable, so we moved to a friend's house in Lambaro (15km from Banda Aceh), though there it was the same situation.

**How about the clean up?** Due to this tragedy, maybe the worst natural disaster ever, Aceh received unprecedented attention from the international community. Today Aceh has made significant progress. People's lives are improving and they're better off than they were before economically and socio-culturally. People of Aceh are very thankful for everyone's kind help and to people who kindly donated money in order to build Aceh back better.

**Hotel Medan** (☎ 21501; fax 23514; Jl Ahmad Yani 15; r 175,000, r incl breakfast 200,000-350,000Rp; 📶 📺 📶) The business-style rooms are spotless and comfortable, with cable TV; wi-fi is available in the lobby. Reception has a photograph from the tsunami of a huge boat marooned in the hotel's carpark.

**Hotel 61** (☎ 638866; reservation@hotel61.web.id; Jl Panglima Polem 28; r incl breakfast 280,000-500,000Rp; 📶 📺) Here you'll find modern rooms that are much closer to international standards than others in town. Includes free transport from airport.

**Sulthan Hotel** (☎ 22469; Jl Sultan 1; r incl breakfast 200,000-834,000Rp, ste 1,246,000; 📶 📺) When the NGOs hit town, this was one of the only functional hotels. With its large modern rooms, it's been packed out ever since.

**Eating**

The square at the junction of Jl Ahmad Yani and Jl Khairil Anwar is usually the setting for the **Pasar Malam Rek**, Banda Aceh's lively night food market. Many night food stalls are found on Jl SM Raja.

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

**Rumah Makan Asia** (Jl Cut Meutia 37/39; mains 10,000Rp) Aceh's version of *masakan Padang* (Padang dish) has an array of zesty seafood dishes that waiters plonk on to your table, such as *ikan panggang* (baked fish).

**PP Cafe & Restaurant** (Jl H Dhimurthala 31; mains 12,000Rp; 📶 📺) Popular with local teenagers, PP's is a great place to escape the heat for a

cold drink, a good selection of Indonesian food and some European dishes.

**Country Steakhouse** (☎ 24213; off Jl Sri Ratu Safiatuddin 45B; mains 15,000-100,000Rp; ☎ noon-10pm; 🍷 🍷) Well hidden down an alley, this wood-panelled restaurant was set up to cater for the international aid workers; now it's often empty. Serves New Zealand steaks, snapper and chips and other Western dishes. Also has beer and Australian red wine, and a TV showing BBC.

**Tropicana Seafood** (Jl SM Raja; mains from 20,000Rp; 🍷) Chinese restaurant serving delicious seafood dishes and cold Bintang. Vegetarians beware: even the 'mixed vegetables' contains chicken and prawns.

### Drinking

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

If you'd like to see what life is like without the fermented juice, follow the locals to the brewed replacement. Friendly locals sip strong Acehnese coffee and smoke at **Chek Yoke** (Jl Chik Pante Kulu), a coffee shop on the southern banks of the river, which serves delicious pastries.

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

### Getting There & Away

#### AIR

There are several flights a day from Banda Aceh to Medan and Jakarta on Garuda, Sriwijaya and Lion Air. Air Asia flies daily to Kuala Lumpur, and Firefly to Penang in Malaysia. **NBA** (☎ 333 777) is the best airline serving the region, with flights to Takengon, Kutacane, Singkil, Simeulue and Meulaboh.

**BP Travel** (☎ 32325; Jl Panglima Polem 75) is a helpful air-ticket agent. **Garuda** (Garuda Indonesia; ☎ 32523; Jl Daud Beureeh 9) also has an office in Banda Aceh.

#### BOAT

After the tsunami, the port moved to Uleh-leh, 10km northwest of Banda Aceh's city centre. The road to the port goes straight through the tsunami's path – once a two car-garage

suburb, now an eerie, empty landscape. See Pulau Weh for boat schedules and fare information (p410).

#### BUS

South of the city centre you'll find the new **Terminal Bus Bathoh** (Jl Mohammed Hasan), which has numerous buses to Medan. Economy buses (100,000Rp, 14 hours) depart at 4pm, while air-con buses leave all day (120,000Rp, 11½ hours). The other option are the non-stop buses (200,000Rp, 10 hours) departing at 8.30pm and 9pm. Other bus services are likely to depart from here in the future.

The west-coast road from Banda Aceh to Meulaboh was destroyed by the 2004 tsunami, but has since been rebuilt (for the most part). Public buses depart from the land-bus terminal behind the mosque on Jl Mohammad Jam.

### Getting Around

Airport taxis charge a set rate of 70,000Rp for the 16km ride into town. A taxi from the airport to Uleh-leh port will cost 100,000Rp.

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

For Uleh-leh (5000Rp, 30 minutes), take the blue *labi labi* signed 'Uleh-leh'. You can also reach Lhok Nga and Lampu'uk (10,000Rp).

From the bus station, a becak into town will cost around 15,000Rp. A becak around town should cost between 5000Rp and 10,000Rp, depending on your destination. From the centre of town to Geuceu Komplek, a becak should cost about 10,000Rp.

### PULAU WEH

☎ 0652 / pop 25,000

A tiny tropical rock off the tip of Sumatra, Weh is a little slice of peaceful living that rewards travellers who've journeyed up through the turbulent greater mainland below. After you've hiked around the mainland's jungles, volcanoes and lakes, it's time to jump into the languid waters of the Indian Ocean. Snorkellers and divers bubble through the great walls of swaying sea fans, deep canyons and rock pinnacles, while marvelling at the prehistorically gargantuan fish. This is one of the finest underwater hikes you'll find. Both figuratively and geographically, Pulau Weh is the cherry on top for many visitors to Sumatra.

Don't come expecting lazy days on sprawling beaches with swaying palms, though; the stretches of sand are generally short, rocky strips met by the ocean's emerald-green coral garden. Most visitors spend their days underwater, ogling the dazzling kaleidoscope of marine life. Along the newly paved island road are little villages with underwear-only kids playing in the yard, lazy cows tied up to a green patch of grass and scrappy goats looking for garden victims.

Pulau Weh is shaped roughly like a horse-shoe. On the northeastern leg is the port town of Sabang, where most of Weh's population lives. The primary tourist beaches are Gapang and Iboih, which are about 20km away heading towards the northwestern leg. Some may try to argue that one beach is better than the other, but both have their charms.

Note that malaria has been reported on the island, so take the proper precautions.

It's always a little rainy on Weh, which has two monsoon seasons. But that shouldn't matter, as you'll be underwater most of the time anyway. Plus the rain keeps the island lush green and the water full of plankton, which draws in underwater giants such as manta rays and whale sharks.

The tsunami did give Weh a minor licking, but the island fared better than the mainland did. Many of the coastal businesses that were battered have since been rebuilt, and the villagers banded together to repair roads and replant trees.

A word of warning: such is Pulau Weh's allure, many a traveller's itinerary has been blown out by weeks or even months by what is regarded by many as the best diving in Southeast Asia.

## ACTIVITIES

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

There are several dive operators on the island; the two main ones are listed here. Both offer PADI diving courses. At Iboih, **Rubiah**

**Tirta Divers** (☎ 332 4555; www.rubiahdivers.com; 1/2/3 dives all inclusive €25/45/60) is the oldest dive operation on the island.

At Gapang, **Lumba Lumba Diving Centre** (☎ 332 4133; 081 1682 787; www.lumbalumba.com; 1/2/5 dives all inclusive €25/45/100) is the centre of activity, with the comings and goings of wet-suited creatures. Ton and Marjan Egbers maintain a helpful website with detailed descriptions of dives and other need-to-know information. The centre's shop has internet access (500Rp per minute).

Snorkelling gear can be hired almost anywhere for around 20,000Rp per day.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Sabang is the port town on Pulau Weh. Fast ferries to Sabang leave the mainland from Uleh-leh, situated 5km northwest of Banda Aceh, at 9.30am and 3.30pm (economy/business/VIP 60,000/75,000/85,000Rp; 45 minutes to one hour). On Friday, the afternoon ferry departs at 4.30pm. Slow ferries (economy/air-con 11,500/36,500Rp, two hours) leave at 2pm on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. On Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday there are two ferries, departing at 11am and 4pm, respectively. In the opposite direction, the slow ferry leaves at 8am daily, with an afternoon ferry on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday at 2pm. The fast ferry leaves at 8.00am and 4pm daily. You should get to the port at least 45 minutes before departure to get a ticket. Ferry service is weather pending.

## GETTING AROUND

From the port, there are regular minibuses to Sabang (20,000Rp, 15 minutes), and Gapang and Iboih (50,000Rp, 40 minutes). You can catch a minibus from Jl Perdagangan in Sabang to Gapang and Iboih (30,000Rp).

## Sabang

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

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

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

You'll find internet at **2 Net Communication** (per hr 6000Rp). The **post office** (Jl Perdagangan 66) is next door to the **telephone office** (☎ 24hr), which has a Home Country Direct phone.

**BRI bank** (Jl Perdagangan) changes travellers cheques and US dollars at terrible rates. It also has an unreliable ATM that's usually out of order; it's highly recommended that you change money at Banda Aceh. Alternatively, try your negotiating skills with the Chinese moneychangers scattered about town.

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

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

## SLEEPING & EATING

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

**Pom Losmen** (☎ 21148; Jl Teuku Umar 3; r with fan & shared bathroom 50,000-70,000Rp, r with air-con 175,000Rp; 🍽️) A local boarding house.

**Hotel Holiday** (☎ 21131; Jl Perdagangan 1; r without bathroom 75,000-100,000Rp, r with bathroom 175,000Rp, r with air-con 200,000-425,000Rp; 🍽️) A marked step up, Hotel Holiday is a Chinese-run hotel with solid, if not fashion-plate, rooms.

**our pick** **Freddies** (☎ 081 3602 5501; www.santai-sabang.com; Santai Sumur Tiga; r weekday 210,000-225,000Rp, weekend 250,000-275,000Rp) This delightful option overlooks a pretty stretch of white-sand beach with a coral reef, perfect for those content with snorkelling and some R&R. The list of alcohol is impressive and all food is cooked by Freddie, the South African owner. Located in Santai Sumur Tiga, 5km east of Sabang.

**Casa Nemo** (☎ 0812 692 2598; www.casanemo.com; Santai Sumur Tiga; weekday/weekend r 225,000/275,000Rp). Italian-owned, this is another excellent Santai Sumur Tiga option, with bungalows perched over a luxurious beach.

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

## Gapang

Occupying a sandy cove, Gapang is a lazy stretch of beach lined with shack restaurants and simple guest houses. The locals are friendly and the atmosphere is low-key and quiet, with dive chat dominating the evenings.

## SLEEPING & EATING

Gapang has the greatest variety of accommodation on the island, from pseudo-resorts to cheapie huts. A problem for budget-minded backpackers is that the old boom years under the NGOs forced the prices disproportionately high, meaning relative value for money is something you'll struggle to find on Weh.

**Ramadilla** (r 50,000-100,000Rp) The last guest house along the beach, Ramadilla features cabins that climb up the hill, plus a longhouse or two with a chieftain's view of the sea.

**Dang Dang Na** (r 100,000Rp) Formerly Ohana; here basic wooden bungalows on concrete stilts with ocean views and *mandis* (common Indonesian form of bath, consisting of a large water tank from which water is ladled over the body) are planted on the hillside.

**Lumba Lumba** (☎ 332 4133; www.lumbalumba.com/staying.html; r with/without bathroom €12/8, cottage €20-25; 🍽️ ☎) Dutch-owned Lumba Lumba features seven spanking-new wood-decked cottages with tiled rooms and Western toilets. Accommodation is for the exclusive use of those diving with this outfit, so it's often hard to find a room. The blue line marked high on the front entrance indicates the water level reached during the tsunami.

Two government-owned resorts, **Flamboyan** (☎ 081 360272270; d 250,000-400,000Rp; 🍽️) and **Leguna Resort** (☎ 22799; d 250,000Rp; 🍽️), are mostly avoided by Western tourists on account of their dire need of maintenance and the fact that they're often spookily empty. There was talk of both closing; whether this is permanent or for a much-needed refurbishment, you'll have to enquire on arrival.

Beachside cafes serving Western food absorb the evening breezes and postdive appetites. For lunch, head out to the main road, where a small warung does delicious *nasi bungus* (rice and curry served for takeaway in a banana leaf). Mama Donut is a local institution, walking the sand selling delicious vegetable samosas, doughnuts and fried bananas.



## Iboih

More spread out than Gapang, Iboih (*ee-boh*) follows a rocky headland with a string of simple bungalows along a woody footpath. A small path leads through a stone gateway past the village well, and up and over a small hill to the bungalow strip.

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

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

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

## SLEEPING & EATING

Simple palm-thatched bungalows, many built on stilts and overhanging crystal-clear water, make up the majority of the accommodation here – the cheapest you'll find in Pulau Weh.

Most places are very similar, but it's best to do a wander before you declare a winner. If you are staying for several days, you can negotiate 50,000Rp a night for a basic bathroom and a fanless shack. The following bungalows are listed in geographic order as you'll approach them: of the more comfortable huts, **OONG's Bunglows** (☎ 0813 6070 0150; r without bathroom 50,000Rp) has the best value for money with its two waterfront shacks, while **Iboih Inn** (☎ 081 2699 1659; r 200,000Rp) has the most 'luxurious' shacks – but they are outrageously overpriced. **Yulia's** (☎ 0813 7727 9989; r without bathroom 70,000-80,000Rp) has the best rooms of the basic bunch and excellent front-door snorkelling.

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

Located next door to Rubiah Tirta Divers is **Sirkui Beach Café** with pricey internet, and **Mama's**, serving tasty meals and a view of the small beach that's popular with sunbathers. **Norma's**, the restaurant portion of OONG's

Bungalows, does a nightly seafood dinner around a communal table and serves beer amid scuba chat. Further down, **Yulia's** has shakes and light fare. Prices at these places tend to be around 25,000Rp for mains. There was also large overwater restaurant in construction at the time of research.

## Long Angen

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

## ACEH'S WEST COAST

Rounding the northwestern tip of Sumatra's finger of land is a string of little villages and endless beaches backed by densely forested hills, home to some interesting wildlife including tigers and bears. This is the perfect recipe for paradise, but several factors have conspired to keep the sands free of beach blankets: the unstable safety situation during the military occupation of Aceh, and the Boxing Day tsunami. Most of the houses along the coast are identical in design, having been rebuilt after villages were destroyed in 2004. For the moment the attractive, but still visibly scarred, west coast attracts only the more intrepid travellers and surfers in search of waves. Once the road from Banda Aceh to Calang is completed, no doubt it will open up more to tourists again.

## Lhoknga & Lampu'uk

☎ 0656 / pop Lhoknga 200, Lampu'uk 1000

Before the tsunami this area was a favourite spot of intrepid surfers and weekend localers from Banda Aceh. These coastal weekend spots, only 17km from Banda Aceh, were levelled by the tsunami. In Lampu'uk the wave travelled some 7km inland, killing four in five people. The reconstruction work is pretty much complete here and the disjointed families that have returned are trying to continue with their lives.

There's still very little in the way of accommodation here, although some of the bungalows along the beach in Lampu'uk are rented out by surfers. Also in Lampu'uk, **Joel's Restaurant** (☎ 0813 7528 7765; ☎ 4pm-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat & Sun), of the legendary Joel's Bungalows fame before the tsunami, had beach bungalows in construction at the

## THE LAST OF THE LAMNOS

One tragic story resulting from the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami was the plight inflicted upon the Lamno people – a mixed blood Portuguese-Acehnese ethnic group living along Aceh's northwest coast. The Lamno people are famous among the Acehnese for their European appearance, and are affectionately referred to as the 'blue eyes of Aceh'. The Portuguese explorers first arrived in the region during the 16th century in search of spices; the Lamno people are their descendants. The Lamno villages were hard hit by the tsunami, destroying six villages and killed three in four people. Included in this figure were the remaining blue-eyes – all except a fisherman and his wife, who are said to be the last of the Lamnos. In actuality, there is no doubt that Lamno people still live in Banda Aceh and other parts of Aceh, but whether this recessive blue-eye gene will continue through generations seems unlikely.

time of research. It's a good spot for wood-fire pizza, beer and a spot of surf chat; it also rents surfboards. It's situated in the village, away from the beach.

Lhoknga has decent waves too, although it's beach is not as nice, particularly with the huge concrete factory and the nearby port.

Take *labi labi* 04 (20,000Rp, 20 minutes) from the *opelet* terminal in Banda Aceh for both Lhoknga and Lampu'uk.

## Calang & Meulaboh

☎ 0654/5

This coastal swath of Banda Aceh felt the ferocity of the tsunami more than anywhere else. The west-coast road from Banda Aceh to Meulaboh was destroyed by the tsunami. USAID contracted Halliburton to rebuild parts of the road – while not complete from Banda Aceh to Calang, the road is working again and being used. You'll need to make several river crossings with a rickety wooden car barge, complete with attached outboard motor.

Everything in the town of **Calang** was destroyed; the population was halved and infrastructure was wiped out and relocated 20km north of the original town. There's very little to see or do here. If you get stuck you can stay at **Khana Hotel** (☎ 0654-221 0127; r 110,000-275,000Rp).

Further south, **Meulaboh**, 240km from Banda Aceh, was the closest town to the earthquake's epicentre and is often referred to in the press as 'ground zero'. The town was completely destroyed and close to a third of the 120,000 population was killed. Reconstruction is underway, but sorting such epic destruction will take time. **Meuligou Hotel** (☎ 0655-700 7171; Jl Iskandar Muda 35; 275,000-495,000Rp; ♿) is one of the few places that survived the tsunami. You'll

find a few *very* basic losmen; if you're on a tight budget it's worth asking to see if anything new has opened up. **Speed Net** (Jl Iskandar Muda; per hr 4000Rp) has internet.

Bus services to Calang or Meulaboh are running again. The airport is operational and **Susi Air** ([www.susair.com](http://www.susair.com)) runs twice-weekly flights to Medan, while **NBA** flies to Medan and Banda Aceh.

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

## Pulau Simeulue

☎ 0650 / pop 70,000

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

You'll find simple **losmen** (r 40,000Rp) in Sinabang and Sibigo, or if you have a tent you can camp on the beach. The most comfortable sleeping option is the surf camp **Baneng Beach Retreat** (☎ 0813 6241 7692; [www.simeulue.com](http://www.simeulue.com); packages Nov-Apr US\$115, May-Oct US\$140) on the west coast. Packages include meals and transfers. Reef uplift from the earthquake has flattened out some of the famous surf breaks, but new spots are being discovered.

**Susi Air** (☎ 061-785 2169; [www.susair.com](http://www.susair.com)) has twice-daily flights from Medan, while **Merpati** (☎ 061-736 6888; [www.merpati.co.id/EN](http://www.merpati.co.id/EN)) has three flights a week from Medan. **NBA** has flights to Banda Aceh. Enquire with a local travel agent for ticketing and schedules.

Ferries run from the mainland ports of Singkil and Labuhan Haji to Pulau Simeuleu's port town of Sinabang.

## Tapaktuan

☎ 0656 / pop 15,000

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

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

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

**Gua Kelam** (Dark Cave), 3km north of Tapaktuan, is a spectacular series of caves and tunnels that can be explored, but you'd be wise to take a guide. You can usually find a guide at the coffee shop by the river.

Most of the places to stay are located along Jl Merdeka. **Losmen Bukit Barisan** (☎ 21145; r 50,000Rp), an old Dutch house, is a friendly place with basic rooms and a certain shabby charm; and **Hotel Panorama** (☎ 21004; Jl Merdeka 33; d 55,000-135,000Rp; 📶) is a large, modern hotel with a range of reasonable rooms. Otherwise try the comfortable **Metro Hotel** (☎ 0813 6053 8088; Jl Ben Mahmud 17; r incl breakfast 250,000Rp), a friendly guest house with some rooms looking out over the waves rolling into shore.

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

Bank BRI has a 24-hour ATM.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

The west road is now working and in semi-decent order. There's a daily bus from Banda

Aceh (economy/air-con 100,000/170,000Rp, 10 hours); Medan (120,000Rp, 10 hours) via Berastagi and Sidikalang. From Sidikalang it's possible to get a direct bus to Pangururan (50,000Rp, two hours) on the west coast of Danau Toba.

NBA has two flights per week to Medan, and one per week (on Friday) to Banda Aceh.

## Singkil

☎ 0658 / pop 20,000

Singkil is a remote port at the mouth of Sungai Alas. It's a sleepy town with welcoming locals, although it merits a mention only as the departure point for boats to the Banyak Islands and Pulau Simeulue.

Catching a boat will mean spending a night in Singkil, with **Hotel Dina Amalia** (☎ 0856 6404 4354; elviandi\_rs@yahoo.com; Jl Bahari; r 130,000-200,000Rp; 📶) the best option. You can also find basic **losmen** (r 30,000Rp). Internet is at **Icang Promo** (Jl Bahari; per hr 5000Rp).

NBA has two flights to Medan and one flight to Banda Aceh per week. **Bombay Tours & Travel** (☎ 0813 7721 9667; Jl Mesjid 102) can organise flights to Medan as well as charter speedboats.

There are daily minibuses from Medan to Singkil (80,000Rp, nine hours) and from Banda Aceh (250,000Rp, 16 hours). If you're travelling from Berastagi, Danau Toba or Tapaktuan, you will need to change buses at Sidikalang and Subulus Salem.

For transport to Pulau Banyak, see opposite. There's also one overnight ferry per week to Sinabang, Pulau Simeulue (28,000Rp to 68,000Rp, Wednesday 6.30pm), arriving early the next morning.

## PULAU BANYAK

pop 5000

If you've ever dreamt about having a tropical island entirely to yourself, complete with palm trees, powdery white beaches and gin-clear waters, then Pulau Banyak is a great place to fulfil your Robinson Crusoe fantasy. A cluster of 99, mostly uninhabited islands, the Banyak (Many) Islands are situated about 30km west of Singkil. They are very remote and see few casual visitors. As well as beaches to laze on, Pulau Banyak has some great reef breaks for surfing, kayaking and snorkelling.

The 2004 Boxing Day earthquake and tsunami, followed by the 2005 Nias quake,

destroyed many coastal dwellings and contaminated fresh-water wells. The main town on the island of Pulau Balai was permanently see-sawed by the quake, causing the west coast to rise by about 70cm and the east coast to drop below sea level. Its once-beautiful beaches were permanently washed away, hence most visitors only hang around to arrange transport to one of the other islands.

Your first port of call on Balai should be to **Yayasan Pulau Banyak** (YPB; ☎ 0813 6282 8449; [luk.manul.kim@gmail.com](mailto:luk.manul.kim@gmail.com); Jl Makmur, Balai), an NGO that aims to develop ecotourism as an alternative livelihood for local communities. YPB can provide information on places to stay and transport, as well as guides and tents. It was set up to promote sea turtle conservation in the region, and continues to do excellent work. If you're keen to see turtles lay their eggs on the beach at Pulau Bangkaru, you'll need to obtain a permit first from YPB. It's also possible to do volunteer work, with duties including nightly beach patrols collecting data on the nesting turtle population. Enquire on their website at [www.acehturtleconservation.org](http://www.acehturtleconservation.org).

Tourists arriving on Balai will need to bring a copy of their passport and register at the police office.

Haloban on Pulau Tuangku is the other main village on the islands, which many visitors prefer over Balai; though it's not renowned for its beaches, it's more relaxed.

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

## Sleeping & Eating

Sleeping options on Pulau Banyak are limited and basic, with only a few islands having bungalows. Camping is another option, and will allow you to stay exclusively on one of the many uninhabited idyllic islands. Tents can be arranged through Yayasan Pulau Banyak (see above).

If staying at one of the bungalows, or if you have a guide, you can arrange food on the islands; otherwise you'll have to bring provisions with you (or catch your own dinner!). It's a good idea to stock up on food and drinking water in Singkil. Sunglasses are essential, such is the intense glare from the sun.

If you get stuck at Balai, the best accommodation is at **Losmen Putri** (☎ 0813 9737 6499; r

with shared bathroom 20,000-85,000Rp, r with air-con 85,000-150,000Rp; ☎ ). At Haloban you can stay at the losmen **Sederhana Aleng Moon** (☎ 0813 9745 8156; r 40,000Rp).

On **Pulau Palambak Basar**, you'll find basic bungalows at **Pap** (☎ 0812 6332 2839; r 50,000Rp) which has mosquito nets, and also the **Point** (☎ 0852 7744 2298; r 75,000Rp). Both look onto perfect white beaches and turquoise water. **Pulau Tailana** also has basic bungalows (50,000Rp), and there's a good chance that you'll have the entire island to yourself.

On **Ujung Lolok**, surfers can try **Banyak Island Lodge** (☎ 0813 6126 3491; [www.banyakislandlodge.com](http://www.banyakislandlodge.com); 9/12 nights package all-inclusive with flights AU\$3190/3490), which also organises fishing trips.

## Getting There & Around

There is one ferry a week (Tuesday 8.30am) between the mainland port of Singkil and Balai (16,000Rp, four hours). It returns from Balai to Singkil on Wednesday at 8.30am.

Local boats depart Singkil (30,000Rp, 4½ hours) at around 8am to 9am on Monday, Thursday and Saturday. They return from Balai on Sunday, Wednesday and Friday. A boat leaves twice a week to Haloban (50,000Rp). Try calling **Mr Dasir** (☎ 0852 6111 0411) for further info.

By far the most convenient way to reach the islands is to charter a speedboat from Singkil (one way/return around 800,000/1,400,000Rp, two hours), although it is very expensive.

To travel between islands it's best to ask around at the port on Balai or enquire at YPB for local boats to islands (around 50,000Rp per two hours).

## GAYO HIGHLANDS

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

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

## Takengon

☎ 0643 / elev 1120m

Takengon is the largest town in the highlands, and while it is not particularly attractive it retains a relaxed charm, with a spectacular setting and a refreshing climate. The town is built on the shores of Danau Laut Tawar, a 26km-long stretch of water, surrounded by steep hills rising to volcanic peaks. Gunung Geureundong, to the north, rises 2855m.

### ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

All of the action is in the centre of town on Jl Lebe Kadir. You'll find the post office, a Telkom wartel, the police station and Mesjid Raya here. You can change money at **BRI bank** (Jl Yos Sudarso), which has an ATM. **HRC.Net** (Jl Sengeda; per hr 5000Rp) has internet, including wi-fi hotspots in its surrounds, access to which you can purchase by the hour.

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

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

The best cave is **Loyang Koro** (Buffalo Caves; admission 3000Rp), 6km from town, which has some interesting stalagmites. Don't forget to bring a torch (flashlight).

At Simpang Balik, about 15km north of Takengon, the sulphurous **hot spring** (Wih Pesame; entry by donation) is set in a large concrete pool and is said to cure skin diseases.

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

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Hotel Buntu Kubu** (Jl Malem Dewa; r 65,000-140,000Rp) This hotel has a varied history: a former Dutch official residence, museum and Indonesian military post. Today it's a pretty horrible, run-down guest house, though it's the only cheap place in town.

**Hotel Mahara** (☎ 21728; Jl Sengeda 568; r incl breakfast 185,000-295,000Rp) New sparkling rooms with homely fittings arranged around an indoor Indonesian-style pond with bonsai trees.

**ourpick Hotel Renggali** (☎ 21144; Jl Bintang; d incl breakfast 250,000-550,000Rp) A wonderful location

perched above the lake, Renggali's rooms are large and comfortable and open directly onto the calm lake and pleasant gardens – so it's surprising that it's often spookily empty. Situated 2km out of town.

**Rakan Singkile** (Jl Labe Kader 2; meals 10,000-25,000Rp) Tasty Chinese, Indonesian and Western dishes, as well as beer (17,000Rp).

**Pondok Laguna** (Jl Lintang, mains 12,000-30,000Rp) Best restaurant in town, with a good selection of vegetarian and seafood dishes. The back section is one giant adventure playground.

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

### SHOPPING

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

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

There's one bus a day to Medan at 7.30pm (air-con, 110,000Rp, 10 hours). There are also buses to Banda Aceh (85,000Rp, eight hours). Heading south, there are regular buses to Blangkejerman (80,000Rp, seven hours) and Ketambe (110,000Rp, nine hours). You would connect through these towns to reach Berastagi.

NBA flies has two flights a week to both Medan and Banda Aceh.

### GETTING AROUND

*Labi labi* leave from the southern end of Jl Baleatu. Fares around town cost 2000Rp. *Perahu* for lake cruising can be hired at the pier at the end of Jl Laut Tawar.

### Blangkejerman

Blangkejerman is the main town of the remote southern highlands. The area is recognised as the Gayo heartland and it's possible to hire guides to take you out to some of the smaller **villages**. Accommodation is available in several small guest houses. There are regular buses north to Banda Aceh via Takengon and south to Ketambe and Kutacane.



## GUNUNG LEUSER NATIONAL PARK

☎ 0629

The Aceh section of Gunung Leuser National Park has slipped under the tourist radar for years, seeing only a trickle of visitors as the masses head to the more hyped Bukit Lawang. Its jungle is basically the same minus the well-worn paths and tourists clambering about trying to spot semiwild orangutans. Here is the place for the *real* jungle experience. In the past it's been largely off limits due to the conflict, but now that there's peace in the region it's likely to receive the recognition it deserves.

The World Heritage-listed Gunung Leuser National Park is one of the world's most important and biologically diverse conservation areas. It is often described as a complete ecosystem laboratory because of the range of forest and species types.

Within the park's boundaries live some of the planet's most endangered and exotic species: tigers, rhinoceros, elephants and orangutans. Although your chances of seeing these celebrity animals are remote, you've got a reasonable chance of seeing orangutans, and you can be sure of encountering plenty of primates. The most common is the white-breasted Thomas' leaf monkey, which sports a brilliant, crested punk hairdo. Other resident species include leopards, bears and cobras.

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

More than 300 bird species have been recorded in the park, including the bizarre rhinoceros hornbill, the helmeted hornbill and woodpeckers.

The park faces a great number of challenges. Poachers have virtually wiped out the crocodile population and have severely reduced the number of tigers and rhinoceros. According to the Indonesian Forum for the Environment, a fifth of the park has been adversely affected by illegal logging and road construction. A highly controversial road project called Ladia Galaska runs through the park, linking the eastern and western coasts of the province. Furthermore, during the conflict

in Aceh, the jungle was a stronghold of GAM militants, and the national park saw fighting between GAM and Indonesian troops.

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

### Ketambe (Gurah)

#### ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

Ketambe (also called Gurah), in the heart of the Alas Valley, is one of the main access points to Gunung Leuser National Park. Directly across the river is Ketambe Research Station, a world-renowned conservation research station, which is off limits to tourists (see the boxed text, p418). Kutacane, 43km from Ketambe, is the closest town of any note and is the place to go for transport, ATMs and internet. For the latter, go to **Yom** (Jl Iskandar 71; per hr 4000Rp; ☎ 24hr).

Permits to the park (20,000Rp per day) can be arranged at guest houses in Ketambe. In theory you will need three photocopies of your passport but this is rarely required. Guides can be hired from any guest house in Gurah. If you want to see a certain plant or animal, ask around for the guides with that speciality.

Guide prices (one day 250,000Rp, two days and one night 350,000Rp, three days and two nights 700,000Rp) are fixed by the Sumatran Guide Association. Non-English-speaking guides cost less. It's important that you support local guides if possible, rather than organising through Medan.

#### TREKKING

For serious trekkers and jungle enthusiasts Ketambe offers a much more authentic experience than the trekking near Bukit Lawang. Be prepared for extreme terrain, hordes of leeches and swarms of stinging insects. Bring plenty of water. Here are a few options; guides can also tailor a trip to specific requests:

**Gurah Recreation Forest** The *hutan wisata* (recreation forest) at Gurah is a park within the national park. The forest's 92 sq km has walking tracks and viewing towers. The most popular walk involves a two-hour (5km) hike from Ketambe to hot springs by Sungai Alas. There's also a 6km walk to a waterfall.

**Bukit Lawang** Starting one hour south of Kutacane, this five-day trek through tough terrain passes over 20 river crossings. You have a good chance of seeing orangutans and gibbons, and the trek passes through areas that elephants are known to inhabit. You can arrange to have your luggage delivered to Bukit Lawang separately.



## KETAMBE RESEARCH STATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

## SLEEPING & EATING

Accommodation is scattered along the only road through Ketambe; guest houses are listed in geographical order as you arrive into town. Each has its own small restaurant.

**Pak Mus Guesthouse** (☎ 0813 8020 4305; r 50,000Rp) Charming family-run bungalows set beneath a forest backdrop. Thomas' leaf monkeys are often sighted feeding on the fruit trees.

**Pondok Wisata Ketambe** (☎ 24652; www.ketambe-indonesia.com; r 50,000-70,000Rp) Well-established guest house with knowledgeable staff.

**Wisma Sadar Wisata** (☎ 0852 7615 5741; r 50,000Rp) Here you'll find a range of good-value bungalows from basic older models to newer, more comfortable rooms overlooking the river. The friendly lady owner is great for a laugh.

**ourpick Friendship Guesthouse** (☎ 0852 9688 3624; www.ketambe.com; r 50,000) This new spot has a beautiful location 150m upriver, with charming wooden bungalows and Western toilets. Staff are very friendly, and there are plenty of characters lurking about (Jhon Kanedi, aka JFK, is a classic!).

**Wisma Cinta Alam** (☎ 0852 7086 4580; r 30,000-60,000Rp) Another decent option along the river, whose owner is an experienced guide. A good choice for those keen on rafting.

The government-owned Gurah Bungalows is simply best avoided.

If you arrive in Kutacane too late to reach Gurah, you might have to spend the night at **Hotel Maroon** (☎ 21078; Jl Besar; r from 60,000-150,000Rp; 📶); one of the better sleeping options in town, it's located in a quiet street parallel to the main road.

## GETTING THERE & AROUND

NBA flies from Kutacane to Medan and to Banda Aceh twice weekly.

Long-distance buses leave from the terminal in Kutacane for Medan's Pinang Baris terminal (50,000Rp, seven hours), Banda Aceh (190,000Rp, 20 hours) via Takengon (130,000Rp, eight hours) and Berastagi (50,000Rp, five hours). Along the way there are fine views of Gunung Sinabung and the Alas Valley.

From Kutacane there are countless *labi labi* to Ketambe (10,000Rp, one hour).

There are buses heading north to Blangkejeran (80,000Rp, three hours) and beyond.

## Kedah

Located 15km west of Blangkejeran, the small village of Kedah has seen very few visitors since the conflict in Aceh, making it ripe for off-the-beaten-track travel. At the northern edge of Gunung Leuser National Park, Kedah is a magnificent starting point for treks into the jungle, which is home to orangutans, gibbons and other exotic wildlife, birds and plants.



## THE MINANGKABAU

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

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

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

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

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

lovers explore Sumatra's largest national park in Kerinci, just across the border in Jambi province. Danau Maninjau remains the stunning, forgotten jewel in the crown.

## History

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

After the arrival of Islam, the region was split into small Muslim states ruled by sultans. It remained this way until the beginning of the 19th century, when war erupted between followers of the Islamic fundamentalist Padri movement and supporters of the local chiefs, adherents to the Minangkabau *adat* (traditional laws and regulations). The Padris were so named because their leaders were haji, pilgrims who had made their way to Mecca via the Acehese port of Pedir. They returned from the haj determined to establish a true Islamic society and stamp out the pre-Islamic ways that dominated the ruling houses.

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

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

## PADANG

☎ 0751 / pop 960,000

Most visitors don't give Sumatra's third-largest city a second glance, convinced that it's just another simmering urbo-Indonesian sprawl of traffic, smog and chaos. Caught between the mountains and the sea, this once-humble fishing village is reinventing itself, aided by cheap airfares and its proximity to the region's power centres of Malaysia and Singapore. There's a strong sense of cultural identity among the youthful, well-educated population, and Padang is the modern face of Minangkabau culture and the cuisine Padang gave to the world. Sure, it's not without its problems, which include daily blackouts, but as you eat sate, sip a Bintang and watch the sun dive blood red into the Indian Ocean, who really cares?

Note: at the time of going to press, a major earthquake hit Padang, destroying large sections of town and the surrounding region. See boxed text, p422, for further information.

## Orientation & Information

While Padang's tentacles spread in all directions, the central area is reasonably compact. Most of the action is centred around the *pasar* (market) on Jl M Yamin, and the area immediately south bounded by Jl Iman Bonjol, the river and the sea. Jl Bundo Kandung contains top-end hotels, while cheaper digs can be found along Jl Hayam Wuruk and Jl Diponegoro/Veteran. The old colonial area on the river is home to Chinatown.

The main *opelet* terminal is across from the *pasar* and the airport is 20km north. Taxis are found outside any of the top-end hotels, and behind the museum on Jl Gereja. Boats to Siberut leave from one of two ports (for more information see Getting There & Away, p424).

## INTERNET ACCESS & POST

**Caroline Street Internet** (Jl Pondok 5F; per hr 6000Rp;

☎ 9am-9pm)

**Cyber West** (Jl Nipa Berok 10; per hr 5000Rp ☎ 9am-late)

**Post office** (Jl Azizchan 7; per hr 6000Rp)

## MEDICAL SERVICES

**Rumah Sakit Yos Sudarso** (☎ 33230; Jl Situjuh 1)

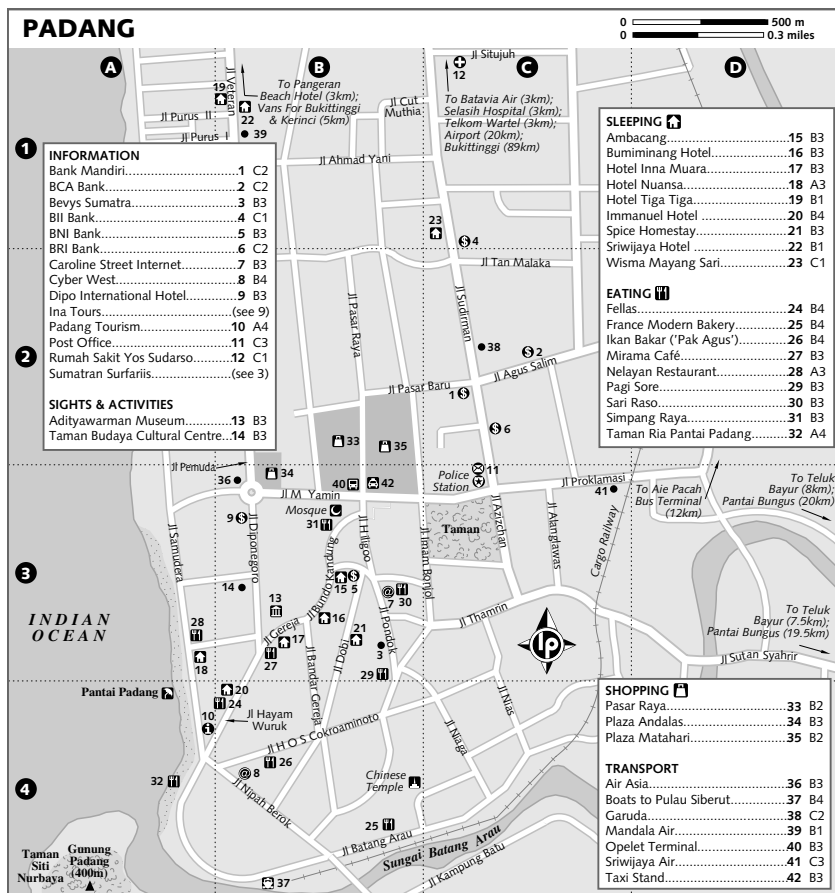
**Selasih Hospital** (☎ 51405; Jl Khatib Sulaiman 72)

## MONEY

There are ATMs all over town, and all major Indonesian banks are represented. The **Dipo International Hotel** (Jl Diponegoro 13) has a 24-hour moneychanger.

**BCA bank** (Jl Agus Salim 10)

**BII bank** (Bank Internasional Indonesia; Jl Sudirman 14)



## PADANG EARTHQUAKE 2009

At 5.16pm on 30 September 2009, the city of Padang was devastated by a 7.6 magnitude earthquake that struck 57km southwest of Pariaman. At the time of going to print it was estimated that as many as 5000 people had been killed. Several places reviewed in this section were destroyed, including hotels, restaurants and hospitals. Some of these places will rise again, others won't. It's strongly advised to check the situation before you arrive.

Some remote villages in the Kerinci region were wiped out completely from landslides, while Mentawai, Bungus, Bukittinggi and Danau Maninjau escaped relatively unscathed.

**BNI bank** (Jl Bundo Kandung)

**BRI bank** (Jl Sudirman)

## TELEPHONE

Mobile phones have killed the wartel scene. It's easier to purchase a pre-paid SIM and borrow a handset from your hotel.

**Telkom wartel** (cnr Jl Ahmad Dahlan & Khatib Sulaiman;

☎ 24hr) Huge Minangkabau-style building located north of the city centre.

## TOURIST INFORMATION

**Tourism Padang** (Dinas Kebudayaan Dan Pariwisata;

☎ 34186; www.tourism.padang.go.id; Jl Samudera 1;

☎ 8am-2.30pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Keep repeating 'tourist information' and eventually someone will give you an informative booklet. The website has a handy list of events.

## Sights & Activities

Padang's **colonial quarter** around Jl Batang Arau is laden with old Dutch and Chinese warehouses backing onto a river brimming with fishing boats. The beach along Jl Samudera is the best place to watch the sunset.

**Adityawarman Museum** (Jl Diponegoro; admission 1500Rp; ☎ 8am-4pm Tue-Sun), built in the Minangkabau tradition, has pleasant grounds, though non-Bahasa speakers may find the dusty collections detailing everyday Minangkabau life rather dry. The entrance is on Jl Gereja.

**Taman Budaya Cultural Centre** (☎ 22752; www.tamanbudaya-sumbar.org; Jl Diponegoro 31) stages sporadic dance performances, poetry readings, plays and art exhibitions. The events schedule is posted outside the building and on the website.

## Tours

Padang is the launching point for tours of the Mentawai Islands, famous for their hunter-gatherer culture, endemic flora and fauna, and world-class surfing. See p425 for more information.

## Festivals & Events

Don't miss the colourful dragon-boat festival held annually at the beginning of August to commemorate the city's founding.

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

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

## Sleeping

Hotels don't age well in Sumatra. Prepare to pay for comfort and location; always ask for a 'discount' and whether breakfast, tax and service charges are included.

## BUDGET & MIDRANGE

**Hotel Tiga Tiga** (☎ 22173; Jl Veteran 33; r incl breakfast 55,000-125,000Rp plus 10% tax; ☎) North of the centre, this old travellers' dossier has cheap, simple rooms only five minutes' walk from the sea. Grab any white *opelet* heading up Jl Permuda.

**Immanuel Hotel** (☎ 28560; Jl Hayam Wuruk 43; r incl breakfast 100,000-250,000Rp; ☎) Another travellers' standby, centrally located with simple rooms, helpful cheery staff and a welcome garden.

**our pick Spice Homestay** (☎ 841388; spicehome@yahoo.com; Jl Dobi 34; r incl breakfast 110,000-330,000Rp plus 10% tax; ☎) Fabulous tiny Balinese-style losmen in the centre, with beautiful rooms, a cosy lounge and great food.

**Wisma Mayang Sari** (☎ 23555; Jl Sudirman 19; r 130,000-330,000Rp plus 15% tax; ☎) If only it were in the centre. Nice clean airy rooms with a leafy courtyard, stuck on a busy road to the north.

**Sriwijaya Hotel** (☎ 21942; thesriwijayahotel.com; Jl Veteran 26; r incl breakfast 250,000-325,000Rp; 🍴) If the Tiga's too grungy, then try this newbie across the road. Beautiful modern rooms look onto a quiet courtyard, and the ocean is (almost) close enough to smell.

**Hotel Nuansa** (☎ 26000; Jl Samudera 12; r incl breakfast 220,000-320,000Rp plus 10% tax; 🍴) Fantastic location opposite the main beach, though only the flashiest rooms have a view.

### TOP END

Depending on the season, these hotels may offer big discounts, which bring the cheaper rooms back into the realms of mere mortals (check that tax and service are still included).

**Hotel Inna Muara** (☎ 35600; www.innamuara.com; Jl Gereja 34; r incl breakfast 625,000-850,000Rp; 🍴 📺) The faux Minangkabau is a little tired, but with a discount the economy rooms aren't bad value.

**Ambacang Hotel** (☎ 39888; www.theambacanghotel.com; Jl Bundo Kandung 14-16; r incl breakfast from 650,000-1,500,000Rp plus 21% tax; 🍴 📺) Sumptuous rooms, a day spa and the best nightclub in town.

**Bumiminang Hotel** (☎ 37555; www.bumiminang.com; Jl Bundo Kandung 20-28; r incl breakfast from 816,000-6,900,000Rp plus 21% tax; 🍴 📺 📺) The most expensive pad in town has a business centre and other trappings of the rich and powerful.

### Eating & Drinking

Start with the cuisine that conquered a nation, from these excellent proponents: **Pagi Sore** (Jl Pondok 143; dishes 8000Rp), **Sari Raso** (☎ 33498; Jl Karya 3; dishes 10,000Rp) and **Simpang Raya** (Jl Bundo Kandung; dishes 8000Rp).

**Taman Ria Pantai Padang** (Jl Samudera; mains 6000-8000Rp; 🍴 dinner) Serves standard dishes with excellent sea views.

**Mirama Cafe** (☎ 23237; miramacafest@hotmail.com; Jl Gereja 38; mains 21,000Rp) Offers pricey, bland-down versions of Indonesian standards in a nice outdoor setting.

**Nelayan Restaurant** (Jl Samudera; mains 25,000Rp) Does great seafood the Chinese way.

**our pick Ikan Bakar 'Pak Agus'** (☎ 823 1799; Jl H 0 S Cokroaminoto 91; set meals from 25,000Rp) Pak Agus flames his dead sea creatures to perfection.

### MEET BREAKFAST, LUNCH & DINNER: PADANG CUISINE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



The seafood is delivered fresh every afternoon. A set meal contains a whole barbecued fish, sides, rice and a drink.

Jl Sumadera and Jl Batang Arau are full of cheap warungs that spring to life at night, while discerning foodies head for Jl Pondok and Jl H O S Cokroaminoto. Juice wagons loiter near the end of Jl Hayam Wuruk. Grab a snack from the carts at the *opelet* station opposite the market. If pastries are your thing, try **France Modern Bakery** (Jl Batang Arau; mains 2000Rp) or any of the **Tokyo Bakery** franchises.

**Fellas** (Jl Hayam Wuruk 47; ☎) is a Western-style wi-fi cafe by day; the evenings see it fill with trendy young locals sucking on hookahs and tourists getting liquored.

## Shopping

**Pasar Raya** (Jl Pasar Raya) – literally ‘big market’ – is the centre of Padang’s shopping universe; most traveller necessities can be found here. Across the street, **Plaza Matahari** specialises in women’s clothes, while the nearby **Plaza Andalas** (Jl M Yamin) is the place to hunt out a new cell phone. All three have a food court on their top floor.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Padang’s airport, **Bandara Internasional Minangkabau** (BIM; off Jl Adinegoro) is located 20km north of town. The following airlines operate international and domestic flights. There is a 100,000Rp departure tax on international flights.

**Air Asia** (☎ 021 5050 5088; Hotel Huangtuah, Jl Pemuda 1) Flies twice daily to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

**Batavia Air** (☎ 41502; www.batavia-air.co.id; Jl Khatib Sulaiman 63C) Flies three times daily to Jakarta.

**Fireflyz** (www.fireflyz.com.my) Has a daily propeller flight to Kuala Lumpur domestic airport (Subang), Malaysia.

**Garuda** (☎ 30737; www.garuda-indonesia.com; Jl Sudirman 2) Operates three flights daily to Jakarta.

**Lion Air** (☎ 786 4781; www.lionair.co.id; BIM) Flies to Jakarta four times daily.

**Mandala Air** (☎ 39737; www.mandalaair.com; Jl Veteran 20C) Flies daily to Jakarta, Medan and Batam.

**SMAC** (☎ 0813 6358 8828; BIM) Flies three times a week to Pulau Sipora in the Mentawai Islands.

**Sriwijaya Air** (☎ 811 777; www.sriwijayaair-online.com; Jl Proklamasi 39, Terendam) Daily flights to Jakarta and Medan.

**Tiger Airways** (www.tigerairways.com) Flights to Singapore on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

## BOAT

Padang has three commonly used ports. Depending on the tide, boats to Siberut and other Mentawai islands will leave from either the river mouth (Sungai Muara) on Sungai Batang Arau, just south of Padang’s city centre, or from Teluk Kabung port at Bungus, 20km (45 minutes) away. Check the boat’s departure point with your travel agent on sailing day.

Teluk Bayur is the commercial freight port 8km from town and receives a monthly **Pelni** (☎ 61624; www.pelni.co.id) ship, MV *Lawit*, to/from Nias (economy/1st class 109,000/353,000Rp, 20 hours).

## BUS

The days of heading 12km out of town to the Bengkulu terminal at Aie Pacah are over. Most locals prefer to take minivans directly from Padang and, depending on your destination, these vans will even pick you up from your hotel.

Vans depart frequently for Bukittinggi (16,000Rp, two hours), from the city’s northern fringes. **Tranex** (☎ 705 8577) has a depot 2km north of the Pangeran Beach Hotel, opposite the Indah Theatre. Catch any white *opelet* (2000Rp) heading north on Jl Permuda and ask for ‘Tranex’. If coming from the airport and heading straight to Bukittinggi, take any bus from the terminal and alight at the motorway overpass (2km), where there’s a pickup area.

Vans for Kerinci go to Sungai Penuh (70,000Rp, six hours) and leave from the same depot as Tranex.

Vans to other destinations including Parapat (for Danau Toba, 350,000Rp, 17 hours), Bengkulu (155,000Rp, 16 hours) and Sibolga (for Nias, 150,000Rp, 12 hours) will pick up from your hotel.

For Medan and Jakarta, it’s cheaper and faster to fly.

## Getting Around

Airport taxis start from 100,000Rp. White **Damri** (☎ 780 6335) buses (18,000Rp) are a cheaper alternative and loop through Padang. Tell the conductor your street and they’ll drop you at the right stop. Heading to the airport, they pass by Bumiminang Hotel and Jl Pemuda/Veteran. From Bukittinggi alight at the motorway overpass and take an *ojek* to the terminal.

There are numerous *opelet* around town, operating out of the Pasar Raya terminal off Jl M Yamin. The standard fare is 2000Rp. Motorcycle rental is from 80,000Rp per day.

## AROUND PADANG Beaches

If Padang's traffic is frying your brains, or you're waiting for a boat, kick back on one of the nearby beaches. **Pantai Bungus**, 23km south of Padang, is conveniently close to the ferry port of Teluk Kabung, but still sufficiently relaxed to unkink the most frazzled. There's a host of nearby islands to explore, plus the odd gem in the hinterland.

**Losmen Carlos** (☎ 751 153; Pantai Bungus; r 100,000-150,000Rp) has great beachside rooms and a laid-back vibe. It runs tours (200,000Rp) to Pulau Pagang and Pulau Sironjong, and can organise Siberut guides and trips to the hinterland.

**Tin Tin Homestay** (☎ 0812 6683 6668; losmen-tintin.tripod.com; r 50,000Rp) is a small, quiet family-run losmen with basic, netted rooms, situated 400m south of Losmen Carlos. Also offers island tours.

**Pulau Pagang** is beautiful small island, 90 minutes offshore, with white sandy beaches and a handful of basic bungalows. It's possible to rent a boat from Bungus and stay the night. Ask at your losmen, or among the local fishermen.

**Pulau Sikuai** and **Pulau Cubadak** both have expensive resorts. **Cubadak Paradiso Village** (☎ 081 2660 3766; www.cubadak-paradisovillage.com) is the better of the two; it also has a **dive school** (☎ 081 2663 7609).

Further south is **Pulau Marak**, which has a siamiang (black gibbon) rehabilitation centre and miles of undisturbed coastline. While not officially open to the public, it's worth asking around.

Back on the mainland, and close to Teluk Kabung, the spectacular three-storey waterfall **Air Terjun Tiga Tingkat** (Three Tier Waterfall) is found in the village of Koto Lubuk Hitam.

**Jembatan Akar** (Bridge of Roots; Pulut-Pulut) is a living bridge over the Bayang River made from the entwined roots of weeping fig trees. Follow the highway south through Tarusan towards Painan, and turn left after Pasar Baru onto the Muara Air road, heading for Kampong Pulut-Pulut. The narrow road follows a scenic valley for another 23km. There's a small warung at the bridge. Transport can be arranged in Painan.

To reach Pantai Bungus, take a blue *opelet* labelled 'Kabung Bungus' (8000Rp, 60 minutes) or a taxi (100,000Rp).

**Pasir Jambak** is the best of several beaches north of Padang. **Uncle Jack's** (☎ 787 4719; r per person with meals 90,000Rp) has basic huts among the palms just behind the beach. Jack can organise snorkelling trips to nearby Pulau Sawo. He'll also do airport transfers for 50,000Rp.

*Opelet* 423 will get you to the turnover for 5000Rp, but you'll have to take an *ojek* (7000Rp) the rest of the way.

## MENTAWAI ISLANDS

Though not a great distance from the mainland, Mentawai Islands and its people were kept isolated until the 19th century by strong winds, unpredictable currents and razor-sharp corals.

It's thought that the archipelago separated from Sumatra some 500,000 years ago, resulting in such unique flora and fauna that sees Mentawai ranked alongside Madagascar in terms of endemic primate population. Of particular interest is *Siamang kerdil*, a rare species of black and yellow monkey, named *simpai Mentawai* by the locals.

The largest island, Siberut, is home to the majority of the Mentawai population and is the most studied and protected island in the archipelago. About 60% of Siberut is still covered with tropical rainforest, which shelters a rich biological community that has earned it a designation as a Unesco biosphere reserve. The western half of the island is protected as the Siberut National Park (TNS).

Pulau Sipora is home to Tua Pejat, the seat of regional government and a surfer drop-off point. The archipelago's airport is located at Rokot. With only 10% original rainforest remaining, it's also the most developed of the Mentawai islands.

Further south are the Pulau Pagai islands – Utara (North) and Selatan (South), which rarely see independent travellers.

Change has come quickly to Mentawai. Tourism, logging, *transmigrasi* (a government-sponsored scheme enabling settlers to move from overcrowded regions to sparsely populated ones) and other government-backed attempts to mainstream the culture have separated the people from the jungle and whittled the jungle into profit. It isn't what it used to be, but it is a long way from being like everywhere else. And that keeps trekkers happily braving mud and



bugs to visit the remaining traditional communities. Surfers comprise the other Mentawai-bound pilgrims, many of whom rank Mentawai as the ride of their life. Slowly but surely resorts are grabbing a beachhead and starting a crab-like march against the forest, though with rising sea levels, nothing is guaranteed.

## Information

The islands are very undeveloped. Bring all necessities and plenty of cash.

**Siberut National Park** (TNS; Sejeterah; ☎ 0759-

21109; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) The park office, a 10-minute *ojek* ride from the ferry jetty, is only useful if you speak Bahasa.

## Activities

### TREKKING

The river scene from *Apocalypse Now* flashes into your mind as you head upstream in a long-boat and watch the people and villages growing wilder by the minute. Soon you're out of the canoe and following some shaman-eyed tribesman with crazy tattoos and a loincloth through the mud for the next few hours, passing waterfalls, balancing on slippery tree branches and swimming across rivers, to his humble abode on poles in the middle of nowhere.

There's been fervent discussion about the authenticity of these trips, and what actually constitutes a traditional lifestyle. The mud is real, and so are the tattoos – decide for yourself.

In the past, mainland tour agencies had a stranglehold on the tourist dollar, but times have changed. It is infinitely more flexible, rewarding and sustainable to turn up at Muara Siberut independently and tailor a trek to remote communities, than it is to be locked into a 10-day mainland-organised tour with a horde of strangers following a well-trodden route. Ask around at the jetty cafes in Maileppet and Muara Siberut. Prices start around 100,000Rp per day, but don't include transport, food, accommodation or tips. Clarify exactly what is and isn't included.

If you prefer a mainland-organised trek, prices in Bukittinggi start at around US\$225/250 for six/10 days and normally include a guide, accommodation, food and transport. However, always check for any additional costs. Guides also hang around some of the losmen in Bungus, waiting for a boat home, and most hotels in Padang also offer tours.

For more on hiring guides, see p822.

## Trekking Essentials

Dress for mud wrestling. Most of your gear will get trashed, so bring as little as possible; electronic items have a particularly high attrition rate. Bear in mind you may need to swim the odd river.

Double bag everything in plastic bags and try to keep one set of clothes dry for evening use. Don't walk in beach sandals – one foot into deep bog and you'll never see them again. However, if you dislike having pig excrement between your toes, you might find them useful around the communities in the evenings.

Travel light. Large packs are a hindrance and anything tied to the outside is a goner. Forget rain gear, just accept that you're going to get wet. Bring a mosquito net if trekking independently; tour group accommodation should supply them (though check!). Water purification (tablets or Steripen) is recommended, as is a head torch.

Chloroquine-resistant malaria still exists on Siberut, so take appropriate precautions, though **Surf Aid** ([www.surfaidinternational.org](http://www.surfaidinternational.org)) has been actively working to limit its spread. DDT-strength insect repellent is advisable. Sanitation is poor, with the local river serving all purposes, so bring as much bottled water as you can.

May is generally the driest month, while October and November are the wettest – but it can rain any time. The seas between Siberut and the mainland can get very rough in June and July, when it can be too dangerous to sail.

You can buy most supplies in Muara Siberut, but they are much cheaper in Padang. You'll also need items for barter and gifts. You will be pestered for cigarettes, but day-to-day items might be more appropriate. Check with your guide what is sustainable.

## FIXERS – THE FINE ART OF FIXING A SURFING SAFARI

Surfers have latched onto what journalists and movie directors have known for years – if you need to get things done in a foreign country with the least amount of hassle, you need to find a local 'fixer'. Sure, you could just take an all-inclusive surf package with a tour company, but these cost a lot of money (something surfers are traditionally reluctant to part with), and besides, they lack a little, well, adventure.

A good fixer is worth their weight in gold. They will meet you at the airport and arrange portage of all your boards and gear, take you somewhere to freshen up, show you where you can procure various supplies (food, drinking water, beer – there's none where you're headed), then get the whole lot to the port and safely stowed on the ferry. They will have already arranged your arrival day to coincide with the ferry schedule, and secured you a cabin. On your return, they'll meet the ferry and get you and all your gear back to the airport.

You then need a second fixer out in the islands, who will meet your ferry, tee up a longboat, ship your gear, and drop you at a cheap losmen or basic hut somewhere close to your favourite break. They'll even arrange a cook if you want one. Of course, all this costs money, and rest assured, your fixer is taking a cut from everybody, but with careful planning and bargaining it's still going to be a whole lot cheaper than two weeks in a resort.

How do you find a fixer? Without any recommendations, your first trip will always be a learning curve and will involve equal quantities of patience, luck, and trial and error. Experienced surfers come back year after year and use the same fixers, boat drivers and hut owners. All business is conducted by mobile phone, and good fixers will also have email addresses. Ask around your hotel – chances are that desk clerk actually came from village A and his best mate now works in resort B and knows a boat driver who can hook you up with this guy who owns a shack on island C. Watch closely what other groups are doing, maybe you can share a taxi to the port, or bum a lift in a speedboat – all the time filling your mobile phone with contact numbers.

Who are these fixers? A lot are or were students, looking for some extra cash and a chance to practise their English/French/Portuguese. Some have worked in hotels and resorts and are well connected, as are others who are native to the islands.

There's nothing stopping you doing all this organising yourself, and the first time you probably will, but it's time and energy you'd most likely rather leave for the waves.

## THE MENTAWAIANS

The untouched, the unbaptised and the unphotographed have long drawn Westerners to distant corners of the globe. And the Mentawaians have seen every sort of self-anointed discoverer: the colonial entrepreneurs hoping to harness the land for profit, missionaries trading medicine for souls, and modern-day tourists eager to experience life before the machine.

Very little is known about the origins of the Mentawaians, but it is assumed that they emigrated from Sumatra to Nias and made their way to Siberut from there.

In 1864 the Mentawai archipelago was nominally made a Dutch colony, but it was not until 1901, during the Russo-Japanese War, that the Dutch placed a garrison on the islands to prevent another foreign power using them as a naval base. In subsequent years it was the missionaries who had the most influence on the Mentawai people, creating fundamental changes in their culture.

At the time of contact with missionaries, the Mentawaians had their own language, *adat* (traditional laws and regulations) and religion, and were skilled boat builders. They lived a hunter-gatherer existence.

Traditional clothing was a loincloth made from the bark of the breadfruit tree for men and a bark skirt for women. Mentawaians wore bands of red-coloured rattan, beads and imported brass rings. They filed their teeth into points and decorated their bodies with tattoos.

After independence, the Indonesian government banned many of the Mentawaians' customs, such as tattoos, sharpened teeth and long hair. Although the ban has not been enforced, many villagers have adopted modern fashions.

Traditional villages are built along riverbanks and consist of one or more *uma* (communal house) surrounded by *lalep* (single-storey family houses). Several families live in the same building. Bachelors and widows have their own quarters, known as *rusuk*, identical to the family longhouse except they have no altar. Traditionally, the houses stand on wooden piles and are windowless.

Although essentially patriarchal, society is organised on egalitarian principles. There are no inherited titles or positions and no subordinate roles. It is the *uma*, not the village itself, which is pivotal to society. It is here that discussions affecting the community take place. Everyone is present at meetings, but the prominent men make most of the major decisions, including choosing a *rimata* (the person who leads religious affairs and is the community's spokesperson to the outside world), building an *uma*, clearing a forest or laying out a banana plantation.

## SURFING

Surfing is big business in Mentawai as the islands have consistent surf year-round at hundreds of legendary breaks. The season peaks between April and October.

In the past, charter boats were the primary means of reaching the top spots, but now land-based resorts have gained a foothold, and many fly in clients on all-inclusive packages.

With patience, attitude and a handful of contacts, however, it's possible to put together your own independent surfing safari for a fraction of the cost of a package tour (see the boxed text, p427). Losmen are blossoming throughout Mentawai, and chartering a longboat is relatively easy. Check some of the more popular surfing blogs, or Lonely Planet's own Thorntree forum, for the latest hotspots:

**GlobalSurfers** ([www.globalsurfers.com](http://www.globalsurfers.com))

**WannaSurf** ([www.wannasurf.com](http://www.wannasurf.com))

**Lonely Planet Thorn Tree forum** ([www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree))

## Tours & Charters

The following companies can arrange trekking tours and surf charters.

**Bevys Sumatra** (Map p421; ☎ 34878; [bevyssumatra@yahoo.com](mailto:bevyssumatra@yahoo.com); Jl Pondok 121, Padang) A Padang-based agent who issues ferry tickets to Mentawai and organises trekking, surf and dive tours.

**Ina Tours** (Map p421; ☎ 31669; Dipo International Hotel, Jl Diponegoro 13, Padang) Located inside Dipo Hotel in Padang, this agent organises Mentawai cultural tours.

**Sumatran Surfariis** (Map p421; ☎ 34878; [www.sumatransurfariis.com](http://www.sumatransurfariis.com); Jl Pondok 121) Affiliated with Bevys, Sumatran Surfariis operates a variety of surf-boat charters; packages start from US\$1600 for a 10-day tour.

On such occasions, the people of the *uma* carry out a religious festival known as *punen*. This usually involves ritual sacrifices of both pigs and chickens and, depending on the importance of the occasion, the festival can last for months, sometimes years. All kinds of everyday jobs and activities become taboo; work in the fields is stopped and strangers are denied access to the *uma*, its isolation being marked by a cordon of palm leaves and flowers.

The native Sibulungan religion is a form of animism, involving the worship of nature spirits and a belief in the existence of ghosts, as well as the soul. The chief nature spirits are those of the sky, the sea, the jungle and the earth. The sky spirits are considered the most influential. There are also two river spirits: *Ina Oinan* (Mother of Rivers) is beneficent, while *Kameinan* (Father's Sister) is regarded as evil. In addition, all inanimate objects have a *kina* (spirit), which gives them life.

The worship of the soul is of utmost importance, being vital to good health and longevity. The soul is believed to depart the body at various times during life before its ultimate escape at death. Sickness, for example, is the result of the temporary absence of the soul; dreams also signify that the soul is 'on vacation'.

When the soul leaves the body at death it is transformed into a *sanitu* (ghost). Mentawaians try to avoid these ghosts, whom they suspect of malevolently attempting to rob the living of their souls. To protect themselves, they place fetish sticks at every entrance to the village. This tactic is considered foolproof, provided no one has committed a ritual sin or broken a taboo.

German missionary August Lett was the first to attempt to convert the local people, but he was not entirely successful: eight years after his arrival Lett was murdered by the locals. Somehow the mission managed to survive and 11 baptisms had been recorded by 1916. There are now more than 80 Protestant churches throughout the islands.

More than 50 years after the Protestants, Catholic missionaries moved in to vie for converts. They opened a mission – a combined church, school and clinic – in south Siberut. Free medicines and clothes were given to any islander who became a Catholic, and by 1969 there were almost 3000 converts.

Islam began to make inroads when government officials were regularly appointed from Padang during the Dutch era, and then to complicate religious matters further, the Baha'í faith was introduced in 1955. Today more than half the population claims to be Protestant, 16% Catholic and 13% Muslim, while the rest have no official religion.

## Sleeping

Along with transport, accommodation will be your primary expense in Mentawai. Trekking guides will organise family homestays. Most of the private surf resorts don't accept short-term stays (less than seven days). However, there are alternatives.

If you're stuck in Muara Siberut without a guide, there is very basic accommodation at the **Sirruhuudin Hotel** (r 25,000Rp) on the waterfront (next to the pink Telkom shop), as well as the odd homestay (ask around the *pasar*).

There are basic losmen around most of the Mentawai ports, and simple beach huts (with/without cook from 175,000/75,000Rp) have sprung up around **E-Bay** and **Playgrounds**, to the south of Siberut. Bring all your supplies, drinking water and mosquito nets. To get there, either bum a lift off another group, or charter your a longboat from Muara Siberut (see p431).

You don't have to be a surfer to enjoy the pristine beach protected by a lagoon at **Masalot Island**, an hour from Muara Siberut. Boatmen from Siberut can arrange a local homestay.

**Katiet**, at the bottom of **Pulau Sipora** and home of the classic **Lance's** breaks, also has a few losmen. Catch a ferry from Bungus to **Sioban**, then try to find a speedboat (seat/whole boat 50,000/400,000Rp) heading south. Saturday (market day) is your best bet.

If you want wi-fi, three meals a day and hot showers, then bite the resort bullet. Transport from the mainland is normally included.

**Wavepark Resort** (Pulau Mainuk; ☎ 081 2663 5551; www.wavepark.com; minimum 7-night package, per day US\$245) The first land-based resort on Mentawai, Wavepark has a front-row view of Hideaways. Rates include flights to and from the mainland.



**Macaroni's Resort** (Pulau Pagai Utara; ☎ 081374429357 www.macaronisresort.com; minimum 8-day package surfer/nonsurfer US\$1525/1245; 🏠) Bamboo villas built over the water; it's a quick speedboat transfer to Macca's and Macca's Right.

**Aloita Resort & Spa** (Pulau Simakakang; ☎ 34878; www.aloitaresort.com; minimum 3-night package, per day surfer/nonsurfer US\$220/165) Eight bungalows occupy a private beach within shuttle's reach of Telescopes and Iceland. Also offers scuba diving and certification. Book through Bevys.

**Kandui Resort** (Pulau Karangmajat; ☎ US 1714 478 2487; www.mentawaiislands.com; minimum 10-night package from US\$2350; 🏠) Self-contained, wi-fi-enabled thatched bungalows with access to 4 Bobs and A-Frames. Price does not include transport.

**Pitstop Hill Resort** (Pulau Masokut, aka Nyang Nyang; www.pitstophill.com; per day from A\$150) Sleeps six in a central house near the break of the same name. Close to E-Bay.

**Awera Island Surf Camp** (Pulau Awera; www.aweraisland.com; per day from US\$105;) This small low-key resort near Iceland sleeps six in twin-bunk dorms. Transport to the island not included.

## Getting There & Away

**Subang Merauke Airways** (SMA, previously SMAC; ☎ 0813 6358 8828) flies to Pulau Sipora (Rotok) on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday (without/with surfboard 800,000/1,600,000Rp).

As there is no longer a speedboat, all ferries to Mentawai charge the same price (deck/cabin 105,000/125,000Rp) and usually take 10 hours. Unless you enjoy being squashed into a corner on a hard floor and continually trampled under the glare of the passage lights, pay extra for a cabin. All boats run overnight, and usually return the following evening (unless continuing). The ferry schedules are changing constantly so always check what's available on arrival in Padang. See below for the ferry schedule.

Tickets can be bought from **Bevys Sumatra** (Map p421; ☎ 34878; Jl Pondok 121). Remember to check which Padang port to leave from (see p424)

## Getting Around

Boats to Siberut arrive at the jetty in Maileppet. It's a 10-minute *ojek* ride (15,000Rp) to the

### FERRY SCHEDULE TO/FROM MENTAWAI ISLANDS

Day	Boat	From	To
Mon	Ambu-Ambu	Tua Pejat	Padang
	Beriloga	Sikakap	Padang
	Simasin	Sikabalu	Siberut—Tua Pejat—Padang
	Sumber Rezeky	Padang	Siberut
Tue	Ambu-Ambu	Padang	Sikakap
	Beriloga	Padang	Sikabalu—Siberut
	Sumber Rezeky	Siberut	Padang
Wed	Ambu-Ambu	Sikakap	Padang
	Beriloga	Siberut	Padang
	Sumber Rezeky	Padang	Tua Pejat
Thu	Ambu-Ambu	Padang	Tua Pejat#
	Ambu-Ambu	Padang	Siberut*
	Beriloga	Padang	Sikabalu—Tua Pejat
	Simasin	Padang	Sikabalu—Siberut
	Sumber Rezeky	Tua Pejat	Padang
Fri	Ambu-Ambu	Siberut*	Padang
	Ambu-Ambu	Tua Pejat#	Padang
	Beriloga	Sikabalu	Padang
	Simasin	Siberut	Padang
	Sumber Rezeky	Padang	Sioban—Tua Pejat
	Sumber Rezeky	Tua Pejat	Sioban—Padang
Sun	Ambu-Ambu	Padang	Tua Pejat
	Beriloga	Padang	Sikakap
	Simasin	Padang	Tua Pejat—Siberut—Sikabalu

# - weeks 1 & 4

\* - weeks 2 & 3

### FERRY SCHEDULE AROUND MENTAWAI ISLANDS

Day	From	To
Mon	Tua Pejat	Sioban–Pasar Puat–Sikakap
Tue	Sikakap	Pasar Puat–Sioban–Tua Pejat
Wed	Tua Pejat	Maulimuk–Siberut–Sikabalu
Thu	Sikabalu	Siberut–Maulimuk–Tua Pejat
Fri	Tua Pejat	Sioban–Pasar Puat–Sikakap
Sat	Sikakap	Pasar Puat–Sioban–Tua Pejat

main village of **Muara Siberut**, where longboats can be hired. Sample charter fees (up to five passengers) include the following:

**Muara Siberut to E-Bay** 600,000Rp (1½ hours)

**E-Bay to Playgrounds** 300,000Rp (30 minutes)

**Playgrounds to Tua Paget** 1,200,000Rp (2½ hours)

**Sioban to Katiet** 400,000Rp (two hours)

In theory it's possible to island hop from Siberut all the way to Tua Pejat on Sipora via E-Bay and Playgrounds, but in reality it would work out cheaper (because you would have to keep the same boat or risk getting stranded) to return to Muara Siberut and take the inter-island ferry. See above for the ferry schedule.

Every Monday the *KM Sibulat* departs from Tua Pejat and winds its way through the islands. Tickets are 35,000Rp for one stop and the boat leaves at 9am each day.

## BUKITTINGGI

☎ 0752 / pop 95,000

Early on a bright, clear morning, the market town of Bukittinggi sits high above the valley mists as three sentinels – fire-breathing Merapi, benign Singgalang and distant Sago – all look on impassively. Sun-ripened crops grow fat in the rich volcanic soil, as frogs call in the paddies, *bendis* haul goods to the *pasar*, and the muezzin's call sits lightly on the town. Modern life seems far removed.

Until 9am. Then the traffic starts up, and soon there's a mile-long jam around the bus terminal and the air turns the colour of diesel. The mosques counter the traffic by cranking their amps to eleven, while hotel staff try to pass off cold bread and jam as breakfast.

Such is the incongruity of modern Bukittinggi, blessed by nature, choked by mortals. Lush. Fertile. Busy. And at 930m above sea level, deliciously temperate all year round.

The town (alternatively named Tri Arga, referring to the triumvirate of peaks) has had a chequered history, playing host at various times to Islamic reformists, Dutch colonials, Japanese invaders and Sumatran separatists.

Bukittinggi was once a mainstay of the banana-pancake trail, but regional instability, shorter visas, and the rise of low-cost air-carriers have seen the traveller tide reduced to a low ebb. However, locals are optimistic that the worst is over, and that numbers may again be on the increase.

## Orientation

The town centre is compact and most items of interest are easily reached on foot. By day, the *pasar* and clock-tower end is bustling. In the evenings the focus shifts to the bottom of Jl Ahmad Yani, where warungs open and travellers sip their drinks after a hard day's touring.

The Aur Kuning bus terminal is 2km south of the town centre.

## Information

### INTERNET ACCESS & POST

Internet cafes abound on Jl Ahmad Yani.

**Orange99.net** (Jl Ahmad Yani; per hr 4000Rp; ☎ 10am-late) Two locations.

**Harau Internet** (Jl Ahmad Yani; per hr 4000Rp)

**Turret Cafe** (☎ 625 956; Jl Ahmad Yani 140-142; internet access per hr 6000Rp)

**Post office** (Jl Sudirman; internet access per hr 6000Rp) South of town, near the bus terminal.

### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Rumah Sakit Sayang Bari** (Jl Dr Rivai)

### MONEY

Banks and ATMs are scattered along Jl Ahmad Yani.

**Lippo bank** (Jl Ahmad Yani)

**BNI bank** (Jl Lenggogeni)

**BRI bank** (Jl Ahmed Yani)

**BRI bank** (Jl Istana)

### TELEPHONE

There are still a few wartel around town.

**Wartel** (Jl Yos Sudarso, next to Hotel Sari)

**Wartel** (Jl Ahmad Yani, near Aladdin Antiques)

**Wartel** (Jl Ahmad Yani, near Apache Cafe)

**Wartel** (Jl Sudirman, past the Tourist Office)



## TOURIST INFORMATION

**Tourist Office** (Jl Sudirman; ☎ 7.45am-3pm) Opposite the clock tower; it's got maps, tours and tickets to cultural events.

## TRAVEL AGENCIES

Bukittinggi has plenty of travel agencies, most of them along Jl Ahmad Yani.

**PT Jogja Wisata Travel** (☎ 32634; Jl Perintis Kemerdekaan 17) At the bottom of the steps at the clock-tower side of the market. Staff can arrange airport transfers (40,000Rp) and flights.

Some traveller hotels and cafes also act as booking agents. The **Orchid Hotel** (☎ 32634; roni\_orchid@hotmail.com; Jl Teuku Umar 11) and **Canyon Cafe** (☎ 21652; www.seruling-travel.com; Jl Teuku Umar 8) have previously proved reliable.

## Sights

**Pasar Atas** (located east of Jl Minangkabau) is a large, colourful market crammed with stalls selling fruit and vegetables, secondhand clothing and crafts. It's open daily, but the serious action is on Wednesday and Saturday, when the stalls overflow down the hill and villagers from the surrounding area come to haggle and have a look around.

**Benteng de Kock** (Benteng Fort; admission 5000Rp) was built by the Dutch during the Padri Wars, but apart from the moat and a few rusting cannons, there's not much to see, other than fine views over the town from its hilltop position.

A footbridge crosses over Jl Ahmad Yani to Taman Bundo Kandung, site of the **museum** and **zoo**. The museum, constructed in 1934 in Minangkabau style, is the oldest in the province; admission is 2000Rp. The zoo (included in the Benteng Fort admission) is just depressing.

**Taman Panorama** (Panorama Park; Jl Panorama; admission 5000Rp), on the southern edge of town, overlooks the deep Ngarai Sianok (Sianok Canyon), where fruit bats swoop at sunset. *Friendly* guides will approach visitors – settle on a price before continuing (around 20,000Rp) to avoid misunderstandings later – to lead you through **Gua Jepang** (Japanese Caves), wartime defensive tunnels built by Japanese slave labour. **Jam Gadang** (Big Clock Tower; btwn Jl Istana & Sudirman) is the town's focal point, where locals and tourists alike slurp ice creams and take snapshots under the leafy shade while vacant *bendis* look on. It was built in the 1920s

to house the clock, a gift from the Dutch queen; independence saw the retrofit of a Minangkabau roof.

## Tours

Local tours fall into two categories, culture or nature, and can range from a half-day meander through neighbouring villages to a three-day jungle trek to Danau Maninjau, or an overnight assault on Gunung Merapi.

Half-/full-day tours start at around 100,000Rp/175,000Rp, and multiday trekking is roughly 200,000Rp per day. Some tours have a minimum quota, though the **Orchid Hotel** runs solo tours by motorbike.

Guides hang out in all the cafes. Be clear about what you want and what is and isn't included. If going solo, make sure somebody knows who you're going with.

There's a healthy climbing scene here and a day on the cliffs is around US\$35, but if you can find some locals and avoid the entrepreneurs, it'll work out cheaper.

## Sleeping

Bukittinggi's mosques have been strategically located to saturate the entire town with the predawn call to prayer.

Most hotels include a simple breakfast. Hotel tax is only applied to top-end options and can be negotiated. On holidays, rooms fill quickly with Indonesian visitors. In Bukittinggi's temperate climate, hot water is more desirable than air-con.

## BUDGET

**Rajawali Homestay** (☎ 26113; Jl Ahmad Yani 152; r 50,000Rp) The rooms are basic but cosy in this tiny homestay right in the centre. The irrepressible Ulrich is a fount of local knowledge and has detailed maps and advice on the area's attractions.

**Orchid Hotel** (☎ 32634; roni\_orchid@hotmail.com; Jl Teuku Umar 11; r cold/hot water 75,000/100,000Rp) Roni runs this popular backpacker inn that features clean rooms and a friendly atmosphere, and he's able to tailor a tour to almost anywhere.

**Singgalang Hotel** (☎ 21576; Jl Ahmad Yani 130; r 120,000-150,000Rp) This basic cheapie is close to the action.

**Mountain View Hotel** (☎ 21621; Jl Yos Sodarso 31; r 150,000Rp) In a stunning location with a huge garden and plenty of room for vehicles. The simple rooms are great value.

## MIXING BUSINESS WITH FRIENDSHIP

In Indonesia, the line between business and socialising isn't as distinct as it is in the West. We expect printed prices and obvious sales tactics. Without a price tag, we assume that it is free or done out of friendship. On the other side of the cultural divide Sumatrans prefer business to resemble friendship: a little chit-chat, a steady sales pitch, and a sort of telepathic understanding that payment is expected. They'd rather be helpful instead of entrepreneurial, but necessity dictates an income. The sluggish state of the Sumatran economy means that unemployment is high, with an overload of young resourceful men supporting themselves by guiding too few tourists.

Once you realise that nothing is gratis, ask about prices. Don't assume that the quoted price is all-inclusive. You are expected to buy lunch and drinking water for your guide. If transport isn't included in the initial price, you should pay for this as well. A tip at the end is also welcome. Most are smokers and a pack costs about 10,000Rp. If all this seems steep, keep in mind that the guides have a couple of crumpled rupiah to their name and not a lot of other opportunities.

## MIDRANGE & TOP END

**Hotel Asia** (☎ 625277; Jl Kesehatan 38; r incl breakfast 100,000-250,000Rp; 🚻) Centrally located, the Asia offers spotless rooms for a bargain price. The airy common balconies evoke a Himalayan vibe.

**Hotel Khartini** (☎ 22885; Jl Teuku Umar 6; r incl breakfast 150,000-250,000Rp) Clean, light-filled rooms, but it's very close to the mosque.

**Lima's Hotel** (☎ 22641; www.limashotelbukittinggi.com; Jl Kesehatan 34; r incl breakfast 250,000-400,000Rp plus 10% tax) Great views down the valley from the side of the hill. The economy rooms are spotless and well appointed.

**Hills** (☎ 35000; www.thehillshotel.com; Jl Laras Dutuk Bandar; r 800,000-4,000,000Rp plus 21% tax; 🚻 📺 📶) Commanding the heights like a Moorish citadel, and with more bling than a Paris catwalk, the most expensive place in town is usually full of VIPs and their security squads. At least grab a drink and watch the proceedings (or use the wi-fi).

## Eating

Bukittinggi has always been the one place in Sumatra where weary road bums can give their poor chilli-nuked organs a chance to recover, with lashings of lovingly bland western *makan* (food). OK, so sometimes the reality doesn't quite fit the dream, but hey, what did you expect?

**Canyon Cafe** (☎ 21652; Jl Teuku Umar 8; mains from 15,000Rp) Still playing Credence and waiting for the tide to change, but the food's always good.

**Turret Cafe** (☎ 625 956; Jl Ahmad Yani 140-142; mains from 20,000Rp; 📺) Good food, relaxed outdoor lounges, internet (per hour 6000Rp) the best guacamole in town.

**Bedudal Café** (Jl Ahmad Yani; mains from 20,000Rp) All the old favourites in a cosy, intimate atmosphere, located on the main drag.

If you're pizza'd out, there are plenty of *nasi Padang* options. Try tiny **Sederhang** (Jl Minangkabau 63) and its mouth-watering choices; **Selamat** (upper Jl Ahmad Yani), located towards the clocktower; **Gon Raya** (Jl Ahmad Yani), in the middle of town; or either **Simpang Raya** (Jl Minangkabau) location. Dishes start at 8000Rp.

Need a chocolate muffin fix? Try the sublime offerings at **Serba Coklet** (Jl Yos Sudarso 6A; ☎ 8am-4pm).

Jl Ahmad Yani comes alive at night with food stalls doing excellent sate and *nasi mie goreng*. Locals rave about the sweet *lon tong* (a soupy concoction of coconut milk, rice, egg and whatever else is handy) served in a no-name tent opposite the Singgalang Hotel.

## Entertainment

**Medan Nan Balinduang** (Jl Lenggogeni; tickets 40,000Rp; ☎ 8.30pm) presents Minangkabau dance performances. Check with the tourist office for the latest schedule.

West Sumatrans love a good **bullfight**, known locally as *adu kerbau*. Unlike Spanish bullfighting, there is no (intended) bloodshed and the water-buffalo bulls are normally unharmed. Two animals of similar size and weight lock horns in a trial of strength. Whichever doesn't retreat, wins. Unfortunately, West Sumatrans also love a good punt, and betting reached such a frenzy that the provincial government banned bullfighting indefinitely.

However, where there's a will, there's a horse and Bukittinggi holds an annual race at Bukik Ambacang in early March. Horses are ridden bareback and jockeys wear regional costumes, vying to win kudos for their village, and something else for the onlookers' wallets. Solok and Sawahlunto also hold annual races.

## Shopping

Bukittinggi is a great place to shop for both the mundane and the bizarre: leather sandals, woven bags, false teeth, silver, karabiners, skate wear, batik shirts, antiques and curios. Box collectors can look out for a couple of Minangkabau versions. Brass *salapah panjang* (long boxes) are used for storing lime and tobacco, and silver *salapah padusi* for betel nut and lime.

Souvenir shops line Jl Minangkabau, while upper Jl Ahmad Yani is full of trendy clothes and antiques. Try **Minang Art** (☎ 35662; Jl Cindurmato 98A), **Aladdin Antiques** (☎ 33593; Jl Ahmad Yani 14) or **Makmur Arts** (☎ 22208; Jl Ahmad Yani 10).

For outdoor gear, check out **Orange** and **Markas Outdoors**, both on upper Jl Ahmad Yani.

Beautiful red and gold Minangkabau embroidery can be found in the *pasar*. Pillowcases, slippers and ceremonial wedding sashes all make easy-to-carry souvenirs.

## Getting There & Away

The chaos of the Aur Kuning bus terminal 2km south is easily reached by *opelet* (2000Rp). Ask for 'terminal'. Heading to town ask for 'Kampung China'.

Minivans run regularly to Padang (16,000Rp, two hours) and Solok (16,000Rp, two hours). Decrepit buses make the Danau Maninjau run (13,000Rp, 1½ hours), while a taxi starts at 160,000Rp.

Trans-Sumatran buses also stop here, though only zombies make it to Jakarta (from 250,000Rp, 35 hours); it's quicker and cheaper to fly from Padang. Ditto for Medan (from 200,000Rp, 20 hours), though you could jump off at Parapat (from 170,000Rp, 16 hours) for Lake Toba. You'll cross the equator en route, near Bonjol.

Minivans head west to Pekanbaru (100,000Rp, five hours), and there's a night bus direct to Dumai (110,000Rp, 10 hours) that connects with the Melaka ferry (250,000Rp, two hours). There is a handy bus to Sibolga (90,000, 12 hours) for Nias, and a few buses to Bengkulu (150,000Rp, 18

hours), Jambi (200,000Rp, 15 hours), Sungai Penuh for Kerinci (85,000Rp, 10 hours) and Palembang (140,000Rp, 20 hours), but most services leave from Padang.

## Getting Around

*Opelet* cost 2000Rp. *Bendi* start from 10,000Rp. An *ojek* from the bus terminal to the hotels costs 7,000Rp and a taxi costs 20,000Rp. Transfers direct to Padang airport can be arranged from any travel agent for 40,000Rp.

## AROUND BUKITTINGGI

While Bukittinggi is an interesting market town, visitors come to explore the Minangkabau countryside, hike up an active volcano or hunt for the fabled rafflesia.

## Handicraft Villages

Silversmiths occupy the old Dutch houses of **Koto Gadang**, 5km from Bukittinggi (*opelet* 2000Rp). Alternatively, it's an hour's walk from Taman Panorama.

**Pandai Sikat** (Clever Craftsmen) is famous for *songket* (silver- or gold-threaded cloth) weaving and woodcarving. The village is 13km from Bukittinggi. Take an *opelet* (5000Rp) from Aur Kuning.

## Minangkabau Sights

The rich volcanic soil of the hilly countryside around Bukittinggi oozes fertility. Stop by the roadside and you can spot cinnamon, betel nut, avocado, coffee, mango and papaya trees. Rice, tapioca and potatoes grow in terraces, while bamboo waterwheels feed irrigation ditches and drive wooden grinding mills.

Hopefully, you'll see a wedding parade. The bride and groom, dressed in full traditional regalia, are accompanied by musicians, family members and half the village. The Minangkabau tribal flags (red, black and yellow) typically mark the site of the festivities.

**Rumah Gadang Pagaruyung** (King's Palace) was a scaled-down replica of the former home of the rulers of the ancient Minangkabau kingdom of Pagaruyung. Unfortunately, a fire razed it to the ground in 2007 and the reconstruction is still incomplete. Most tours now divert to **Istano Silinduang Bulan** (Silinduang Bulan; donation 2000Rp), the nearby Queen's Palace. This building is still used for important clan meetings, and a small donation is expected. Both palaces are located in the village of Silinduang Bulan,



5km north of Batu Sangkar, the heartland of the red Tanah Datar clan of Minangkabau.

Batu Sangkar is pleasant enough and can be reached via public bus (15,000Rp), where an *ojek* (3,000Rp) or minivan (2,000Rp) can take you the rest of the way to Silinduang Bulan.

Another popular tour stop is **Belimbing**, one of the largest surviving collections of traditional architecture in the highlands. Many of the homes are 300 years old and in various states of decay. Most owners have built modern homes nearby and use the relics for ceremonial purposes.

Ethno-musicologists make the pilgrimage to the town of **Padangpanjang**, 19km south of Bukittinggi, to see the **Conservatorium of Traditional Music** (STSI or ASKI; ☎ 0752-82077; Jl Bundo Kandung 35; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Thu, to noon Fri). Minangkabau dance and music are preserved and performed here. Regular buses run between Bukittinggi, Padang and Padangpanjang (10,000Rp).

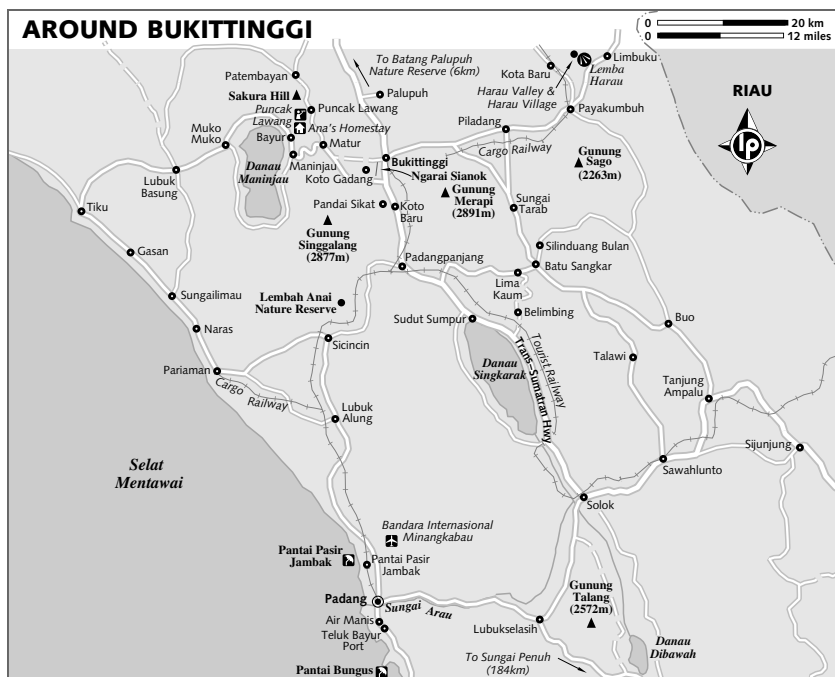
Train lovers head to Padangpanjang for Sunday's Museum Train trip to the old coal-mining town of **Sawahlunto**. Scenically stunning, this newly restored service runs

alongside **Danu Singkarak**. The trip takes three hours (one way 60,000Rp, departs 7.30am) and there's two hours in Sawahlunto, where you can ride a steam train, visit the rail museum or head down a coal mine, before the return journey.

## Nature Reserves

West Sumatra is famous for its many orchid species and for the massive *Rafflesia arnoldii*, and *Amorphophallus titanum*, the largest flowers on the planet. The blossom of the parasitic rafflesia measures nearly a metre across and can weigh up to 11kg, while the inflorescence of *Amorphophallus* can extend to over 3m in circumference. Both flowers reek like road kill. The rafflesia typically blooms between August and November, whereas the Titan Arum flowers infrequently. The best place to find ripe blossoms is **Batang Palupuh Nature Reserve**, 16km north of Bukittinggi. Local buses to Palupuh, where guides can be hired, cost 5000Rp.

On the highway between Padang and Bukittinggi is the **Lembah Anai Nature Reserve**, which is renowned for its waterfalls, wild



## WOMEN RULE

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

orchids and giant rafflesia. Any Bukittinggi–Padang bus can drop you nearby.

## Gunung Merapi

Looming large over Bukittinggi to the east is the smouldering summit of Gunung Merapi (2891m). Occasionally deemed too dangerous to climb, Merapi is Sumatra's most active volcano.

If Merapi's benign, then visitors typically hike overnight to view sunrise from the summit. The climb begins at the village of Koto Baru and it's normally a 12-hour round trip. You'll need good walking boots, warm clothing, a torch, food and drink.

It's unwise to attempt the climb alone, and people are advised to take a guide or join a group. Travel agencies in Bukittinggi do guided trips to Merapi for US\$25 per person (minimum three people).

## Gunung Singgalang

Singgalang (2877m) is a more adventurous undertaking than Merapi, is rarely climbed by tourists. There are campsites by the beautiful crater lake, Telago Dewi.

## Harau Valley

Heading east from Bukittinggi takes you through the tapioca-growing area of **Piladang**, famous for *keropok* (tapioca crackers), and the sprawling agricultural centre of **Payakumbuh**. Of Minangkabau's three clans, this is the territory of the 50 Kota (50 villages) yellow branch. Paddies and daydreaming buffaloes flank the narrow road that leads to the tiny village of Harau. Venture another 3km and spectacular 100m cliffs rise up to enclose the claustrophobic Harau Valley, 15km northeast of Payakumbuh and 55km from Bukittinggi.

Most tourists just pass through on a tour to **Leмба Harau** (admission 1000Rp), a set of waterfalls that either trickles or plummets, depending on the weather. However, Harau Valley is also the best-developed rock-climbing area in Sumatra, and those climbers who make the pilgrimage will be rewarded with long clean lines on plenty of sheer faces. The local climbers are very knowledgeable and worth seeking out. Check out climbing blogs such as **Climbing** ([www.climbing.com](http://www.climbing.com)) and **Rockclimbing.com** ([www.rockclimbing.com](http://www.rockclimbing.com)) for more information.

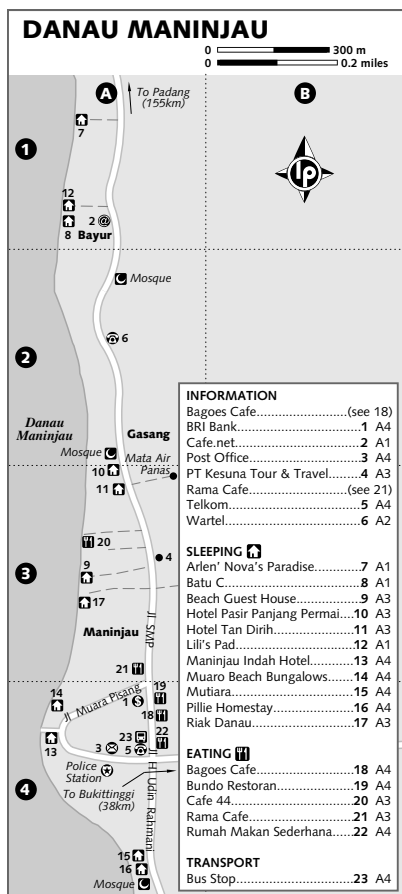
Right under the cliffs in the narrowest part of the valley is **Echo Homestay** (☎ 775 0306; Taratang Lb Limpato; r with shared bathroom 60,000Rp, r incl breakfast 350,000–450,000Rp), a stunningly beautiful place teeming with butterflies and surrounded by forests full of gibbons. Slum it in the basic thatched bungalows or pamper yourself in the Minangkabau-style cottages.

To get there take a local bus from Bukittinggi to Payakumbuh (10,000Rp), then a minivan to Harau village (5000Rp), and finally an *ojek* the rest of the way (5000Rp). Alternatively, take an *ojek* all the way from Payakumbuh (15,000Rp). Harau can also be reached on a half-day tour from Bukittinggi for 100,000Rp.

## DANAU MANINJAU

☎ 0752

The first glimpse of this perfectly formed volcanic lake sucks your breath away as the dilapidated bus lurches over the caldera lip and hurtles towards the first of the 44 (yep, they're numbered) hairpin bends down to the lakeshore. Monkeys watch your progress from the crash barriers as the lush rainforest of the heights retreats from the ever-expanding farms and paddies of the lowlands.



When the traveller tide receded from Bukittinggi, Danau Maninjau was left high and dry. The locals looked to more sustainable sources of income and aquaculture to fill the void. Fish farms now dot the lake foreshore.

Life travels slowly in Maninjau, making it the ideal place to kick back and do nothing. On the other hand, the rainforests and waterfalls of the caldera are just waiting to be explored.

Hopefully, the tide may again be turning as travellers begin to trickle back to one of Sumatra's most stunning destinations.

## Orientation & Information

Ground zero is the intersection where the Bukittinggi highway meets the lake road in the middle of Maninjau village. Turn left or right

and drive 60km and you'll end up back here. The lake is 17km long, 8km wide and 460m above sea level. Most places of interest spread out north along the road to Bayur (3.5km) and beyond. Tell the conductor where you're staying and you'll be dropped off at the right spot. The town is pretty much asleep by 9pm.

## INTERNET ACCESS

Internet in the area is slow and expensive.

**Bagoes Cafe** (per hr 10,000Rp; ☎ 10am-9pm)

**Rama Cafe** (per hr 10,000Rp; ☎ 9am-10pm)

**Cafe.net** (Bayur; per hr 10,000Rp)

## MONEY

There are no ATMs. The **BRI bank** in Maninjau should change foreign currency, otherwise try one of the larger hotels or the travel agent, but rates are much better in Bukittinggi.

## POST & TELEPHONE

The post office and Telkom wartel are next to each other at the intersection. There is another wartel on the road to Bayur.

## TRAVEL AGENCIES

**PT Kesuna Tour & Travel** (☎ 61422; kesumatravel@yahoo.com; Jl Panurunan Air Hangat) Arranges air tickets and minibus charters to Padang (300,000Rp) and Bukittinggi (170,000Rp), and will also change money.

## Sights & Activities

Swimming and canoeing in the lake (warmed by subterranean springs) are still the main drawcards but there are plenty of other options.

The caldera is a hiker's dream, covered in rainforest, hiding waterfalls and traditional villages. Hike to the rim from Bayur, or cheat by catching the bus up the hill to Matur, then walking back down via the lookout at **Puncak Lawang**. Half-way to Bayur is **Ana's Homestay**, deep within the jungle.

If this all sounds a bit athletic, try unwinding in a hot spring. Failing all else, grab a moped and zoom off to Sinar Pagi, the point on Ujung Tanjung poking out from the far shore.

## Festivals & Events

**Rakik Rakik** is celebrated on the night before Idul Fitri (the end of Ramadan) by building a platform to hold a replica Minangkabau house and mosque. The offering is then floated out onto the lake on canoes, accompanied by fireworks and revelry.

## Sleeping

Aquaculture has transformed the Maninjau foreshore. Losmen that once overlooked pristine beaches now have views of fishponds and jetties. There are still beautiful spots, but you need to decide whether comfort, scenery, cost or access is your main priority.

Outside of Maninjau village, most losmen are reached by walking along rice-paddy paths, so look for the sign by the roadside. Truck tubes, canoes, bicycles and mopeds can normally be hired.

Distances listed here are from the intersection.

### MANINJAU

The majority of the town options front onto aquaculture.

**Riak Danau** (☎ 081 2679 08153; s/d 30,000/50,000Rp) The cheapest single in town, 500m north of the intersection.

**Pillie Homestay** (☎ 61048, 081 3633 73361; r 50,000Rp) Simple and cheap rooms 200m south of the intersection, with a lovely family and nice verandah.

**Beach Guest House** (☎ 61082; r 50,000; 🚲) Cheap rooms on a sunny beach, 600m north of town; they also rent bicycles and mopeds.

**Muaro Beach Bungalows** (☎ 61189; neni967@yayoo.com; Jl Muaro Pisang 53; r 50,000Rp) Down a maze of footpaths (about 300m northwest) on a nice stretch of private beach somehow free of fish ponds, these clean bungalows are the best value of the village group.

**Mutiara** (☎ 61049; ricojayamazart@yahoo.com; r with fan/air-con 100,000/150,000Rp) Next door to Pillie Homestay, the rooms here are clean and cool with great views from the deck.

**Maninjau Indah Hotel** (☎ 61018; Jl Telaga Biru 1; r 175,000-300,000Rp; 🍷 🚲) One of the best views in town, but the rooms in this large hotel are overpriced.

### GASANG

Between Maninjau and Bayur, there is a sprinkling of hotels, cheap losmen and restaurants.

**Hotel Tan Dirih** (☎ 61474; KM1 Desa Air Angek; r 150,000Rp) Good value rooms, but the deck looks at fishponds; 950m north of the crossroads in Maninjau.

**Hotel Pasir Panjang Permai** (☎ 61111; Desa Gasang; r 200,000-300,000Rp) Excellent rooms, with a great view from the breezy restaurant. It's 1.2km north of the crossroads.

### BAYUR

The following are all beyond Bayur village.

**Lili's Pad** (r 70,000Rp) Nice beach but these bungalows (3.8km north of Maninjau) need some work.

**Batu C** (r 40,000Rp) Next door to Lili's Pad, Batu C has cheap, sunny huts – but you can't escape the fishponds.

**'Arlen' Nova's Paradise** (☎ 081 5352 04714; novaf@hotmail.com; Sungai-Rangeh; r 150,000Rp) Walk through rice paddies (5.5km north of Maninjau) to these beautiful bungalows on a private beach, with nary a fishpond in sight. It's easily the nicest place on the lake.

### Eating

Most of the guest houses serve standards such as nasi/mie goreng, some Western favourites and freshly caught fish. The bigger hotels also have restaurants. A few places in Maninjau village are also worth checking out.

**Bagoes Cafe** (☎ 61418; mains 12,000-25,000Rp; 🚲) Traveller-friendly place with all the usual faves and a few local dishes. It also runs movie nights. Internet access is 10,000Rp per hour.

**Rama Cafe** (ramacafe@gmail.com; mains 20,000-30,000Rp; 🚲) Share a *plat martabak* (20,000Rp) before hooking into a plate of *ikan panggang* (baked fish; 30,000Rp) while lazing on cush-

## WHO LET THE DOGS OUT

Unlike other parts of Southeast Asia, Sumatra is not overrun with packs of stray dogs. In Islam, dogs are regarded as impure and contact with the animal is prohibited. Then what is all that barking, you might ask? Minangkabau culture makes an exception to some of the Islamic precepts, especially when it comes to protecting crops. The farmer's great nemesis is the wild boar, which roots up vegetable patches during overnight feasts. To combat the intruder, farmers keep very vocal hunting dogs, usually tied up on leashes or kept in pens. All that caged energy is then unleashed on boar-hunting days, assigned to various villages throughout the year. In other hunting traditions, the prey is usually retrieved for the owner, but because pigs are also haram (forbidden) in Islamic law, the dogs get the spoils instead of the scraps.

ions amongst kites and drums. Look out for the excellent map. Internet access is 10,000Rp per hour.

**Cafe 44** (☎ 61238; mains 12,000Rp) Down by the lakeshore, this place has a good selection of local food – if you can find the cook. There are also a few cheap rooms (30,000Rp).

**Rumah Makan Sederhana** and **Bundo Restoran** (dishes from 8000Rp) both serve a good selection of Padang food.

## Getting There & Around

Buses run hourly between Maninjau and Bukittinggi (13,000Rp, 1½ hours). Taxis from Bukittinggi start from 160,000Rp. There is also an economy bus to/from Dumai (50,000Rp).

Several places rent out mountain bikes (per day 15,000Rp), motorcycles (per day 80,000Rp) and canoes (per day 15,000Rp).

Minivans (2000Rp) travel the lake road during daylight hours. Alternatively, an *ojek* from the intersection to Bayur will cost around 7000Rp.

## KERINCI VALLEY

☎ 0748 / pop 300,000

Kerinci is a stunning mountain valley tucked away high in the Bukit Barisan on Jambi's western border. Many of the cool, lush forests are protected as the Kerinci Seblat National Park. To the south is picturesque Danau Kerinci and a patchwork of rich farmland. Tea and cinnamon account for much of the valley's wealth, with the former ringing the higher villages and the latter forming a buffer between farmland and rainforest.

Minangkabau and native Kerincinese make up most of the population, with a sprinkling of Batak and Javanese who are drawn by the rich soil. Kerinci is in Jambi province but appears in this section because of its geographic proximity to Padang.

## Getting There & Away

Sungai Penuh doesn't have a bus terminal, but the bus companies all have offices near the market.

The shortest approach to Sungai Penuh is from Padang (70,000Rp, seven hours). If you're staying in Kersik Tua, let the driver know, as all minibuses pass through the town en route. **PO Cahaya Kerinci** (☎ 21421; Jl Diponegoro), **PO CW Safa Marwa** (☎ 22376; Jl Yos Sudarso 20) and **PO AYU Transport** (☎ 22074; Jl Cokroaminoto), all in

Sungai Penuh, run Padang-bound services. If you're leaving Kersik Tua for Padang or Bukittinggi, let the bus company know and they'll pick up from your losmen.

Other destinations include Dumai (200,000Rp, 18 hours), Bukittinggi (85,000Rp, 10 hours, nightly), Bangko (50,000Rp, five hours) and Bengkulu (100,000Rp, 16 hours, daily).

## Getting Around

Most places in the valley are accessible using the white minivans that leave from near the market. Sample destinations and fares are Danau Kerinci (8000Rp), Kersik Tua (7000Rp, one hour) and Pelompek (7000Rp, 80 minutes). Watch your pronunciation – Semurup and Semerap are in opposite directions.

## Sungai Penuh

Sungai Penuh (Full River) is the regional administrative centre and transport hub for the valley. Bang in the middle is a large, walled sports field and most necessities will be in one of the streets that radiate off here. There is a lively market and fast, reliable internet, but not much else to recommend a protracted stay. Most people get in and get out, heading for the more scenic climes of Kersik Tua.

## INFORMATION

**BNI ATM** (Jl Matadinata) Just off the main square near Hotel Jaya Wisata; accepts MasterCard and Visa.

**BNI Bank** (Jl Ahmad Yani) Will exchange cash and travellers cheques; opposite Hotel Matahari.

**TNKS** (Taman Nasional Kerinci Seblat; ☎ 323701; Jl Basuki Rahmat 11) The park (p442) HQ sells permits but ring first to check it's open. If closed, you can get permits from losmen in Kersik Tua.

**Post office** (Jl Sudirman 1)

**Telkom wartel** (internet per hr 5000Rp) Fast internet and IDD in the big building on the southern side of the sports field near Hotel Aroma.

## SIGHTS

### Mesjid Agung Pondok Tinggi

Head west up Jl Sudirman (past the post office) and turn left, where you'll find this old wooden **mosque** (admission by donation 10,000Rp) with its pagoda-style roof. Built in 1874 without a single nail, the interior contains elaborately carved beams and old, Dutch tiles. Ask the caretaker for permission, and dress demurely.

## SLEEPING & EATING

Accommodation options in Sungai Penuh are fairly dire. Unless you're planning adventures in the not-so-exciting southern end of the park, try and head to Kersik Tua (p442).

**Hotel Matahari** (☎ 21061; Jl Ahmad Yani 25; d 55,000-175,000Rp) Sungai Penuh's first hotel is showing some wear and tear.

**Hotel Yani** (☎ 21409; Jl Muradi 1; d 60,000-185,000Rp) Next door to Minang Soto (see right), it's as good as it looks.

**Aroma Hotel** (☎ 21142; hotel.aroma@yahoo.com; Jl Imam Bonjol 14; d 80,000-210,000Rp) Conveniently located at the top corner of the square, the Aroma's budget rooms are better value than its expensive ones.

**Hotel Jaya Wisata** (☎ 21221; Jl Martadinata 7; r ind breakfast & fan/air-con 100,000/495,000Rp; ♿) The flashiest address in town fills up quickly.

Kerinci is known for the local speciality of *dendeng batokok*, charcoal-grilled strips of pounded beef. Street stalls pop up in the evening along Jl Teuku Umar, a block from

the square. The fruit and produce market is at the southern end of Jl Diponegoro.

**Minang Soto** (Jl Muradi; dishes from 8000Rp) Busy Padang-style eatery, but watch you get what you ordered. The *tahu* arrives with *ayam*. Eat the *tahu*, pay for the *ayam* (chicken).

## Kersik Tua

Darjeeling it's not, but at 1500m, surrounded by tea plantations and dominated by the massive cone of Gunung Kerinci (3805m), Kersik Tua makes a pleasant base for exploring the wilder northern end of Kerinci Seblat.

The town sprawls along one side of the main road, with tea plantations and the mountain on the other. The national park turn-off is indicated by a *harimau* (Sumatran tiger) statue.

Trekking gear, supplies, guides and transport can all be arranged here. There's a market on Saturday and a BNI ATM. The village is 52km north of Sungai Penuh on the road to

## ORANG PENDEK: LITTLE BIG FOOT

Every culture that has lived among trees tells stories about elusive creatures that straddle myth and reality. Tales about leprechauns, fairies and even Sasquatch have existed for so long that it is impossible to determine which came first: the spotting or the story. The Indonesian version of these myth makers is the *orang pendek*, which has been occasionally spotted but more frequently talked about in the Kerinci forests for generations.

Villagers who claim to have seen *orang pendek* describe the creature as being about 1m tall, more ape-like than human, but walking upright on the ground. The creature's reclusive habits made it a celebrity in local mythology. Common folk stories say that the *orang pendek* has feet that face backwards so that it can't be tracked through the forest or that it belongs to the supernatural not the world of flesh and blood. Others say that the first-hand accounts were only spottings of sun bears.

Scientists have joined the conversation by tramping through the forest hoping to document the existence of *orang pendek*. British researchers succeeded in making a plaster cast of an animal footprint that fits the *orang pendek* description and doesn't match any other known primate. Hair samples with no other documented matches have also led researchers to believe that there is merit to the local lore. Two members of Fauna & Flora International, a British-based research team, even reported separate sightings, but were unable to collect conclusive evidence. Researchers sponsored by the National Geographic Society have resumed the search by placing motion-sensitive cameras in strategic spots in the jungle. So little is known about this region and so many areas are so remote that researchers are hopeful that the *orang pendek* will eventually wander into the frame.

If nothing else, the *orang pendek* helps illuminate aspects of Sumatrans' linguistic and cultural relationship with the jungle. Bahasa Indonesia makes little distinction between man and ape, for example 'orang-utan' (forest man) or 'orang rimba' ('people of the forest', the preferred term for the Kubu tribe) may reflect a perceived blood tie between forest dwellers. This imprecision is often used for comic effect. A common joke is that the *orang pendek* (meaning 'short man') does indeed exist, followed by the punch line that the shortest person in the room is the missing link.



Padang and can be reached via any Padang–Kerinci bus.

There are several basic homestays. **Subandi Homestay** (☎ 357009, 081 2741 14273; subandi.homestay@gmail.com; just south of the tiger statue; r 90,000Rp) is the best base camp in the village. Subandi is a trove of local knowledge and can organise mountain, jungle and wildlife treks of varying difficulty and duration. His rooms are basic but clean, and his wife is an excellent cook catering for all tastes.

Other homestays include **Home Stay Paiman** (☎ 357030; r 65,000Rp), 200m south of Subandi (near the ATM), and **Home Stay B Darmin** (☎ 357070; r 65,000Rp), 300m north of the statue.

### Kerinci Seblat National Park (TNKS)

This is the largest national park in Sumatra, covering a 350km swath of the Bukit Barisan range and protecting 15,000 sq km of prime equatorial rainforest spread over four provinces, with almost 40% of the park falling within Jambi's boundaries.

Most of the protected area is dense rainforest; its inaccessibility the very reason it's one of the last strongholds of endangered species such as *harimau* and *badak* (Sumatran rhinoceros).

Because of the great elevation range within the park, Kerinci has a unique diversity of flora and fauna. Edelweiss and other high-altitude flowers grow in the forest. Lower altitudes bring pitcher plants, orchids, *Rafflesia* and the giant *Amorphophallus* (see p436).

As with many of Sumatra's protected areas, encroachment by farmers, illegal logging and poaching are all serious issues for Kerinci. According to park estimates, a total of 23,000 hectares (230 sq km) of forests were destroyed between 2002 and 2004.

TNKS sees few visitors and tourist infrastructure is nonexistent. Trekking opportunities typically focus on the northern region of the park, while the southern region is the traditional zone where local people are allowed to cultivate the land. Permits and guides are required to enter the park; both can be arranged at the TNKS office in Sungai Penuh (see p440) or through your losmen. There is a park office at the entrance to Danau Gunung Tujuh, but it's rarely staffed.

Permits cost 20,000Rp and guide rates are highly negotiable, ranging from 75,000Rp to 200,000Rp per day. Be sure to clarify exactly

what the rate entails, as camping gear, food and transport may be considered additional costs.

Kerinci's climate is temperate, and downright cold as you gain altitude. Bring warm clothes and rain gear.

### GUNUNG KERINCI

Dominating the northern end of the park is the 3805m Gunung Kerinci, one of Sumatra's most active volcanoes (it last erupted in 2009) and Indonesia's highest non-Papuan peak. On clear days the summit offers fantastic views of Danau Gunung Tujuh (see below) and the surrounding valleys and mountains.

Summit treks usually start from the national park entrance, 5km from Kersik Tua, and tackle the mountain in two stages (see boxed text, opposite). The highest campsite, at 3400m, is normally reached after six hours. The following morning, allow an hour in the predawn to reach the summit by sunrise.

Botanists and twitchers from around the world come for the rare flora and fauna such as Javanese edelweiss, Schneider's pitta and the Crested Wood Partridge. *Nepthenes* (pitcher plants), squirrels, geckos and long-tailed macaques can be found in the lower forest.

The path is very steep and eroded, and above the treeline the scree is extremely slippery. A guide is mandatory and you'll need full camping gear and warm clothes, including a windproof jacket and head torch (all of which can be hired in Kersik Tua). Nights are freezing. Do not attempt the climb in wet weather.

Expect to pay around 700,000Rp for a fully guided trip with food, permits, transport and all gear thrown in. Fully self-sufficient parties needing a guide only will pay around 400,000Rp.

### DANAU GUNUNG TUJUH

At 1996m, the beautiful caldera of Danau Gunung Tujuh (Seven Mountain Lake) is the highest in Southeast Asia and makes for a pleasant day walk or multiday trek.

It takes 3½ hours to climb to the lake from the park entrance, which is 2km from the village of Pelompek. It's possible to camp near the lake. Subandi Homestay in Kersik Tua (see above) can organise two- or three-day treks including a canoe crossing.

### CLIMBING GUNUNG KERINCI *Steve Waters*

The *ojek* bumps it's way along the rough track for 5km through tea plantations until the road becomes impassable. Time to hoof it. My guide, Kemun, is shouldering most of the load including the tent and all the food, leaving myself with a light pack of warm clothes and rented sleeping bag.

The forest doesn't begin until the park entrance, and even there it's looking like it's on borrowed time, as farms keep pushing the boundaries. It's cooler under the canopy and the first thing I notice is bird song. Within 10 minutes we arrive at a small clearing, named Base Camp I.

Kemun is adept at pointing out wildlife and we spot various geckos, squirrels and quite a few birds. On glimpsing a long-blond primate tail I ask Kemun 'what sort', thinking it's possibly a long-tailed macaque. He replies 'monkey'. Alas, neither of us have the language skills for further clarification.

The track is unmarked, though well defined, and not too steep in the early sections, and Base Camp II is reached after an hour. We take a break. Kemun supplies the snacks – pineapple cream biscuits. We push onto Shelter I, which takes 90 minutes of hard slog over tree roots to 2500m, where we take another break and eat some sticky-rice snacks Kemun has procured from the market.

The track steepens further and is greatly eroded, making for strenuous moves balancing on tree roots, and for a while I think I'm in southwest Tasmania in Australia. Alien shrieks from the shrubbery help me refocus and soon we arrive at Shelter II, at 3000m. There are no structures at these shelters, other than a few rusting poles or a slab of cement, and lots of litter. Slower groups normally spend the night at Shelter II.

Kemun produces a plastic container holding a Padang-style lunch of rice, noodles, potatoes, fried egg, chilli sardine and *rendang*. Fuelled up, we push onto Shelter III (3400m) where we'll spend the night. Just above the treeline, this campsite has sensational views of the whole valley, including Danau Gunung Tujuh.

Kemun sets up camp and gets a brew going while I snap away. The wind is fierce and we both start piling on the layers. By 4pm I'm wearing everything I've got, including a bike jacket, rented gloves and beanie. By 5pm we're both inside the tent, emerging briefly to check the sunset, as Kerinci's pyramid of shadow marches across the valley. Dinner is another plastic container containing an identical meal.

Kemun's brought insulating mats, but it's a cold, sleepless night in a crowded tent on hard ground with a thin sleeping bag. The muezzin's call from the valley comes as welcome relief, and we get a pre-dawn brew going.

Above Shelter III there is no real path, just the odd concrete pole to mark the way. The scree is extremely slippery and it pays to keep your hands free (hence the gloves). The sky is lightening behind Gunung Tujuh but it's still bitterly cold. The knife-edge rim of the caldera is reached in only an hour and we trade places in front of the camera as we soak in the view and try not to gag on the sulphurous fumes.

The descent back to Shelter III takes as long as the ascent due to the treacherous scree, but once we're packed and on the path proper we make good time and all too soon we are at the bottom and out of the forest. Here we are greeted by our transport, and are back in Kersik Tua in time for lunch.

Pelompek is 8km beyond Kersik Tua (bus 4000Rp) and 60km from Sungai Penuh (7000Rp). Hire an *ojek* (5000Rp) from Pelompek for the final trip to the park entrance. You'll need a park permit, and if TNKS (see left) is closed, ask next door at the tiny **Losmen Pak Edes** (r 50,000Rp) which also has two very basic rooms and can arrange guides.

### LADEH PANJANG

This region of rainforest, sulphur lakes and hot springs located on Gunung Kerinci's western flank is seldom visited, and is home to *harimau*, *badak*, tapir and *beruang* (bear). A five-day, 120km trek traverses the range and exits onto the highway north of Kerinci.

**DANAU KERINCI**

Danau Kerinci, 20km south of Sungai Penuh, is a small lake nestled beneath Gunung Raya (2535m). There is a popular recreational park and an annual festival, held in July, which displays traditional Kerinci dance and music. **Stone carvings** in the villages around the lake suggest that the area supported a sizable population in megalithic times. **Batu Gong** (Gong Stone), in the village of Muak, 25km from Sungai Penuh, is thought to have been carved 2000 years ago.

To reach the lake, catch a public bus from Sungai Penuh to Sanggaran Agung (8000Rp). The last return bus leaves around 4pm.

**AIR TERJUN**

Impressive waterfalls dot the whole valley. The easiest to find are the **Letter 'W' Waterfalls** (3000Rp) in 'Letter W' village 4km north of Pelompek. Look for the sign 'Air Terjun Telun Berasap' then walk 300m to a deep, fern-lined ravine where a thunderous torrent of water crashes onto rocks below.

Other falls include **Air Terjun 13 Tingkat** near Sungai Medang, and **Air Terjun Pauh Sago** near Batang Merangan on the Bangko Rd.

**GUA (CAVES)**

Locals believe that caves act as mediums for communicating with the supernatural, and that entry into these sacred spaces requires a modest ritual. Hiring a guide helps in the exploration of both the physical and esoteric landscapes.

The most extensive network of caves is situated outside the village of **Sengering**, including the celebrated **Gua Tiangko**. Obsidian-flake tools found in the cave indicate that it was occupied some 9000 years ago. The caves also contain some impressive natural formations.

Sengering is 9km from Sungai Manau, on the Bangko road. Buses leave Sungai Penuh for Bangko in the mornings.

There are cave paintings in **Gua Kasah**, 5km southeast from Kersik Tua, and two cave systems **Gua Kelelawar** and **Gua Belang** at Ting Kemulun near Sanggaran Agung.

**AIR PANAS (HOT SPRINGS)**

If you fancy a dip in some hot springs, make your way to either **Dusan Buru Air Panas** near Semurup (11km north of Sungai Penuh) or **Sungai Medang Air Panas** across the valley.

# BENGKULU

Cut off from its neighbours by the Bukit Barisan range, Bengkulu remains Sumatra's most isolated province – and nothing much seems to have changed here for years.

Few tourists make it this far, but those who do are rewarded with the simple pleasures of ordinary Indonesian life and an opportunity to learn Bahasa Indonesia without the support of bilingualism.

**History**

Little is known of Bengkulu before it came under the influence of the Majapahits from Java at the end of the 13th century. Until then it appears to have existed in almost total isolation, divided between a number of small kingdoms such as Sungai Lebong in the Curup area. It even developed its own cuneiform script, *ka-ga-nga*.

In 1685, after having been kicked out of Banten in Java, the British moved into Bengkulu (Bencoolen, as they called it) in search of pepper. The venture was not exactly a roaring success. Isolation, boredom and constant rain sapped the British will, and malaria ravaged their numbers.

The colony was still not a likely prospect in 1818 when Sir Stamford Raffles arrived as its British-appointed ruler. In the short time he was there, Raffles made the pepper market profitable and planted cash crops of coffee, nutmeg and sugar cane. In 1824 Bengkulu was traded for the Dutch outpost of Melaka as a guarantee not to interfere with British interests in Singapore.

From 1938 to 1941 Bengkulu was a home-in-domestic-exile for Indonesia's first president, Sukarno.

**BENGKULU**

☎ 0736 / pop 380,000

A quiet provincial capital, Bengkulu does not really have much for tourists to do except chat to the locals, most of whom don't speak English. Alternatively you could pass through as a UFO – unidentified foreign object.

**Orientation**

Although Bengkulu is by the sea, most of the town is set back from the waterfront, touching only near the fort, Benteng Marlborough. The coast is unexpectedly



## TRAVEL AGENCIES

**Sanindo Wisata Tours & Travel** (☎ 27522; Jl Mt Haryono 73) Sanindo Wisata can arrange historical city tours, as well as tours to the Curup tea plantations and offshore islands.

## Sights

Set on a hill overlooking the Indian Ocean, **Benteng Marlborough** (admission 2000Rp; 🕒 8am-7pm), a former British fort, was restored and opened to the public in 1984 after a long period of use by the Indonesian army. It became the seat of British power in Bengkulu after 1719, when it replaced nearby Fort York, of which nothing but the foundations remain. Despite its sturdy defences the fort was attacked and overrun twice – once by a local rebellion just after its completion in 1719, and then by the French in 1760. The old British gravestones at the entrance make poignant reading. There are a few interesting old engravings and copies of official correspondence from the time of British rule, and you can also see where the Dutch incarcerated Sukarno during his internal exile.

Bengkulu has a number of other reminders of its British history. The **Thomas Parr monument** (Jl Ahmad Yani), in front of the Pasar Barukota, was erected in memory of a British governor beheaded by locals in 1807. The **Monumen Inggris** (Jl M Hasan), near the beach, is dedicated to Captain Robert Hamilton, who died in 1793 ‘in command of the troops’.

Former president Sukarno was exiled to Bengkulu by the Dutch from 1938 until 1941. The small villa in which he lived is maintained as a **museum** (Jl Soekarno-Hatta; admission 2000Rp; 🕒 8am-4.30pm Mon-Thu, 8am-noon Sat & Sun). Exhibits include a few faded photos, a wardrobe and even his trusty bicycle. During his stay, Sukarno, who was an architect, designed the **Mesjid Jamik** (Bung Karno Mosque; cnr Jl Sudirman & Suprpto).

**Museum Negeri Bengkulu** (☎ 32099; Jl Pembangunan; admission by donation; 🕒 8am-4.30pm Tue-Thu, 8am-noon Sat & Sun) has a poorly labelled collection of standard Sumatran fare. Bring your own light if you want to see anything. The graves in the **European cemetery** (Jl Ditra) behind the small church are testament to the colonialists’ vulnerability to malaria.

Bengkulu’s main beach, **Pantai Panjang**, although not the best in Indonesia, is clean, generally deserted and a good place for a walk. Strong surf and currents make it unsafe for swimming.

## Sleeping BUDGET

**Vista Hotel** (☎ 20820; Jl MT Haryono 67; r incl snack with fan/air-con 40,000/170,000Rp; 🕒) Located near the bus agents, Vista is excellent value. You might have forgotten what clean means in Sumatra, but Vista can remind you, with a good range of clean rooms.

**Wisma Balai Buntar** (☎ 21254; Jl Khadijah 122; r with fan/air-con 75,000/100,000Rp) In an old Dutch villa, this is Bengkulu’s version of backpacker land. The enormous rooms are a little faded, but the neighbourhood is worth a wander.

**Hotel Samudera Dwinka** (☎ 21604; Jl Sudirman 246; r incl breakfast with fan/air-con 110,000/450,000Rp; 🕒) Located in the centre of town, Hotel Samudera has rooms that are inexpensive without being depressing.

**Hotel Bumi Endah** (☎ 21665, fax 073 634 6442; Jl Fatmawati 29; r incl breakfast 198,000-374,000Rp; 🕒) A friendly rambling hotel with quiet rooms and airy common spaces in a residential neighbourhood.

## MIDRANGE & TOP END

**Hotel Dena** (☎ 21066; Jl Fatmawati 28; r incl breakfast 195,000-250,000Rp; 🕒) A popular option with clean, comfortable rooms – all with hot water.

**Rio Asri Hotel** (☎ 345 000; Jl Veteran 63; r incl breakfast 454,000-816,000Rp; 🕒 📺) For such a staid town, Rio Asri is a daring ’80s-inspired design experiment. The rooms are equally as smart and some have high-top views over the garden city.

**Horison Hotel** (☎ 21722, 081 173 9304; dewita\_grage@yahoo.com; Jl Pantai Nala 142; r incl breakfast 465,000-1,400,000Rp; 🕒 📺 📶) The fanciest hotel in town, with well-dressed rooms and a swimming pool overlooking the beach.

## Eating

In the evening, several warungs cause a traffic jam along Jl Sudirman, serving freshly grilled seafood. Be sure to try the local favourites, *tempoyak* (durian and fish) and *martabak* (stuffed savoury pancake).

**Roti Holland Bakery** (Jl Suprpto 124; pastries 2000Rp; 🕒 8am-5pm) Chocolate doughnuts are wrapped thoughtfully in a cardboard box for those with self-control. The rest of us can tear into the pastries at the cafe tables.

**Sri Solo** (Jl Suprpto 118; mains 8000Rp; 🕒 10am-10pm) The equivalent of an ice-cream parlour, Sri Solo serves plates of *ayam baker* (grilled

chicken) and tasty fruit juices to local families after church, gangs of school kids and courting couples.

**Rumah Makan Si Kabayan** (Jl Sudirman 51; mains from 35,000Rp; ☎ 6-10pm) This is where Bengkulu entertains guests, with fitting VIP prices.

**Simpang Lima Bakso** (Jl Soekarno-Hatta; mains from 10,000Rp) Bengkulu is *bakso* (meatball-and-noodle soup) crazy and this simple warung does a thriving business beside the city's crazy five-way intersection.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Merpati and Sriwijaya operate daily flights to Jakarta. The **Merpati office** (☎ 27111; Jl Sudirman 246) is in the Hotel Samudera Dwinka. Other tickets can be purchased through Sanindo Wisata Tours and Travel (see left).

### BUS

Bengkulu has two bus terminals: the Air Sebakul terminal, 12km east of town, serves long-distance destinations, while Panorama terminal, 7km east, is used by local buses. However it is much easier to go to the bus company offices on Jl MT Haryono, as almost all long-distance destinations can be reached from here.

To get to Air Sebakul take a yellow *opelet* (2000Rp) to Panorama and then a white one (2000Rp) to Air Sebakul.

**Putra Rafflesia** (☎ 20313; Jl MT Haryono 12) services Palembang (economy 90,000Rp, 15 hours). **Bengkulu Indah** (☎ 22640; Jl MT Haryono) services a wide range of destinations. **San Travel** (☎ 21811; Jl MT Haryono 73) goes to Bukittinggi (economy/air-con 110,000/135,000Rp, 17 hours) and Padang (economy/air-con executive 110,000/150,000Rp) on Friday only.

**PO Gunung Kerinci** (Jl Bali 36) runs buses up the coast to Sungai Penuh in the Kerinci Valley (95,000Rp, 18 hours). **Tanjung Indah** (Jl MT Haryono 108) runs minivans to Palembang (160,000Rp) and other destinations.

**Habeco** (Jl MT Haryono), at the northern edge of town, has daily buses along the coast road to regional destinations, such as Lais (10,000Rp, two hours), Ipuh (40,000Rp, five hours) and Mukomuko (60,000Rp, eight hours).

## Getting Around

Airport taxi charge a standard 60,000Rp to town. The airport is 200m from the main road south, from where there are regular *opelet*

to town (2000Rp). Tell the driver where you want to stay or simply ask for the *benteng* (fort). *Opelet* and *ojek* also greet buses when they arrive at Jl MT Haryono/Jl Bali. *Opelet* fares to almost anywhere in town are 2000Rp; *ojek* are 5000Rp.

There are no fixed routes for *opelet*; tell the driver your destination or general area and you might get a nod of approval.

## NORTHERN BENGKULU

The coast road (Jl Manusurai Pantai), running north from Bengkulu to Padang, offers a number of possibilities for travellers.

The road is sealed all the way and the journey takes a mere 16 hours, a real quickie when measured by the Sumatran distance stick. However in the wet season the coast road is prone to wash-outs and landslides, so the going can be much slower.

The journey can be done in a number of short hops, stopping off at a town along the way for the hell of it; each town has at least one losmen. The first town north of Bengkulu is **Lais**. There are reputed to be elephants further north near **Ipuh**, around the mouth of Sungai Ipuh. **Mukomuko**, 200km north of Bengkulu, is the largest community on this stretch of road and was the northern outpost of the British colony of Bencoolen.

**Curup** is a small market town in the foothills of the Bukit Barisan, halfway between Bengkulu and Lubuklinggau. There are several surviving traditional homes and the town itself is in a valley watered by the upper reaches of Sungai Musi, which eventually flows through Palembang. Curup is a good base for visits to the surrounding mountains, including volcanic **Gunung Kaba**, 19km east of town, which has two large smouldering craters surrounded by dense rainforest.

There's nowhere to change money in Curup, so come prepared. Curup has a mediocre losmen and hotel to choose from.

## Getting There & Away

Padang-Bengkulu buses can stop off at the northern coastal towns. Curup can be reached by frequent connections to/from Bengkulu and Lubuklinggau.

## PULAU ENGGANO

This remote island, 100km off the coast of southern Bengkulu, is so isolated that until the early 20th century some Sumatrans believed



that it was inhabited entirely by women, who miraculously gave birth to children sired by the wind.

The island is featured on a map of Asia drawn in 1593. Enggano is Portuguese for 'deceit' or 'disappointment', which suggests that the Portuguese were the first Europeans to discover it. It wasn't until three years later that Dutch navigators first recorded it.

Enggano's original inhabitants are believed to have fled the Sumatran mainland when the Malays migrated there. Today the islanders live by cultivating rice, coffee, pepper, cloves and copra. Wild pigs, cattle and buffalo are abundant.

The island has an area of 680 sq km and there are no tourist facilities. **Malakoni** is the main harbour. The island is relatively flat (the highest point is Bua Bua, at 250m) and has a swampy coastline interspersed with some good **beaches** and **snorkelling**. Few tourists make it this far, so it's a good spot for budding linguists to practise their Bahasa Indonesia.

It is best to report to the *kepala desa* (village chief) and seek advice for lodging.

### Getting There & Around

In theory there are three boats a week from Bengkulu to Malakoni, but no one in Bengkulu was able to vouch for this service. Alternatively, go to the small port of Bintuhan, about 225km south of Bengkulu, and ask at the harbour.

The villages on the island are connected by tracks originally made by the Japanese and not very well maintained since. The only way to get around is to walk.

## RIAU

The landscape and character of Riau province is decidedly distinct from the northern and western rind of Sumatra. Rather than mountains and volcanoes, Riau's character was carved by rivers and narrow ocean passages. Trading towns sprang up along the important navigation route of the Strait of Melaka, across which Riau claims cultural cousins.

For the port towns, such as Pekanbaru, and the Riau islands, proximity to Singapore and Kuala Lumpur has ensured greater access to the outside world than those towns of the

interior Sumatran jungle. The discovery of oil and gas reserves has also built an educated and middle-class population within an otherwise impoverished island.

The interior of the province more closely resembles Sumatra as a whole: sparse population, dense jungle, surviving pockets of nomadic peoples (including the Sakai, Kubu and Jambisal) and endangered species, such as the Sumatran rhinoceros and tiger.

A strain of chloroquine-resistant malaria has been reported on the Riau archipelago.

### History

Riau's position at the southern entrance to the Strait of Melaka, the gateway for trade between India and China, was strategically significant.

From the 16th century, the Riau Islands were ruled by a variety of Malay kingdoms, which had to fight off constant attacks by pirates and the Portuguese, Dutch and English. The Dutch eventually won control over the Strait of Melaka, and mainland Riau (then known as Siak) became their colony when the Sultan of Johor surrendered in 1745. However Dutch interest lay in ridding the seas of pirates, so they could get on with the serious business of trade, and they made little effort to develop the province.

Oil was discovered around Pekanbaru by US engineers before WWII, but it was the Japanese who drilled the first well at Rumbai, 10km north of the city. The country around Pekanbaru is criss-crossed by pipelines that connect the oil wells to refineries at Dumai, as ocean-going tankers cannot enter the heavily silted Sungai Siak.

### PEKANBARU

☎ 0761 / pop 750,000

Before the Americans struck oil, Pekanbaru was little more than a sleepy river port on Sungai Siak. Today it is Indonesia's oil capital, with all the hustle and bustle of modern cities. Pekanbaru's primary purpose for tourists is as a transit point between ferries from Singapore, but the increased affordability of air travel has curtailed the sea passage. Now only Western oil executives on business trips find themselves in Pekanbaru.

If you do decide to wander through, you'll spend most of your time accepting inexplicable gestures of kindness, from cafe conversations to instant friendships.



In the town centre, **Balai Adat Daerah Riau** (Jl Diponegoro; ☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 8am-noon Fri) maintains a few modest exhibits of traditional Malay culture. The **Mesjid Raya** (Jl Mesjid Raya), near the river, dates back to the 18th century, when Pekanbaru was the capital of the Siak sultanate. The courtyard holds the graves of the fourth and fifth sultans.

## Sleeping

Most midrange hotels line Jl Sudirman and are oriented towards business clientele. If your timing is right, you may be able to broker considerable discounts.

**Poppie's Homestay** (☎ 45762; Jl Cempedak III; r 80,000Rp) Basic budget rooms in a converted house within a residential neighbourhood. It is tricky to find, but locals will be able to point you in the right direction once you turn off Jl Nangka.

**Shorea Hotel** (☎ 48239; Jl Taskurun 100; d from 120,000Rp; 🏠) A good-value place with clean, modern rooms, in a quiet spot off the main drag.

**Hotel Rauda** (☎ 36278; sales@hotelrauda.com; Jl Tangkuban Perahu 4; r incl breakfast 266,000-388,000Rp; 🏠) A solid and centrally located midrange option. The rooms are nothing special and ultimately forgettable.

**Hotel Dyan Graha** (☎ 26600; www.dyangraha.co.id; Jl Gatot Subroto 7; r incl breakfast 350,000-850,000Rp; 🏠 📺 🚿) Conveniently central, this is one of Pekanbaru's upmarket options. The bathrooms are certainly a plus. Rates include breakfast and tax.

**Grand Jatra Hotel** (☎ 850 888; www.jatrahotelpekanbaru.com; Komplek Mal Pekanbaru, Jl Tangkuban Perahu; r incl breakfast 508,000-1,588,000Rp; 🏠 📺 🚿) Visiting oil executives stay at this brand-new spot, which provides international standards and decor.

## Eating

There are innumerable places to eat along Jl Sudirman, particularly at night around the market at the junction with Jl Imam Bonjol.

**Vanhollano Bakery** (Jl Sudirman 153; burgers 12,000Rp) If you need a rest from total immersion in Indonesian food, you can eat safely with these cakes, pastries, hamburgers and ice cream. It also serves fresh fruit juices.

**Ayam Bakar Wong Solo** (☎ 32962; Jl Sudirman 227; mains 15,000Rp) Not fancy but everything you'll need: an air-con retreat from steamy Pekanbaru which serves Indonesian standards.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Pekanbaru's Simpang Tiga airport has five direct flights to Jakarta each day with Batavia Air, Lion Air, Mandala and Garuda. Flights to Medan are handled by Sriwijaya and Merpati. Garuda and Lion Air also have flights to Batam through which you can connect to Singapore flights. Also, AirAsia flies direct to/from Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Jakarta.

Travel agents are located along Jl Sudirman. You can also find the following airline offices:

**Garuda** (Garuda Indonesia; ☎ 45063; Hotel Pangeran, Jl Sudirman 371-373)

**Lion Air** (☎ 40670; Mutiara Merdeka Hotel, Jl Yos Sudarso 12A)

**Mandala** (☎ 856777; Jl Sudirman 115)

**Merpati** (Merpati Nusantara Airlines; ☎ 21575; Jl Sudirman 371)

### BOAT

Pekanbaru's Sungai Duku port is at the end of Jl Sultan Syarif Qasyim. Before flights became so affordable, many travellers bounced between Pekanbaru and Batam's Sekupang port (285,000Rp, six hours, 8am departure) en route to Singapore. However when all the fares are tallied up, it is a long, expensive haul compared to flying.

From Pekanbaru, boats also go to Melaka, Malaysia, three times a week (economy/cabin 405,000/750,000Rp, eight hours, 9am departure), Tanjung Pinang on Pulau Bintan (142,000Rp), Tanjung Balai on Pulau Karimun (230,000Rp) and Tanjung Samak on Pulau Rangsang (185,000Rp). It's also possible to go down Sungai Siak to Tanjung Buton (80,000Rp) and Selat Panjang (145,000Rp).

Ticket agents are located at the pier.

### BUS

Pekanbaru's Terminal Nangka, 5km west of the town centre, is modern and uncharacteristically organised for Sumatra. There are posted prices and even staffed ticket booths within the terminal. If you don't want to be ripped off, buy tickets directly from the booths rather than the freelancers who roam the terminal. Destinations include Bengkulu (air-con 115,000Rp), Bukittinggi (80,000Rp, five hours), Dumai (economy 30,000Rp, five hours), Jambi (economy/air-con 75,000/150,000, 12 hours), Medan (economy 120,000Rp, 12 hours) and Padang (economy 50,000Rp, six hours).

## Getting Around

Airport taxis charge 60,000Rp for the 10km trip into town.

*Opelet* around Pekanbaru cost a standard 2000Rp. From the port, catch a light-blue *opelet* to Pasar Pusat on Jl Sudirman. Green *opelet* on Jl Nangka shuttle between town and the bus terminal.

## AROUND PEKANBARU

Some 120km downriver from Pekanbaru is **Siak Sri Inderapura**, site of the beautiful Asserayah el Hasyimiah Palace, built in 1889 by the 11th sultan of Siak, Sultan Abdul Jalil Syafuluddin. It was the seat of the Siak sultanate until 1945. The palace was restored as a museum in 1989 but the best artefacts have been removed to Jakarta. The site also houses a dazzling white **mosque** with a silver dome.

You can stay at the basic **Penginapan Monalisa** (s/d 50,000Rp), by the dock in Siak.

To get there take the boat from the Sungai Duku port at 7.30am (economy/cabin 50,000/60,000Rp, four hours).

## DUMAI

☎ 0765 / pop 180,000

Like most of Pekanbaru's oil, travellers enter and exit Dumai through its port. Most are bound for the Malaysian port of Melaka. Although airfares between Malaysia and Sumatra are often more competitive, many travellers are still smitten with the idea of sailing the high seas.

If you get stuck in town, try the very basic **Wisma Hang Tua** (Jl Sudirman 431; d with fan from 50,000Rp); **Hotel Tasia Ratu** (☎ 31341 Jl St Syarif Kasim 65; d 120,000Rp), a tolerable midrange option; or **Comfort Hotel** (☎ 34888, reservation by SMS 0813 6510 0888; www.comfortdumai.com; Jl Sudirman 58; r incl breakfast 265,000-550,000Rp; ♿ ♻️ 📶), Dumai's fanciest place.

Ferries travel daily to Pulau Batam (245,000Rp, seven hours). Two Pelni boats call at Dumai then Pulau Bintan en route to Jakarta. There are also irregular international ferry routes to Melaka, Port Dickson and Port Klang in Malaysia. Melaka-bound ferries depart from the Yos Sudarso port of Dumai three times a day at 8am, 10.30am and 1pm (one way/return 260,000/470,000Rp, two hours). You must check in at the port two hours before departure in order to clear immigration. The port tax is 3500Rp.

There are frequent buses from Dumai to Padang (economy/air-con 90,000/120,000Rp, 12 hours), Bukittinggi (80,000Rp, 10 hours) and Pekanbaru (50,000Rp, five hours). There are also minibus services timed with the arrivals of the boats from Pulau Batam.

## RIAU ISLANDS

The Riau Islands are scattered like confetti across the South China Sea. The locals say there are as many islands as there are grains in a cup of pepper. That would be about 3214 islands in all, more than 700 of them uninhabited and many of them unnamed.

Pulau Batam and Pulau Bintan are practically suburbs of Singapore, with the attendant industry and recreation. In fact, the islands prefer to think of themselves as distinct from mainland Sumatra. Further away in the archipelago are the remote islands of Anambas, Natuna and Tambelan.

## PULAU BATAM

☎ 0778 / pop 440,000

Nowhere in Sumatra is the pace of development more rapid than on Batam. With the island's proximity to Singapore, Batam is the labour-intensive production leg of the Singapore-Johor Baru industrial triangle. Land and labour are cheaper here than in Singapore and many electronics companies have established production plants in the industrial park of Mukakuning. Much like the factory towns outside of Hong Kong, Mukakuning employs and houses mainly young women from impoverished areas of Indonesia. Hardly anyone living in Batam is a native and half the population is under 30 years old.

Higher up the economic food chain are the Western managers and executives who oversee the factories, as well as engineers employed by one of the island's largest multinationals, J Ray McDermott, which makes offshore oil rigs and pipelines.

In addition to industry, the island has made several unsuccessful bids at diversifying into a tourist destination. Because its miles of coastline are too close to Singapore's harbour to be swimmable, resorts have tried to distract tourists with golfing and gambling, a promising combination until the Indonesian government unplugged the casinos.

The next jackpot scheme is to develop the island as a retirement community for East



Asians, Singaporeans and Jakarta-based Chinese. New housing complexes are going up faster than new factories.

Besides using Batam as a transit point for boats from Singapore to Sumatra, it is unlikely that a tourist would purposely come to Batam. The majority of foreigners here arrive on corporate assignments and find that the island has cultivated a bit of a boys' club ambience. The main town of Nagoya has plenty of girlie bars to make the buttoned-down execs feel like studs.

### ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

Most travellers to Batam arrive at the northern port of Sekupang by boat from Singapore. Sekupang has an international and domestic terminal next door to each other and all the short-term necessities that new arrivals need: immigration desk and money changers. There are no ATMs at Sekupang, so arrive with cash to avoid a taxi to Nagoya.

The main town on the island is Nagoya, with hotels, banks and other necessities. To the south is the island's administrative centre, Batam Centre, which also has port facilities.

Waterfront City and Nongsa are the surviving resort areas that attract Batam expats on weekends and package tourists from elsewhere in Asia.

On Batam, Singapore dollars are as easy to spend as the Indonesian rupiah.

### Nagoya

This is the original boom town, showing a lot more skin than you'll find in the rest of Sumatra. The heart of town is the Nagoya Entertainment District, where bars and massage parlours indulge male camaraderie with lap dances and take-home prizes. Although it ain't pretty, Nagoya is ultimately functional, with Western-gear food and entertainment sneaking in just under Singapore prices.

The city is divided up like Singapore into main avenues and tributary blocks and exhibits a certain Chinese industriousness similar to the city-state. Most of the hotels in Nagoya have travel agencies.

### INFORMATION

**Awal Brothers Hospital** (☎ 431 777; Jl Balai)

Western-trained doctors and international facilities, 7km south of Nagoya.

**Barelang Internet** (Komplek Batam Plaza 4; per hr 10,000Rp)

**Bank Danamon** (Jl Imam Bonjol) Across from Goodway Hotel.

**Batam Tourist Promotion Board** (☎ 322 871; next door to Sekupang domestic terminal) Can help with local information and hotel bookings but keeps erratic hours.

**Post office** (Jl Imam Bonjol)

### SLEEPING

**Hotel Grand Palace** (☎ 432 529; Komplek Nagoya Business Centre, Block 1; d from 100,000-170,000Rp; 🏨) The best value around for those on a budget. The tiled-floor rooms come with air-con, hot water, cable TV and clean, sleepable beds.

**Hotel Bahari** (☎ 421 911; Komplek Nagoya Square, Block D; r incl breakfast from 140,000-330,000Rp; 🏨) Bahari I and II occupy the block, with comfy concrete boxes and hot and cold showers. Breakfast included.

**Goodway Hotel** (☎ 426 888; www.goodwayhotel.com; Jl Imam Bonjol; r incl breakfast 590,000-750,000Rp; 🏨) Displaced gentleman are lucky to have this classic hotel in this far-flung corner of the world. The decor is subdued and the best rooms have balconies.

**Planet Holiday** (☎ 433 555; www.planetholidayho tel.com; Jl Raja Ali Haji; r incl breakfast 600,000-725,000Rp; 🏨) Service is crisp, the rooms are modern and as the tallest building in town there are views over squatty Batam.

### EATING & DRINKING

Nagoya has a tasty mix of Indonesian and Chinese restaurants, and warungs.

**Grill Bar** (☎ 701 3670; Goodway Hotel, Jl Imam Bonjol; mains from 50,000Rp; 🍷 10am-11pm) Chase away the nasi goreng blues with a meal of New Zealand Angus steaks at this cherished expat restaurant.

**Kedai Kopi Indah** (mains from 20,000Rp) A popular in-town stop for Chinese-style seafood dishes, such as pepper crab and fish claypot. Located behind Panorama Hotel.

**Golden Prawn** (Bengkong; mains from 50,000Rp) This famous *kelong* (open-air seafood restaurant) is considered one of the best on the island. Everything is charged by the kilo.

For local food, head to the **night market** (Jl Raja Ali Haji) or the big and raucous **Pujasera Nagoya** (food centre, opposite Hotel Sahid Rashinta).

**Goodway Wine Bar** (☎ 426 888; Goodway Hotel, Jl Imam Bonjol) Through the wild-west saloon doors is a comfortable tap room for unwinding expats. Kenneth, the publican, once peddled his 'very British' demeanour in Hollywood, a role he plays out here today.



## Waterfront City

Near the shipyards, Waterfront City's resorts are a strange occurrence: beachside resorts without beach activities. Instead they focus on resort diversions: swimming, spa-ing, golfing and organised activities. These resorts are heavily marketed to East Asians, mainly Koreans. Weekday discounts through travel agents might override the obvious drawbacks.

**Harris Resort** (☎ 381 888; d 599,000Rp; ♿ 🚰 🚰) This fun-in-the-sun resort is targeted to families and folks of all ages.

**Holiday Inn Resort** (☎ 381 333; r incl breakfast \$5181-194; ♿ 🚰 🚰) Mainly a corporate hotel, Holiday Inn has classically decorated suites with balconies overlooking the pool. The internationally recognised spa is a fave for Singaporeans who don't want to trek all the way to Bali.

## Nongsa

Batam's prettiest, but still unswimmable, beach occupies the less-developed Nongsa peninsula. Casino resorts had provided the biggest draw for nearby Singaporeans, but ever since the Indonesian government outlawed gambling, the area has quietened down.

**Turi Beach Resort** (☎ 761 086; d from \$5125; ♿ 🚰 🚰) Of the surviving resorts, Turi is the best and provides a close but delicious escape for Batam-bound visitors. The thatched-roof huts designed in the Balinese style have all the mid-life comforts and a linen-suit ambience.

Golf courses in Nongsa offer attractive promotional packages (from \$70 to \$100) during the week; Singapore-based travel agents typically have the best rates. Nongsa's two courses are **Tering Bay** (☎ 778 761; 818 Jl Hang Lekiu, Km 4), which was designed by Greg Norman, and **Palm Spring Golf Resort** (☎ 761 222; Jl Hang Leiku).

Nongsa's favourite *kelong* is the **Rezeki Kelong** (Batu Besar; mains from 50,000Rp).

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Hang Nadim airport is on the eastern side of the Pulau Batam. Garuda, Merpati, Mandala, Bouraq and Air Asia operate to/from Jakarta. Merpati destinations also include Medan, Padang, Palembang, Jambi and Pekanbaru, as well as Pontianak in Kalimantan. Jatayu also flies to Medan.

## BOAT

Batam has five ports and services between Singapore, the Sumatran mainland and other Riau Islands.

### To Pulau Bintan

The ferry dock at Telaga Punggur, 30km southeast of Nagoya, is the main port for speedboats to Bintan. The departure tax is 3500Rp.

Boats to Bintan's Tanjung Pinang (one way/return 45,000/85,000Rp, every 20 minutes from 7.30am to 5.50pm) take one hour. There are also boats to Bintan's Lagoi resort area (one way/return 110,000/190,000Rp, three daily).

### To Elsewhere in Indonesia

The main reason travellers come to Batam is due to its links with the Sumatran mainland. Dumai Express and Surya Gemilang Jaya are the best of the domestic carriers.

Boats leave from Batam's Sekupang terminal to Pekanbaru (210,000Rp, six hours, two morning departures). In order to make the connection without spending the night on Batam, you'll need to catch the first ferry from Singapore at 7.30am and assume that the Indonesian boats are running late as usual.

There are also two morning boats from Sekupang to Dumai (220,000Rp, six hours), one morning boat to Kuala Tungkal (230,000Rp) on the Jambi coast, and three boats weekly to Palembang (305,000Rp, eight hours).

Other destinations from Sekupang port include Karimun (70,000Rp, one hour, hourly from 8am to 4pm) and Pulau Kundur (85,000Rp, two hours, hourly from 8am to 2.30pm).

Pelni ships pass through Batam to and from Belawan (the port for Medan) and Jakarta. The tickets can be bought at the domestic ferry terminal or at travel agencies in Nagoya.

### Singapore

Frequent services shuttle between Singapore and Batam, taking between 25 minutes and 45 minutes depending on the pier. Tickets for all ferries to Singapore cost \$30/54 one way/return. There is a \$7 harbour-departure tax upon leaving Batam and an hour time difference between Indonesia and Singapore. Penguin has the biggest and fastest ferries (taking 25 minutes).

## ISLAND IN THE SUN

Imagine an island made up of a handful of salt-white beaches, emerald waters and nobody but you and your personally selected guests. Robinson Crusoe goes luxury on **Pulau Pangkil** ([www.pangkil.com](http://www.pangkil.com); island hire for up to 10 guests from \$52600; 📞) an exclusive private island available for hire. Guests have a choice of romantic 'Driftwood Palaces' to sleep in, which are scattered up and down the island's main two beaches. Butlers, maids, a swimming pool and all sorts of beach activities are on hand to ensure that island survival is as easy as possible. The tiny speck is around a 30-minute boat hop from Tanjung Pinang and regularly houses up to 30 guests, normally Western expats from Singapore, who take over the island as a single group and get up to all kinds of debauchery. The rule goes what happens on Pangkil stays on Pangkil.

Sekupang is most widely used by tourists because the terminal that receives boats from Singapore's Harbourfront Centre is next door to the domestic terminal for transfer to the Sumatran mainland. The boats to Singapore run approximately every hour from 6am to 6.45pm, and from Singapore to Batam from 7.30am to 8pm. Batam Centre and Waterfront City have services only to/from Singapore's Harbourfront Centre. The last boat to leave the island departs from Batam Centre at 9.30pm. Waterfront City's schedule is fairly limited, with only four departures per day. Ferries to Nongsa shuttle back and forth to Singapore's Tanah Merah, with eight departures per day between 8am and 8pm.

At Sekupang port don't buy a ticket from the many touts, and refuse any offers of 'assistance' to see you through immigration.

## Getting Around

Taxis are the primary way to get around Pulau Batam. Sample fares are as follows: from Sekupang to Nagoya (10,000Rp, 45 minutes) and Batam Centre to Nagoya (6,000Rp, 30 minutes). From the airport, it will cost 100,000Rp to Sekupang, 80,000Rp to Nagoya and 75,000Rp to Batam Centre.

Blue-and-white bemo shuttle between Nongsa and Nagoya (15,000Rp). There's also a public bus from Telaga Punggur to Nagoya (10,000Rp). A taxi on the same route is 75,000Rp.

## PULAU BINTAN

☎ 0771 / pop 200,000

Just across the water from Batam, Pulau Bintan has been receiving a billing as the next big luxury destination. Bintan is trying to market itself as the high-end playground for the new money from East Asia. Certainly, the

folk at Indonesia's marketing department are boasting Bintan to be the next Bali, which is more than optimistic but some of the beaches do justify the comparison.

There's little reason or means for a budget traveller to stop off here, but those with deeper pockets will find high-end resorts on the north side of the island, complete with delicious shores and all the trimmings.

## Tanjung Pinang

The main port town on the island is a bustling mercantile centre with more ethnic diversity than most Sumatran towns. There is lots of provincial-style shopping and nibbling on Chinese and Indonesian specialities. Located nearby are several traditional-style villages and temple attractions that tickle the culture-bone of the many weekendening Singaporeans.

## ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

The port, hotels, and other necessities are all within walking distance. There are plenty of ATMs around town and bank branches, mainly on Jl Teuku Umar.

**Bank Mandiri** (Jl Teuku Umar)

**BCA Bank** (Jl Ketapang)

**Bintan Internet Centre** (Jl Pos; per hr 10,000Rp;

🕒 9am-10pm)

**BNI Bank** (Jl Teuku Umar)

**Extreme Internet** (Jl Mawar 9A; per hr 10,000Rp;

🕒 10am-10pm) On the 2nd floor of a wartel office.

**Pinang Jaya Tour & Travel** (☎ 21267; Jl Bintan 44)

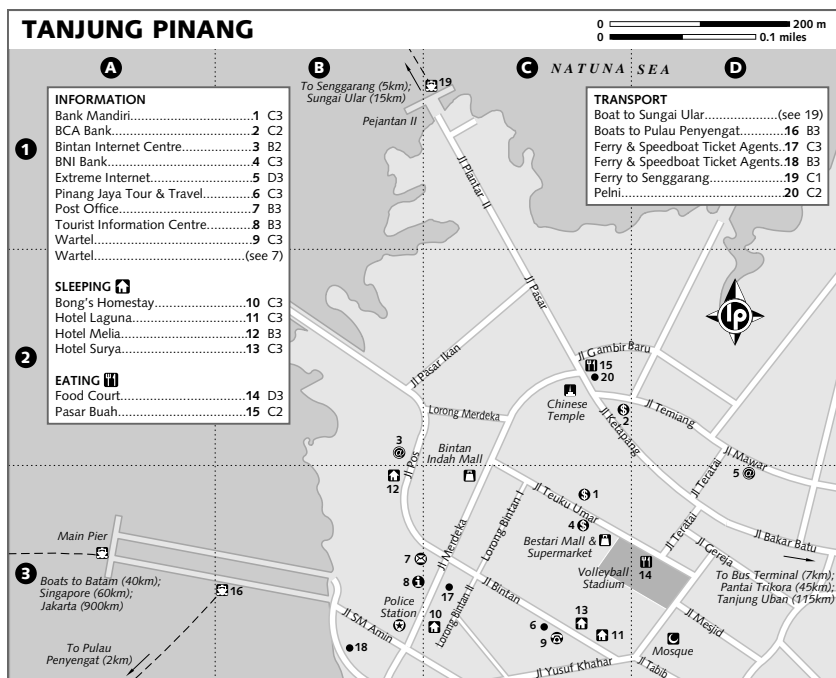
Air tickets.

**Post office** (Jl Merdeka) Near the harbour, on Tanjung Pinang's main street.

**Tourist information centre** (☎ 31822; Jl Merdeka 5; 🕒 8am-5pm) Behind the police station; the helpful English-speaking staff organise city tours.

**Wartel** (Jl Bintan)

**Wartel** (Jl Merdeka)



## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

You can stroll around Tanjung Pinang in a leisurely hour. The older part of town is found around the narrow piers near Jl Plantar II. The harbour hosts a constant stream of vessels, from tiny sampans to large freighters.

The following sites can be visited independently or through tour programs arranged with the tourist office.

### Pulau Penyengat

Only a short hop across the harbour from Tanjung Pinang, tiny **Penyengat** was once the capital of the Riau rajahs. The island is believed to have been given to Rajah Riau-Lingga VI in 1805 by his brother-in-law, Sultan Mahmud, as a wedding present. Another historical footnote is that the Penyengat-based sultanate cooperated with Sir Stamford Raffles to hand over Singapore in exchange for British military protection in 1819.

The island is littered with interesting relics and can be walked in a couple of hours. The coastline is dotted with traditional Malay

stilted houses, while the ruins of the **old palace** of Rajah Ali and the **tombs** and **graveyards** of Rajah Jaafar and Rajah Ali are clearly sign-posted inland. The most impressive site is the sulphur-coloured **mosque**, with its many domes and minarets. Dress appropriately or you won't be allowed in.

There are frequent boats to Pulau Penyengat from Bintan's main pier (4000Rp, from 7am to 5pm). There's a 2000Rp entry charge at weekends.

### Senggarang

A fascinating village sits just across the harbour from Tanjung Pinang. The star attraction is an old **Chinese temple**, now suspended in the roots of a huge banyan that has grown up through it.

The temple is to the left of the pier, where boats from Tanjung Pinang dock. Half a kilometre along the waterfront, **Vihara Dharma Sasana**, a complex of three temples, all said to be more than a century old, occupy a large courtyard facing the sea.

Boats to Senggarang (15,000Rp) leave from Pejantan II wharf.

## Sungai Ular

Snake River swims through mangrove forests to **Jodoh temple**, the oldest Chinese temple in Riau Islands. The temple is decorated with gory murals depicting the trials and tortures of hell. You can charter a sampan (80,000Rp for five people) from Tanjung Pinang harbour.

## SLEEPING & EATING

All of Tanjung Pinang's accommodation is within walking distance of the harbour.

### Bong's Homestay (Lorong Bintan II 20; d 30,000Rp)

This alleyway home has been running since 1972 and has very basic rooms. The family speaks excellent English – specialist subjects include English Football and '70s rock.

**Hotel Surya** (☎ 318 387; Jl Bintan 49; s/d incl breakfast 55,000/90,000Rp; ♿) Quality varies at this multi-storey hotel. Fan rooms are basic concrete boxes, while some rooms have sunny windows and new paint.

**Hotel Laguna** (☎ 311 555; Jl Bintan 51; d incl breakfast 302,500-387,200Rp; ♿) Tanjung Pinang's corporate stay, with big beds and walk-in shower.

**Hotel Melia** (☎ 21898; Jl Pos 25; d incl breakfast 262,500-525,000Rp; ♿) Bright and airy rooms and enormous suites with views over the harbour.

In front of the volleyball stadium on Jl Teuku Umar, an open-air **food court** (mains 8000Rp) whips up tasty snacks.

If you're looking for Padang food, there are several places on Jl Plantar II serving good fish or jackfruit curries.

The colourful *pasar buah* (fruit market) is at the northern end of Jl Merdeka. In the evening there are several food stalls scattered around town serving *mie bangka*, a Hakka-style dumpling soup.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

See p458 for transport options to/from Tanjung Pinang.

## GETTING AROUND

It is fairly easy to get around central Tanjung Pinang by catching one of the many *opelet* (3000Rp). The *opelet* don't have fixed routes, so tell the driver your destination and see if he agrees.

The bus terminal is inconveniently located 7km out of Tanjung Pinang, along the road to Pantai Trikora. But there aren't many services that leave from here.

To get to the outlying beaches is expensive. A taxi from Tanjung Pinang to Pantai Trikora is a long ride and will cost 250,000Rp. You can also fish around for share taxis, but most drivers won't want to cut a deal with a 'rich' foreigner. If you head out to the main highway, you can catch Barakit-bound public buses that pass through Trikora (20,000Rp).

Another not-so-affordable option is to rent a car, which gives you flexibility in exploring the beaches around the island. **Rico Rental** (☎ 315931; Jl Yos Sudarso 1) rents Kijang (4WD vehicles) for 250,000Rp per day (not including petrol). Renting a car in Tanjung Pinang is cheaper than relying on the resorts in Lagoi.

## Pantai Trikora & Around

Bintan's east coast is lined with rustic beaches and simple wooden bungalows. The main beach is **Pantai Trikora**, which is pretty enough at high tide but turns into miles of mud flats at low tide. The beaches to the north around Malangrupai have more consistent surf and turf. Regardless though, the area is relatively deserted: just you, the ocean and a few napping dogs. A group of small islands off Pantai Trikora are well worth visiting and there is good **snorkelling** outside the monsoon season (November to March).

## SLEEPING & EATING

Accommodation at Trikora is outside the village of Teluk Bakau. Hotels listed here can organise snorkelling trips to offshore islands (150,000Rp).

**Shady Shack** (☎ 081 3645 15223; www.lobo.kinemotion.de; d with breakfast \$525) A handful of weather-beaten shacks face directly to the sea. This is just a step above camping and is a good excuse not to shower or brush your teeth. Quad rooms also available (\$\$40).

**Gurindam Resort** (☎ 26234; Telok Bakau, Km 35; weekday/weekend d with breakfast 180,000/220,000Rp) Designed like an Islamic fishing village with stilt-frame bungalows built over the water, this is a dream come true for down-to-earth family getaways. There's fishing in the attached fish ponds, a thatched-roof restaurant big enough for energetic tots, and a small swimming beach.

## Lagoi

Bintan's resort area stretches along the northern coastline of the island along Pasir Lagoi, with acres of wilderness buffering the hotels

from commoners to the south. Security is in full effect, with checkpoints at access roads and at hotel entrances. The beaches are sandy and swimmable, the resorts have polished four- and five-star service and there are water-sports activities and entertainment for all ages.

There are three golf courses in Lagoi designed by champion golfers: **Bintan Lagoon Resort Golf Club** (☎ 0770 691 388; www.bintanlagoon.com; green fees weekday/weekend S\$65/70), **Laguna Bintan Golf Club** (☎ 0770 693 188; golf-bintan@banyantree.com; green fees weekday/weekend S\$122/165) and top-rated **Ria Bintan Golf Club** (☎ 0770 692 839; www.riabintan.com; green fees weekday/weekend S\$150/210). Packages include ferry from Singapore (weekday S\$99 to S\$169, weekends S\$130 to S\$229).

## SLEEPING

There are three resort compounds comprising several hotel clusters, private beaches and golf courses. Check with travel agents about weekday discounts, which can be as generous as 50%. See www.bintan-resorts.com for property details.

Of the three, we found the hotels within Laguna Bintan (Angsana Resort and Banyan Tree) and Nirwana Gardens (Nirwana Resort) compounds to be accommodating and well maintained.

**Angsana Resort & Spa Bintan** (☎ 0770 693 111; www.angsana.com; package incl breakfast weekday US\$220-520, weekend US\$281-607; 📶 📶 📶) The more dressed-down companion to sophisticated Banyan Tree, Angsana is best suited to young professionals. The breezy common spaces are decorated in zesty citrus colours, with private rooms sporting a contemporary colonial style. The superior rooms are nice but the suites are super.

**Banyan Tree Bintan** (☎ 0770 693 100; www.banyantree.com; package incl breakfast weekday/weekend US\$305/320; 📶 📶 📶) More private and privileged than Angsana, Banyan Tree has famed spa facilities and a high-powered retreat deep in the jungle. The hotel shares the 900m-long beach with Angsana.

**Nirwana Resort Hotel** (☎ 0770 692 505; www.nirwanagardens.com; package incl breakfast weekday US\$180-360, weekend US\$228-440; 📶 📶 📶) More targeted to local families, Nirwana is comfortable and unfussy, with sweet staff but not the best beach. The lagoon-style pool has a large baby pool area, but the grounds are little thirsty. The suites have sea views and huge bathrooms.

## GETTING AROUND

For Lagoi-bound visitors, most resorts organise shuttle service between the harbour at Kota Sebung and the hotels as part of the package price or for an additional S\$6.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Kijang airport is currently used for cargo rather than passenger flights.

### BOAT

Bintan has three ports and services to Palau Batam, Singapore and other islands in the Riau archipelago.

Tanjung Pinang is the busiest harbour and the best option for folks planning to stay in Tanjung Pinang or Pantai Trikora. If you're bound for the resort area of Lagoi, the port at Kota Sebung is more convenient. Tanjung Uban is the third option.

### To Batam

Regular speedboats depart from the main pier in Tanjung Pinang for Telaga Punggur on Batam (45,000Rp, 45 minutes) from 7.45am to 4.45pm daily. There are also boats that go from Lagoi to Batam's Telaga Punggur (one way/return 100,000/170,000Rp).

### To Elsewhere in Indonesia

There are boats to Pekanbaru (280,000Rp, daily) and Dumai (220,000Rp, daily). Tickets for all of these destinations can be bought from agents on Jl Merdeka in Tanjung Pinang, just outside of the harbour entrance.

Daily ferries travel to other islands in the Riau chain, such as Pulau Karimuh's Tanjung Balai (80,000Rp, 2½ hours), Pulau Lingga's Daik (70,000Rp, three hours), Sungai Buluh on Singkep (60,000Rp, three hours) and Penuba (80,000Rp, three hours). The Anugra Makmur company runs boats every 10 days to the remote Natuna Islands.

Pelni sails to Jakarta weekly from the southern port of Kijang. Travel agencies in Tanjung Pinang can supply tickets and schedules.

### To Malaysia

There are boats to Johor Bahru in Malaysia (150,000Rp, five departures daily) from Tanjung Pinang. Tickets can be bought from agents on Jl Merdeka in Tanjung Pinang, just outside of the harbour entrance.

## To Singapore

Boats from Tanjung Pinang go to Singapore's Tanah Merah (one way S\$24) between 7am and 6.30pm. There are more frequent services on the weekend.

**Bintan Resort Ferries** ([www.brf.com.sg](http://www.brf.com.sg)) is the only company that handles transport between Lagoi and Singapore; ticket prices vary based on day of week but start at S\$26.

## OTHER RIAU ISLANDS

Few travellers reach the remote outer islands of Riau. Getting there is half the problem. Head to the better-serviced islands first, and you can usually organise to island-hop from there.

### Pulau Singkep

Singkep is the third-largest island in the archipelago. Huge tin mines once provided most of the island's jobs, but since their closure much of the population has moved elsewhere and the island has reverted to being a sleepy backwater.

The main town, **Dabo**, is shaded by lush trees and gardens and clustered around a central park. A large **mosque** dominates the skyline. The fish and vegetable **markets** near the harbour are interesting, and Jl Pasar Lamar is a good browsing and shopping area. **Batu Bedaun**, 4km from town, is a lovely white-sand beach fringed with palms.

There is accommodation available at the simple **Wisma Gapura Singkep** (☎ 0776 21136; Jl Perusalaan 41; d 50,000-240,000Rp).

You can eat at the **markets** behind Wisma Sri Indah or try any of the warungs on Jl Pasar Lama and Jl Merdeka. Food stalls and warungs pop up all over the place at night.

There's one boat a day to Tanjung Pinang on Pulau Bintan (57,000Rp, three hours) and daily ferries to Daik on Pulau Lingga. Boats dock at Singkep's northern port of Sungai Buluh, from where there are buses to Dabo. Several shops in Dabo act as ticket agencies.

### Pulau Penuba

Penuba is a small island wedged between Singkep and Lingga. It's an idyllic place to do little but swim, walk and read. There are some great beaches near the north-coast village of **Tanjung Dua** and others near the main settlement, **Penuba**, on the southeastern coast.

Penuba is a sleepy village centred around the **Attaqwa Mosque**. Accommodation is avail-

able at the house next door – ask around for the caretaker – and you can eat at several warungs along Jl Merdeka, the main street.

A daily boat travels to Penuba from Tanjung Pinang (80,000Rp, three hours) on Bintan, or you can charter a boat from Singkep for the half-hour trip.

### Pulau Lingga

Not much remains of the glory that was once the royal island of Lingga except a few neglected ruins. Today there are few creature comforts and little in the way of modern development. The island resembles a crown and rises sharply from the shore to form the three jungle-clad peaks of **Gunung Daik**. The central peak reaches 1163m and is the highest point in the archipelago. Locals maintain that it has never been climbed.

Daik, the main village and arrival point, is hidden 1km up a muddy river. The town itself is pretty much a single street, with some cargo wharves and about a dozen Chinese shops. It has a certain tropical, seedy charm and a very laid-back atmosphere.

The main site of historical interest is the modest ruin of the **palace** of Rajah Suleiman, the last rajah of Riau-Lingga. Next to the palace are the foundation stones of a building said to have housed the rajah's extensive harem. The palace was made of wood and little survives today, though the surrounding jungle hides overgrown bathing pools and squat toilets. The ruins are a two-hour walk from Daik and you'll need very clear directions or a guide to get you through the maze of overgrown forest paths.

On the outskirts of Daik the **Mesjid Sultan Lingga** houses the tomb of Rajah Mahmud I, who ruled in the early 19th century. A half-hour walk from town is the **Makam Bukit Cenckeh** (Cenckeh Hill Cemetery) on a hill overlooking the river. The crumbling graves of Rajah Abdul Rakhman (r 1812–31) and Rajah Muhammed (r 1832–41) are here. The remains of an old fort are nearby.

There is one basic **hotel** (d around 60,000Rp) in Daik, near the ferry dock on the main street. There are a few small **warungs** on the main street.

There are daily boats for the two-hour trip from Daik to Dabo on Singkep (50,000Rp), and there's also a daily service to Tanjung Pinang (80,000Rp, three hours) on Pulau Bintan.



## Natuna Islands

These islands are right off the beaten track and difficult to reach.

The population of **Pulau Natuna Besar** is fairly small, although there's an extensive *transmigrasi* program along Sungai Ulu, with settlers from Java growing cash crops such as peanuts and green peas.

The islands are noted for fine basket-weave **cloth** and various kinds of **traditional dance**. One particularly idiosyncratic local dance is a kind of *Thousand & One Arabian Nights* saga, incorporating episodes from Riau-Lingga history.

Ask in Tanjung Pinang on Pulau Bintan about infrequent boat services to Natuna.

## JAMBI

For such a centrally located province, Jambi is not easy to reach and sees few foreign visitors. The province occupies a 53,435-sq-km slice of central Sumatra, stretching from the highest peaks of the Bukit Barisan range in the west to the coastal swamps facing the Strait of Melaka in the east.

The eastern lowlands are mainly rubber and palm-oil plantations. Timber is also big business, as is oil; Jambi's main field is southeast of the capital (Jambi) on the South Sumatran border.

In the western portion of the province is the Kerinci Seblat National Park, home to Sumatra's highest peak, Gunung Kerinci (3805m), Sumatran tigers (Jambi's faunal mascot) and rhinos. The park is covered in the West Sumatra section (see p442) as Padang has more convenient transit links than Jambi.

Most of the province is sparsely populated; many are migrants from Java and Bali. In the province's fast disappearing forests, the Orang Rimba are an endangered hunter-gatherer tribe.

## History

The province of Jambi was the heartland of the ancient kingdom of Malayu, which first rose to prominence in the 7th century. Much of Malayu's history is closely and confusingly entwined with that of its main regional rival, the Palembang-based kingdom of Sriwijaya. The little that is known about Malayu has mostly been gleaned from the precise records maintained by the Chinese court of the time.

It is assumed that the temple ruins at Muara Jambi mark the site of Malayu's former capital, the ancient city of Jambi – known to the Chinese as Chan Pi. The Malayu sent their first delegation to China in 644 and the Chinese scholar I Tsing spent a month in Malayu in 672. When he returned 20 years later he found that Malayu had been conquered by Sriwijaya. The Sriwijayans appear to have remained in control until the sudden collapse of their empire at the beginning of the 11th century.

Following Sriwijaya's demise, Malayu re-emerged as an independent kingdom and stayed that way until it became a dependency of Java's Majapahit empire, which ruled from 1278 until 1520. It then came under the sway of the Minangkabau people of West Sumatra.

In 1616 the Dutch East India Company opened an office in Jambi and quickly formed a successful alliance with Sultan Muhammed Nakhruddin to protect its ships and cargoes from pirates. It also negotiated a trade monopoly with Nakhruddin and his successors. The major export was pepper, which was grown in great abundance. In 1901 the Dutch East India Company moved its headquarters to Palembang and effectively gave up its grip on Jambi.

## JAMBI

☎ 0741 / pop 490,000

The capital of Jambi province is the city of the same name, a busy river port about 155km from the mouth of Sungai Batang Hari. Jambi is not known as a tourist destination, but those who have wandered the markets and watched the city in action have found that somewhere can be more fun than nowhere.

## Orientation

Jambi sprawls over a wide area, a combination of the old Pasar Jambi district spreading south from the port, and the new suburbs of Kota Baru and Telanaipura to the west. Most of the banks, hotels and restaurants are in Pasar Jambi near the junction of Jl Gatot Subroto and Jl Raden Mattaher, while government buildings are out at Kota Baru.

## Information

There are plenty of ATMs around town. Jl Dr Sutomo is the primary bank street.

**Culture & Tourism Office** (☎ 445 056; Jl H Agus Salim, Kota Baru) The English-speaking staff are keen to promote the province and can organise city tours.

## ORANG RIMBA

Jambi's nomadic hunter-gatherers are known by many names: outsiders refer to the diverse tribes collectively as Kubu, an unflattering term, while they refer to themselves as Orang Rimba (People of the Forest) or Anak Dalam (Children of the Forest). Descended from the first wave of Malays to migrate to Sumatra, they once lived in highly mobile groups throughout Jambi's lowland forests.

As fixed communities began to dominate the province, the Orang Rimba retained their nomadic lifestyle and animistic beliefs, regarding their neighbours' adoption of Islam and agriculture as disrespectful towards the forest. Traditionally the Orang Rimba avoided contact with the outsiders, preferring to barter and trade by leaving goods on the fringes of the forest or relying on trusted intermediaries.

In the 1960s, the Indonesian government's social affairs and religion departments campaigned to assimilate the Orang Rimba into permanent camps and convert them to a monotheistic religion. Meanwhile the jungles were being transformed into palm-oil and rubber plantations during large-scale *transmigrasi* from Java and Bali.

Some Orang Rimba assimilated and are now economically marginalised within the plantations, while others live off government funds and then return to the forests. About 2500 Orang Rimba retain their traditional lifestyles within the shrinking forest. The groups were given special settlement rights within Bukit Duabelas and Bukit Tigapuluh National Parks, but the protected forests are as vulnerable to illegal logging and poaching as other Sumatran parks.

In the opinions of the NGO groups that work with the Orang Rimba, it isn't a question of *if* the tribes will lose their jungle traditions but *when*. In the spirit of practical idealism, the organisation **WARSI** ([www.warsi.or.id](http://www.warsi.or.id)) established its alternative educational outreach. Rather than forcing educational institutions on the Orang Rimba, teachers join those that will accept an outsider and teach the children how to read, write and count – the equivalent of knowing how to hunt and forage in the settled communities.

**Main Telkom wartel** (Jl Dr Sumantri) In Telanaipura.

**Post office** (Jl Sultan Thaha 9) Near the port.

**Thamrin Internet** (Jl Gatot Subroto 6; per hr 5000Rp;

☎ 10am–10pm) Internet access near Gloria Bookshop.

**Wartel** (Jl Raden Mattaher; ☎ 8am–9pm) More convenient than the main Telkom wartel; you can make international phone calls here.

## Sights & Activities

Jambi is the starting point for excursions to the archaeological site of Muara Jambi (see p462).

**Museum Negeri Propinsi Jambi** (cnr Jl Urip Sumoharjo & Prof Dr Sri Sudewi, Telanaipura; admission 2000Rp; ☎ 8.30am–3pm Mon–Fri), one of the city's few attractions, is out in Telanaipura. It has a selection of costumes and handicrafts, as well as a small historical display. Take an *ojek* (3000Rp to 4000Rp).

Nearby the museum is a **batik centre** that produces and sells traditional Jambi textiles featuring striking floral motifs. The centre also has a range of handicrafts from all over the province, including *songket* weaving and finely woven split-rattan baskets. The centre provides employment for local women.

## Sleeping

Accommodation in Jambi isn't much of a bargain, so you should opt for convenience instead. The most social spot to base yourself is near the market, behind the Novotel, where you'll find a cluster of midrange and top-end hotels.

**Lukman Language Exchange** ([l\\_tanjung@yahoo.com](mailto:l_tanjung@yahoo.com)) Delightful Jambi resident Lukman can provide lodging in his home in exchange for a few appearances by an English native speaker at his weekly tutoring sessions.

**Hotel Da'lia** (☎ 755 2309; Jl Camar 100; d with shared bathroom 70,000Rp, d with air-con 150,000Rp; 🏠) Basic and clean, this is the best you'll get in the budget range.

**Hotel Abadi** (☎ 25600; Jl Gatot Subroto 92; d 410,000, d incl breakfast 550,000Rp; 🏠 📺 📶 🚿) Otherwise average top-end rooms at Hotel Abadi are decorated with Jambi batik bedspreads for a local flair. Junior suites feature a tranquil balcony.

**Novotel** (☎ 27208; [novotel@e-jambi.net](mailto:novotel@e-jambi.net); Jl Gatot Subroto 44; d 465,000–1,010,000Rp; 🏠) Currently the most expensive hotel in town but far from being worth it.

## Eating

**Saimen Perancis** (Jl Raden Mattaher; pastries 2000Rp) An excellent bakery that also serves meals.

**Simpang Raya** (Jl Raden Mattaher 22; dishes 7000Rp) An old friend in the *nasi Padang* game.

**Munri Food Centre** (Jl Sultan Agung; mains 10,000Rp) More night-time eats set the night ablaze at this al fresco dining area.

**Ancol** (near Sungai Batang Hari) Just down from the Trade Centre, this is an evening destination for promenading and river breezes. Stalls sell local favourites, such as *nanas goreng* (fried pineapples) and *jagung bakar* (roasted corn slathered with coconut milk and chillis).

**Pasar Makanan** (Jl Sultan Iskandar Muda) Lots of regional Palembang specialities, which Jambi also claims as its own, get top billing at this busy market.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

The Sultan Thaka Airport is 6km east of the centre. Batavia Air and Mandala fly to Jakarta daily. Merpati flies to Batam. Most tickets are available through travel agents, but **Mandala** (☎ 24341; Jl Gatot Subroto 42) also has an office.

### BOAT

**Ratu Intan Permata** (☎ 60234; Simpang Kawat, Jl M Yamin) operates connecting services from Jambi to the coastal town of Kuala Tungkal (50,000Rp, two hours), from where there are speedboats to Batam (210,000Rp, five hours).

### BUS

The highways to the south and north are in poor condition, making bus travel an arduous task. Bus-ticketing offices occupy two areas of town: **Simpang Rimbo**, 8km west of town, and **Simpang Kawat**, 3.5km southwest of town on Jl M Yamin.

There are frequent economy buses to Palembang (60,000Rp, seven hours).

**Ratu Intan Permata** (☎ 20784; Simpang Kawat, Jl M Yamin) has comfortable door-to-door minibus services to Pekanbaru (190,000Rp, eight hours), Bengkulu (180,000Rp, 10 hours), Palembang (110,000Rp, six hours) and Padang (180,000Rp, 13 hours).

**Safa Marwa** (☎ 65756; Jl Pattimura 77) runs a similar service to Sungai Penuh in the Kerinci Valley (70,000Rp, 10 hours).

Buses from Jambi depart from the companies' offices.

## Getting Around

Airport taxis charge a standard 60,000Rp for the 8km run into town. Local transport comprises the usual assortment of *ojek* and *opelet*. Rawasari *opelet* terminal, off Jl Raden Mattaher in the centre of town, is where all *opelet* start and finish their journeys. The standard fare is 2000Rp.

## MUARA JAMBI

The large temple complex at Muara Jambi, 26km downstream from Jambi, is the most important Hindu-Buddhist site in Sumatra. It is assumed that the temples mark the location of the ancient city of Jambi, capital of the kingdom of Malayu 1000 years ago. Most of the temples, known as *candi*, date from the 9th to the 13th centuries, when Jambi's power was at its peak. However the best of the artefacts have been taken to Jakarta.

For centuries the site lay abandoned and overgrown in the jungle on the banks of the Batang Hari. It was 'rediscovered' in 1920 by a British army expedition sent to explore the region.

## Sights

It's easy to spend all day at **Muara Jambi** (admission by donation; ☎ 8am-4pm). The forested site covers 12 sq km along the north bank of the Batang Hari. The entrance is through an ornate archway in the village of Muara Jambi and most places of interest are within a few minutes' walk of here.

Eight temples have been identified so far, each at the centre of its own low-walled compound. Some are accompanied by *perwara candi* (smaller side temples) and three have been restored to something close to their original form. The site is dotted with numerous *menapo* (smaller brick mounds), thought to be the ruins of other buildings – possibly dwellings for priests and other high officials.

The restored temple **Candi Gumpung**, straight ahead of the donation office, has a fiendish *makara* (demon head) guarding its steps. Excavation work here has yielded some important finds, including a *peripih* (stone box) containing sheets of gold inscribed with old Javanese characters, dating the temple back to the 9th century. A statue of Prajnyaparamita found here is now the star attraction at the small **site museum** nearby.

**Candi Tinggi**, 200m southeast of Candi Gumpung, is the finest of the temples un-

covered so far. It dates from the 9th century but is built around another, older temple. A path leads east from Candi Tinggi to **Candi Astano**, 1.5km away, passing **Candi Kembar Batu** and lots of *menapo* along the way.

The temples on the western side of the site are yet to be restored. They remain pretty much as they were found – minus the jungle, which was cleared in the 1980s. The western sites are signposted from Candi Gumpung. First stop, after 900m, is **Candi Gedong Satu**, followed 150m further on by **Candi Gedong Dua**. They are independent temples despite what their names may suggest. The path continues west for another 1.5km to **Candi Kedaton**, the largest of the temples, then a further 900m northwest to **Candi Koto Mahligai**.

The dwellings of the ordinary Malayu people have long since disappeared. According to Chinese records, they lived along the river in stilted houses or in raft huts moored to the bank.

### Getting There & Away

There is no public transport to the park. You can charter a speedboat (300,000Rp) from Jambi's river pier to the site. You can also hire an *ojek* (35,000Rp).

## SOUTH SUMATRA

Like Riau and Jambi provinces, the eastern portion of South Sumatra shares a common Malay ancestry and influence from its proximity to the shipping lane of the Strait of Melaka. Rivers define the character of the eastern lowlands, while the western high peaks of the Bukit Barisan form the province's rugged underbelly. The provincial capital of Palembang was once the central seat of the Buddhist Sriwijaya empire, whose control once reached all the way up the Malay Peninsula.

Despite the province's illustrious past, there aren't very many surviving attractions, except for the hospitality that occurs in places where bilingual Indonesians don't get a lot of opportunity to practise their English.

### PALEMBANG

☎ 0711 / pop 1.67 million

Sumatra's second-largest city, Palembang is a manic concrete sprawl with little to offer anyone but the true urban enthusiast.

The town prospers as a major port and on the core industries of oil refining, fertiliser

production and cement manufacturing, which all scent the air with a distinctive odour you might first mistake as your own funk.

Chances are you're passing north or south if you're here. While the city ain't much to look at, be sure to stick around for at least a meal – the spicy fare is subject of much debate (positive and negative) in Sumatra, and it's worth establishing your own opinion for gaining kudos on cuisine chat around the rest of the island.

### History

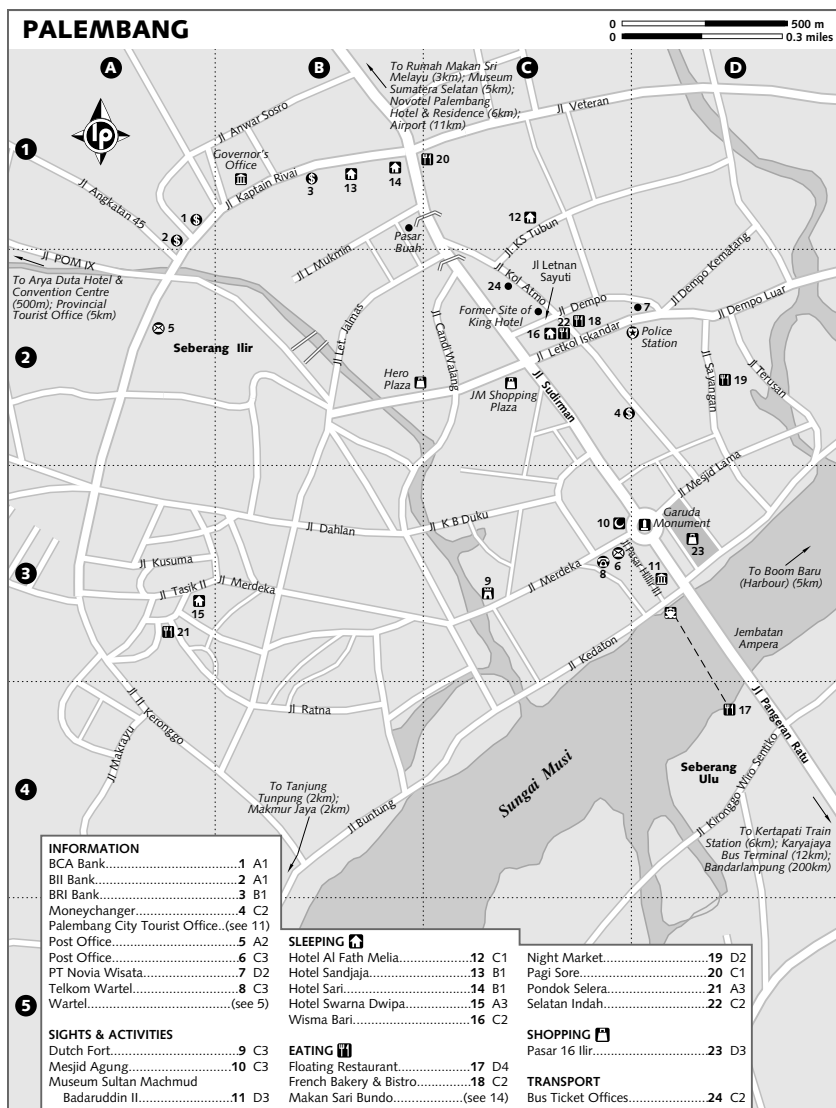
A thousand years ago Palembang was the centre of the highly developed Sriwijaya civilisation. The Chinese scholar I Tsing spent six months in Palembang in 672 and reported that 1000 monks, scholars and pilgrims were studying and translating Sanskrit there. At its peak in the 11th century, Sriwijaya ruled a huge slab of Southeast Asia, covering most of Sumatra, the Malay Peninsula, southern Thailand and Cambodia. Sriwijayan influence collapsed after the kingdom was conquered by the south Indian king Ravendra Choladewa in 1025. For the next 200 years, the void was partly filled by Sriwijaya's main regional rival, the Jambi-based kingdom of Malayu.

Few relics from this period remain – no sculptures, monuments or architecture of note – nor is there much of interest from the early 18th century, when Palembang was an Islamic kingdom. Most of the buildings of the latter era were destroyed in battles with the Dutch.

The city's name comes from two words: *pa* (place) and *limbang* (to pan for gold). The prosperity of the Sriwijayan city is said to have been based on gold found in local rivers.

### Orientation

Palembang sits astride Sungai Musi, the two halves of the city linked by the giant Jembatan Ampera (Ampera Bridge). The river is flanked by a hodgepodge of wooden houses on stilts. The southern side, Seberang Ulu, is where the majority of people live. Seberang Ilir, on the north bank, is the city's better half, where you'll find most of the government offices, shops, hotels and the wealthy residential districts. The main street, Jl Sudirman, runs north-south to the bridge. The bus terminal and train station are both on the southern side.



**Information**

Palembang has branches of all the major banks and there are ATMs all over the city. Outside banking hours, the bigger hotels are a better bet than money changers.

**BCA Bank** (Jl Kapitan Rivai)

**BII Bank** (Jl Kapitan Rivai)

**BRI Bank** (Jl Kapitan Rivai)

**Money changer** (Jl Kol Atmo)

**Palembang city tourist office** (☎ 358 450; Museum Sultan Machmud Badaruddin II, Jl Pasar Hillir 3) A useful office at the Museum Sultan Machmud Badaruddin II, off Jl Sudirman; the staff can arrange trips down the Sungai Musi and handicraft tours.

**Post office** (Jl Merdeka) Close to the river, next to the Garuda monument. Internet facilities available.

**Provincial tourist office** (☎ 357 348; Jl Demang Lebar Daun) A useful office outside of the centre of town.

**PT Novia Wisata** (☎ 512 584; Jl Jend A Yani 3) Agents here can book city and river tours and trips to Bangka and Danau Ranau, plus onward flights.

**Telkom wartel** (Jl Merdeka; ☎ 8am-9pm) Next to the post office; international phone calls can be made here.

**Wartel** (Jl Kapitan Rivai)

## Sights

**Museum Sumatera Selatan** (☎ 422 382; Jl Sriwijaya 1, Km 5.5; admission 1000Rp; ☎ 8am-4pm Sun-Thu, 8-11am Fri) is well worth a visit. It houses finds from Sriwijayan times, as well as megalithic carvings from the Pasemah Highlands, including the famous *batu gajah* (elephant stone). There is a magnificent *rumah limas* (traditional house) behind the museum. The museum is about 5km from the town centre off the road to the airport.

**Museum Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II** (Jl Pasar Hilir III; admission 1000Rp; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 8-11am & 1.30-4pm Fri) has a few dust-covered exhibits.

Other Palembang attractions include the imposing **Mesjid Agung** (Jl Sudirman), built by Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin at the beginning of the 19th century.

The remains of a late 18th-century **Dutch fort**, occupied today by the Indonesian army, can be seen to the north of Jl Merdeka. Only sections of the fort's outside walls still stand.

## Festivals & Events

Palembang's annual tourist event is the **bidar race** held on Sungai Musi in the middle of town every 17 August (Independence Day) and on 16 June (the city's birthday). A *bidar* (canoe) is about 25m long, 1m wide and is powered by up to 60 rowers.

## Sleeping

The midrange hotels in Palembang are typical Indonesian breeds: personality-less multistorey boxes with prices that make a backpacker wince. The upmarket business options are slowly but surely maturing to match international standards.

**Wisma Bari** (☎ 315 666; Jl Letnan Sayuti 55; d incl breakfast 137,000-176,000Rp; ☎) Well positioned in a quiet lane, the postmodern rooms are modest but tolerable.

**Hotel Al Fath Melia** (☎ 370 488; Jl KS Tuban 19; d incl breakfast 175,000-295,000Rp; ☎) The best you'll get for under \$25. Set on a quiet street, a grand old

staircase winds round to the lobby, giving an airy feel to the place. The staff were a delight when we called round.

**Hotel Sari** (Jl Sudirman 1301; d 200,000-240,000Rp; ☎) On a noisy junction, the ugly exterior hides half-decent rooms.

**Hotel Sandjaja** (☎ 362 222; info@sandjaja.com; Jl Kapitan Rivai 6193; d incl breakfast from 355,000Rp; ☎ ☎ ☎) This smart, upmarket hotel has rooms that match what you would get back home for the same price, plus a few more fingerprints. But when measured on the Sumatran scale, this is top-grade.

**Hotel Swarna Dwipa** (☎ 313 322; Jl Tasik II; s/d incl breakfast 445,000/1,208,000Rp; ☎ ☎ ☎) Located in a leafy area, this mini resort is filled with Indonesian bigwigs, but the rooms don't quite deliver.

**Novotel Palembang Hotel & Residence** (☎ 369 777; info@novotelpalembang.com; Jl R Sukanto 8A; d with breakfast 650,000-720,000Rp; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Outside of the town centre, the Novotel is a stone-fortress resort with the town's best rooms oriented around a central pool.

**Arya Duta Hotel & Convention Centre** (☎ 383 838; reservation.palembang@aryaduta.com; Jl POM IX; d with breakfast from 850,000Rp; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) The very modern Arya Duta is decorated in the reigning trend of global minimalist. Business travellers stay here, self-contained style, for conferences.

## Eating

Palembang fare takes a while to get used to. The area's southern Indian influences are found in the spicy vegetable and fish dishes that are favoured. But it's the heavy use of the funky durian that sends many Westerners running.

The best-known dishes are *ikan brengkes* (fish served with a spicy durian-based sauce) and *pindang*, a spicy, clear fish soup. Another Palembang speciality is *pempek*, also known as *empek-empek*, a mixture of sago, fish and seasoning that is formed into balls and deep fried or grilled. Served with a spicy sauce, *pempek* is widely available from street stalls and warungs; you typically pay for what you eat.

Palembang food is normally served with a range of accompaniments. The main one is *tempoyak*, a combination of fermented durian, *terasi* (shrimp paste), lime juice and chilli that is mixed up with the fingers and added to the rice. *Sambal buah* (fruit sambals), made with pineapple or sliced green mangoes, are also popular.



**Pondok Selera** (Jl Rambutan; mains from 5000Rp) Near the Songket Village, this open-air lunch spot pulls in the government workers for Palembang style *ayam baker* (grilled chicken) served with fresh vegetables and sambal.

**Selatan Indah** (Jl Letkol Iskandar 434; dishes from 6000Rp) A recommended joint for trying Palembang food where the English menu removes the lottery factor found in other places.

**Floating Restaurant** (Seberang Ulu; mains 5000-20,000Rp; ☎ noon-10pm) Directly across the Sungai Musi from the museum is Palembang's favourite date restaurant, serving local specialities.

**Rumah Makan Sri Melayu** (☎ 420 468; Jl Demang Lebar Daun; mains 25,000-35,000Rp) For the full immersion of Palembang food and culture, visit this showpiece restaurant with polished wooden seating around a stylish pond.

**French Bakery & Bistro** (Jl Kol Atmo; dishes 8000Rp) Near the bus ticket agents, this bakery and cafe offers all sorts of carb-loaded dishes and fancy coffee drinks.

The main **night market** (Jl Sayangan), to the east of Jl Sudirman, has dozens of noodle and sate stalls. Missing Padang food already? Load up at our old pals **Pagi Sore** (Jl Sudirman) and **Makan Sari Bundo** (Jl Kaptain Rivai).

## Shopping

**Tanjung Tunjung**, 2km from the town centre, is the handicraft village where Palembang's local *songket* industry is based. Ground-floor showrooms display sarongs used in marriage ceremonies and traditional costumes, as well as more functional scarves and textiles. Above the storefront are the workshops where it takes the young weavers a month to weave one sarong and chest wrap, as well as keep up with the daily soap operas.

**Makmur Jaya** (☎ 355 3720; Jl Ki Gede Ing Suro 12) Beyond tourist-market selections of fine silk and batiks.

**Pasar 16 Ilir** (Jl Mesjid Lama; ☎ 6am-6pm) Near the river, just off Jl Pangeran Ratu, this market sells batik and other textiles from Sumatra and Java, as well as house wares.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Sultan Badaruddin II airport is 12km north of town. There are flights by Silk Air to Singapore three times a week (US\$90 to US\$110). Garuda flies daily from Palembang to Yogyakarta (800,000Rp) and Surabaya (655,000Rp).

Garuda, Wings Air, Lion Air, Batavia Air and Sriwijaya all fly to Jakarta.

Merpati flies to Batam daily and then onto Medan four times a week. Garuda, Wings, Lion, Merpati, Jatayu and Batavia also have flights to Medan. Batavia Air serves Jambi daily. Air Asia flies daily to and from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

**PT Novia Wisata** (☎ 512 584; Jl Jend A Yani 3) can handle all of these ticketing arrangements.

### BOAT

There are several services each day from Palembang's Boom Baru harbour to Mentok on Pulau Bangka (140,000Rp to 220,000Rp depending on class, four hours).

There are direct ferry services to Batam (business/VIP 285,000/345,000Rp, 10 hours). Boats depart from Boom Baru on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at 7.30am.

### BUS

The **Karyajaya Bus Terminal** (cnr Jl Sriwijaya Raya) is 12km from the town centre.

Most of the bigger companies have ticket offices on Jl Kol Atmo, just near the former Hotel King. These agents are convenient for buying advance tickets and checking departure times, but it is recommended to catch the bus at the terminal instead of dealing with the extra transfer fee and extra wait time from the agents' offices.

Sample destinations and fares include Bukittinggi (air-con 165,000Rp, 18 hours), Medan (260,000Rp, 36 hours) and Jakarta (air-con 190,000Rp, 20 hours).

There are several companies on Jl Veteran that offer door-to-door minibus services to Jambi (100,000Rp, six hours) and Bengkulu (140,000Rp, 15 hours).

### TRAIN

Kertapati train station is 8km from the city centre on the south side of the river. There are two daily train departures to Bandarlampung. The morning train has economy class only (45,000Rp); the evening train has executive (95,000Rp) and business (65,000Rp) classes. The trip takes nine to 10 hours.

There are also two trains that go north-west to Lubuklinggau (economy/business 15,000/70,000Rp) with a stop at Lahat (for the Pasemah Highlands). It's four hours to Lahat and seven to Lubuklinggau, but the fares are the same.

## Getting Around

*Opelet* around town cost a standard 2500Rp. They leave from around the huge roundabout at the junction of Jl Sudirman and Jl Merdeka.

Any *opelet* marked 'Karyajaya' (4000Rp) will get you to the bus terminal. Any *opelet* marked 'Kertapati' (4000Rp) will get you to the train station.

Taxis to the airport cost 60,000Rp to 80,000Rp. A taxi from the station to the town centre should cost around 40,000Rp.

## DANAU RANAU

Remote Danau Ranau, nestled in the middle of the southwestern Bukit Barisan range, is one of the least accessible and least developed of Sumatra's mountain lakes. It's an extremely peaceful spot and an excellent place to just relax or, if you're feeling energetic, go hiking in the surrounding mountains. It's possible to climb Gunung Semining (1881m), the extinct volcano that dominates the region. Temperatures at Ranau seldom rise above a comfortable 25°C.

The main transport hub of the area is Simpang Sender, about 10km northwest of the lake. At the northern tip is Banding Agung, the main settlement. There is no bank, so change money before you get there.

There are several small hotels in Banding Agung, including **Losmen Batu Mega** (Jl Sugiwaras 269; d 80,000Rp) and **Hotel Semining Permai** (Jl Akmal 89; d 90,000Rp). Jl Akmal is the main street leading down to the lake.

The village of Pusri also has accommodation, including **Danau Ranau Cottages** and **Wisma Pusri** (d 60,000-100,000Rp).

South of Simpang Sender on the western shore is **Wisma Danau Ranau** (d 150,000-200,000Rp), an upmarket place popular with tour groups.

Padang food is about all you'll find in the restaurants.

## Getting There & Away

Most routes to Danau Ranau go through the Trans-Sumatran Hwy town of Baturaja. There are two buses a day to Baturaja from the main bus terminal in Palembang (20,000Rp, four hours). The Palembang-Bandarlampung train line stops at Baturaja, which is about 3½ hours south of Palembang.

There are regular buses for the remaining 120km from Baturaja to Simpang Sender (15,000Rp, three hours), where you can pick

up an *opelet* for the final 18km to Banding Agung (4000Rp). It's a good idea to arrive in Baturaja as early as possible to give yourself plenty of time to get a bus out again. If you do get stuck, there are dozens of uninspiring budget losmen to choose from.

## KRUI

☎ 0728

If southern Sumatra ever makes an impression on the tourist trail, Krui will be the beach bums' hang-out. Sweeping slithers of white sand lick the coast north and south of Krui, which to-date has only been discovered by intrepid surfers.

You can stay at **DWI Hotel** (☎ 51069; Jl Merdeka 172; d with fan 65,000Rp, d with air-con & breakfast 195,000Rp; 📶) in the town centre. **Hotel Mutiara Alam** (☎ 51000; 3km south of Krui; d 80,000Rp) is an out-of-town possibility right on the beach.

Backpackers might not pay much attention to Krui but surfers come for the unhindered swells that roar in off the ocean. Right in front of the Karang Nyimbor surf break is the scenic and homely **Family Losmen** (☎ 081 3804 31486; 30min south of Krui; d 165,000Rp).

There are daily buses to Krui from Bandar Lampung (50,000Rp, six hours) and Bengkulu (75,000Rp, eight hours). *Opelet* depart regularly for Liwa (20,000Rp, one hour) and from there to Simpang Sender (for Danau Ranau).

## PASEMAH HIGHLANDS

The highlands, tucked away in the Bukit Barisan west of Lahat, are famous for the mysterious megalithic monuments that dot the landscape. The stones have been dated back about 3000 years, but little else is known about them or the civilisation that carved them. While the museums of Palembang and Jakarta now house the pick of the stones, there are still plenty left in situ.

The main town of the highlands is Pagaram, 68km (two hours by bus) southwest of the Trans-Sumatran Hwy town of Lahat.

The best source of information about the highlands is the Hotel Mirasa in Pagaram. There's nowhere to change money, so bring enough rupiah to see you through.

## Sights & Activities

The Pasemah carvings are considered to be the best examples of prehistoric stone sculpture in Indonesia and fall into two distinct styles. The early style dates from almost 3000 years ago

and features fairly crude figures squatting with hands on knees or arms folded over chests. The best examples of this type are at a site called **Tinggi Hari**, 20km from Lahat, west of the small river town of Pulau Pinang.

The later style, incorporating expressive facial features, dates from about 2000 years ago and is far more elaborate. Examples include carvings of men riding, battling with snakes and struggling with elephants. There are also a couple of tigers – one guarding a representation of a human head between its paws. The natural curve of the rocks was used to create a three-dimensional effect, though all the sculptures are in bas-relief.

Sculptures of this style are found throughout the villages around Pagaralam, although some take a bit of seeking out. **Tegurwangi**, about 8km from Pagaralam on the road to Tanjung Sakti, is the home of the famous **Batu Beribu**, a cluster of four squat statues that sit under a small shelter by a stream. The site guardian will wander over and lead you to some nearby dolmen-style stone tombs. You can still make out a painting of three women and a dragon in one of them.

The village of **Berlubai**, 3km from Pagaralam, has its own **Batu Gajah** (Elephant Stone) sitting out among the rice paddies, as well as tombs and statues. There is a remarkable collection of stone carvings among the paddies near **Tanjung Aru**. Look out for the one of a man fighting a giant serpent.

## GUNUNG DEMPO

This dormant volcano is the highest (3159m) of the peaks surrounding the Pasemah Highlands and dominates the town of Pagaralam. Allow two full days to complete the climb. A guide is strongly recommended as trails can be difficult to find. The lower slopes are used as a tea-growing area, and there are *opelet* from Pagaralam to the tea factory.

## Sleeping

The best place to stay in the highlands is Pagaralam.

**Hotel Mirasa** (☎ 073 062 1484; Jl Mayor Ruslan; d with/without breakfast 175,000/65,000Rp) There is a range of rooms to choose from and the owner can organise transport to the sites or guides to climb Gunung Dempo. The hotel is on the edge of town, about 2km from the bus terminal.

**Hotel Telaga** (☎ 073 062 1081; Jl Serma Wanar; d from 40,000-100,000Rp) A basic place with simple but clean rooms and very little else.

If you get stuck in Lahat, there is **Hotel Permata** (☎ 073 132 1642; Jl Mayor Ruslan III 31; r fan/air-con 60,000/100,000Rp; 📶), conveniently close to both the bus terminal and the train station.

## Getting There & Around

Every bus travelling along the Trans-Sumatran Hwy calls in at Lahat, nine hours northwest of Bandar Lampung and 12 hours southeast of Padang. There are regular buses to Lahat from Palembang (55,000Rp, five hours), and the town is a stop on the train line from Palembang to Lubuklinggau. There are frequent small buses between Lahat and Pagaralam (20,000Rp, two hours).

There are *opelet* to the villages near Pagaralam from the town centre's *stasiun taksi* (taxi station). All local services cost 2000Rp.

## PULAU BANGKA

☎ 0717 / pop 790,000

Bangka is a large, sparsely populated island 25km off Sumatra's east coast. Bangka has several white-sand beaches and a peaceful way of life, but little in the way of alluring accommodation. Resort hotels were originally designed for wealthy visitors from Singapore and Malaysia, but they, like everyone else, have been spooked by security in Indonesia.

The island's name is derived from the word *wangka* (tin), which was discovered near Mentok in 1710. Tin is still mined on the island, although operations have been greatly scaled down in recent years.

There are only small pockets of natural forest left on Bangka with a large part of the land cleared for rubber, palm-oil and pepper plantations.

## Pangkal Pinang

Bangka's main town is Pangkal Pinang, a bustling business and transport centre with a population of about 140,000 people.

Most places of importance to travellers are close to the intersection of the main streets, Jl Sudirman and Jl Mesjid Jamik. The bus terminal and markets are nearby on Jl N Pegadaian.

## SLEEPING

There are quite a few cheap losmen around the centre of town.

**Penginapan Srikandi** (☎ 421 884; Jl Mesjid Jamik 42; r with shared bath 70,000-80,000Rp) Simple and clean, and, best of all, cheap.

**Bukit Shofa Hotel** (☎ 421 062; Jl Mesjid Jamik 43; d 100,000-150,000Rp; 🍽️) A large, modern place with a choice of decent rooms.

**Sabrina Hotel** (☎ 422 424; Jl Diponegoro 73; d incl breakfast 175,000-400,000Rp; 🍽️) A midrange place with comfortable rooms on a quiet side street off Jl Sudirman.

## EATING

There are lots of small restaurants in Pangkal Pinang, including plenty of places along Jl Sudirman and in the markets near the main junction.

**Restaurant Asui Seafood** (Jl Kampung Bintang; seafood from 20,000Rp) Behind the BCA bank, this is the place to go for seafood. *Gebung*, known locally as 'chicken fish' because of the firmness of its flesh, is worth trying.

## Mentok

Mentok, on the northwestern tip of the island, is the port for boats to/from Palembang. Most people hop on a bus directly from the port to Pangkal Pinang.

In Mentok, there is little of interest other than a **memorial** to 22 Australian nurses shot dead by the Japanese during WWII.

If you get stuck, try **Tin Palace Hotel** (Jl Major Syafrie Rahman 1; s/d 70,000/90,000Rp; 🍽️).

## Beaches

The best beaches are on the northeastern coast around the town of Sungailiat, the island's administrative centre.

**Pantai Parai Tenggara** is one of the most popular and is monopolised by the **Parai Beach Hotel** (☎ 94888; Jl Pantai Matras; d incl breakfast weekday/weekend 484,000/574,750Rp; 🍽️). The deserted **Pantai Matras**, 5km further on, is even better.

## Getting There & Away

Merpati flies three times a week to Jakarta (350,000Rp).

There are several services each day from Palembang's Boom Baru jetty to Mentok on Bangka (100,000Rp to 200,000Rp depending on class, four hours).

Pelni ships stop in at Mentok travelling to Bintan. The **Pelni office** (☎ 22743) is outside the port gates in Mentok.

## Getting Around

There is regular public transport between Bangka's main towns, but most *opelet* stop

running in the mid-afternoon. After that taxis are the only option.

Airport taxis charge 50,000Rp for the 7km run into Pangkal Pinang.

There are public buses from Mentok to Pangkal Pinang (15,000Rp, three hours) and Sungailiat (20,000Rp, 3½ hours).

# LAMPUNG

At the very tip of this bow-shaped landmass is Sumatra's southernmost province, which was not given provincial status by Jakarta until 1964. Although the Lampungese have had a long history as a distinct culture, the most recent tug of Jakarta's gravitational force is altering Lampung's independent streak. Big-city TV news and fashions have crept across the Sunda Strait, as did Javanese settlers under the *transmigrasi* policies, designed to off-load excess population and turn a profit in the wilds of Sumatra.

Outside the provincial capital of Bandar Lampung, the province's robust coffee plantations dominate the economy and the unclaimed forests, closely followed by timber and pepper. There are also large areas of rubber and palm-oil plantation.

Today many Jakarta weekenders hop over to tour the Krakatau volcano (p474) or visit the elephants of Way Kambas National Park (p472). The rugged western seaboard is ostensibly protected as the Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park.

## History

Long before Jakarta became the helm of this island chain, there's evidence that Lampung was part of the Palembang-based Sriwijayan empire until the 11th century, when the Jambi-based Malayu kingdom became the dominant regional power.

Megalithic remains at Pugungraharjo, on the plains to the east of Bandar Lampung, are thought to date back more than 1000 years and point to a combination of Hindu and Buddhist influences. The site is believed to have been occupied until the 16th century.

Lampung has long been famous for its prized pepper crop, attracting the West Javanese sultanate of Banten to the area at the beginning of the 16th century and the Dutch East India Company in the late 17th century.

The Dutch finally took control of Lampung in 1856 and launched the first of the *transmigrasi* schemes that sought to ease the chronic overcrowding in Java and Bali. Most migrants came to farm the fertile plains of eastern Lampung and today the area is something of a cultural melting pot.

## BANDARLAMPUNG

☎ 0721 / pop 850,000

Once a major backpacker thoroughfare connecting Java and Sumatra, you'll immediately notice the jump in 'Hello Misters' and toothy smiles as the locals welcome Western faces like a long lost relative – which, of course, passing travellers are in these parts.

Perched on the hills overlooking Teluk Lampung, Bandarlampung is the region's largest city and its administrative capital. The fourth-largest city in Sumatra, it is the product of an amalgamation of the old towns of Telukbetung (coastal) and Tanjungkarang (inland).

Krakatau and Way Kambis are the main spots to check out in the area when passing through.

### Orientation

Bandarlampung is something of an administrative creation and the now massive, sprawling city has no real heart. Most places of relevance to travellers are in Tanjungkarang, including the train station and the bulk of the hotels. The Rajabasa bus terminal is 10km north of the town centre; the airport is 24km away.

### Information

All the major banks have branches in Bandarlampung, and there are ATMs all over town.

**Arie Tour & Travel** (☎ 474 675; Jl Monginsidi 143) A helpful travel agent located outside the city centre.

**BCA Bank** (Jl Raden Intan 98) Offers the best exchange rates; a second branch is located on Jl Kartini.

**Bill Bank** (Jl Kartini)

**BNI Bank** (Jl Kartini)

**Lippo Bank** (Jl Kartini)

**Post office** Main office (Jl KH Dahlan); central branch (Jl Kotaraja)

**Provincial tourist office** (☎ 266 184; Jl Sudirman 29) A helpful centre centrally located.

**Rumah Sakit Bumi Waras** (Jl W Monginsidi) Hospital.

**Squid Net** (Jl Raden Intan 88a; per hr 5000Rp; ☎ 10am-8pm) Internet access.

**Telkom wartel** (Jl Majapahit; ☎ 24hr) International and home-country-direct calls can be made here.

### Sights

The **Krakatau monument** (Jl Veteran, Telukbetung) is a lasting memorial to the force of the 1883 eruption and resulting tidal wave. Almost half of the 36,000 victims died in the 40m-high tidal wave that funnelled up Teluk Lampung and devastated Telukbetung. The huge steel maritime buoy that comprises the monument was washed out of Teluk Lampung and deposited on this hillside.

**Lampung Provincial Museum** (Jl Teuku Umar; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Tue-Sun), 5km north of central Tanjungkarang, houses a dusty collection of bits and pieces – everything from Neolithic relics to stuffed animals. To reach the museum, catch a *grey opelet* (2500Rp).

### Sleeping

Bandarlampung has a nice selection of mid-range hotels that line Jl Raden Intan, within walking distance or a short *ojek* ride from the train station.

**Kurnia Perdana Hotel** (☎ 262 030; Jl Raden Intan 114; d incl breakfast 150,000-250,000Rp; ☎ ☎) Clean, comfortable rooms with TV, but no charm.

**Hotel Arinas** (☎ 266 778; Jl Raden Intan 35; d incl breakfast from 215,000-500,000Rp; ☎ ☎) Central with clean, comfortable, modern rooms, all with TV and hot water.

**Hotel Purnama** (☎ 261 448; Jl Raden Intan 77; d incl breakfast 230,000-630,000Rp; ☎ ☎) The best option in this price range. It is well managed and maintained, with big comfortable rooms.

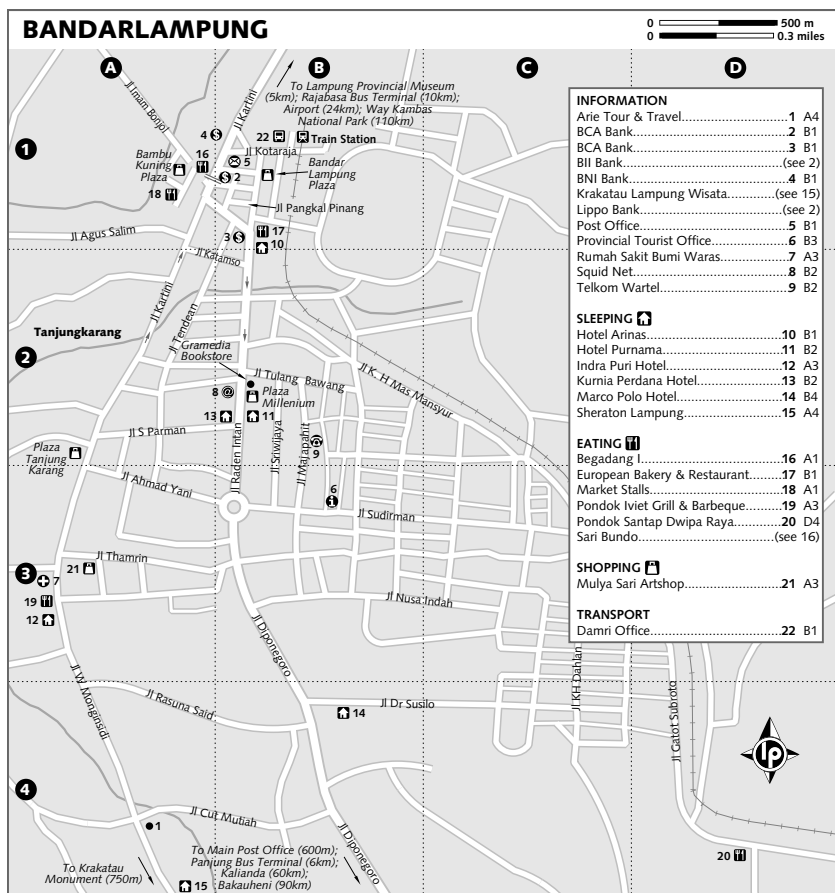
**Marco Polo Hotel** (☎ 262 511; Jl Dr Susilo 4; d incl breakfast 386,000-735,000Rp; ☎ ☎ ☎) Character is a permanent guest at this atmospheric old gent. Rooms are spacious and many have views of Teluk Lampung.

**Indra Puri Hotel** (☎ 258 258; Jl W Monginsidi 70; d incl breakfast 390,000-1,120,000Rp; ☎ ☎) Perched high on a hill, the Indra Puri has beautiful rooms with excellent views of the bay.

**Sheraton Lampung** (☎ 486 666; Jl W Monginsidi 175; d incl breakfast 810,000-935,000Rp; ☎ ☎ ☎) An impressive place; the Sheraton is the most stylish hotel in town and offers a range of sporting activities onsite.

### Eating

The **market stalls** around the Bambu Kuning Plaza offer a wide range of snacks.



**Pondok Santap Dwipa Raya** (Jl Gatot Subroto; dishes from 15,000Rp) An upmarket Palembang-style place. It serves a delicious *sayur asam* (sour vegetable soup).

**Pondok Iviet Grill & Barbeque** (Jl W Monginsidi 64; steaks from 15,000Rp) A meat lover's paradise, with lots of steaks and grills to choose from.

**European Bakery & Restaurant** (Jl Raden Intan 35; pastries 2500Rp) For those in need of a sugar fix.

**Begadang I** (one of four in town) and **Sari Bundo** (dishes 6000Rp) are a couple of popular Padang restaurants near the markets on Jl Imam Bonjol.

## Shopping

Lampung produces weavings known as **ship cloths** (most feature ships), which use rich

reds and blues to create primitive-looking geometric designs. Another type is *kain tapis*, a ceremonial cloth elaborately embroidered with gold thread.

**Mulya Sari Artshop** (Jl Thamrin 85) A good collection of both ship cloths and *kain tapis* can be found here.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

The airport is 24km north of the city. There are flights every day to Jakarta through Merpati, Sriwijaya and Riau Air. Riau also flies to Palembang twice a week. Do note that Merpati flies to Halim Perdanakusuma Airport not Soekarno-Hatta airport. Arie Tour & Travel (see opposite) is a helpful travel agent.



**BUS**

There are two bus terminals in Bandarlampung. The city's sprawling Rajabasa bus terminal is 10km north of town and serves long-distance destinations. Panjang bus terminal is 6km southeast of town along the Lampung Bay road and serves local and provincial destinations.

From Rajabasa, buses run to Palembang (90,000Rp, 10 hours) and Bengkulu (120,000Rp, 16 hours), but most people heading north go to Bukitinggi (economy/air-con 190,000/300,000Rp, 22 hours).

You've got several bus options for getting to the Bakauheni pier, from which boats go to Java. If travelling from central Bandarlampung, the most convenient option is the Damri bus-boat combination ticket (business/executive 110,000/130,000Rp, eight to 10 hours). Damri buses leave from Bandarlampung's train station at 9am and 9pm, shuttling passengers to the Bakauheni pier, and then picking them up at Java's Merak pier for the final transfer to Jakarta's train station. Damri's office is in front of Bandarlampung's train station.

For other options, see the Bakauheni section (p474).

**TRAIN**

The train station is in the town centre at the northern mouth of Jl Raden Intan. Sumatra's only convenient rail service connects Bandarlampung with Palembang (economy/business 45,000/65,000, 10 hours) and then beyond to Lubuklinggau (economy/business 50,000/70,000Rp, 14 hours).

**Getting Around**

For the airport, taxis charge 80,000Rp to 100,000Rp for the ride to/from town.

All *opelet* pass through the basement of the Bandar Lampung Plaza on Jl Raden Intan and the standard fare around town is 2000Rp.

To reach the Rajabasa bus terminal, take a green *opelet* (2500Rp). To reach the Panjang bus terminal, take a green *opelet* to Sukaraja and then transfer to a red *opelet* (2500Rp).

**WAY KAMBAS NATIONAL PARK**

This national park is one of the oldest reserves in Indonesia. It occupies 1300 sq km of coastal lowland forest around Sungai Way Kambas on the east coast of Lampung. What little remains of the heavily logged forests is home to endangered species of elephants, rhinos and tigers.

It is believed that close to 200 wild Sumatran elephants (*Elephas maximus sumatrensis*) live in the park, but reliable estimates are uncertain and poaching and development pressures are constant. The Sumatran elephant is a subspecies of the Asian elephant and is found only in Sumatra and Kalimantan. Another rare but endemic creature in Way Kambas is the Sumatran rhino, the only two-horned rhino of the Asian species. Its hide is red in colour with a hairy coat.

The area around Way Kanan, a subdistrict of the park, is frequently visited by bird-watchers. Of the most remarkable species, white-winged duck and Storm's stork get the binoculars fogged up.

For some time an elephant training centre operated in the park and served as a major tourism draw. The centre was created to rehabilitate wild elephants that were threatening farmer's crops. It was hoped that training the elephants for jobs in the logging or tourism industry would resolve the conflicts created by diminishing wild lands. But the elephants, like many of the island's human population, had a hard time finding work and caring for a large population of animals proved too costly after the monetary crisis. As a result many of the elephants have been moved elsewhere and the ones who remain are used to carry tourists on jungle treks.

Also operating in the park is the Sumatra Rhino Sanctuary, where four rhinos formerly held in captivity are introduced to wild surroundings in the hope of successful breeding. The Sumatran rhino is a solitary animal and its habitat in the wild is so fractured that conservationists fear the species will die out without intervention. Breeding centres for rhinos are a controversial component of species-protection campaigns as they are expensive to maintain and have reported few successful births. For more information, visit the website of the **International Rhino Foundation** ([www.rhinos-irf.org](http://www.rhinos-irf.org)), one of the lead organisations involved with the centre and antipoaching patrols in the park.

For the average visitor not engaged in wild-life conservation, a visit to the park is a nice break from the concrete confines of Jakarta, but it's not a true wild safari. Most visitors are led through the forest on elephants or by canoes on the Sungai Way Kanan and surrounding waterways. The most commonly spotted animals on the tour include primates and

birds. Herds of elephants are seen here from time to time but sightings of the Sumatran tiger are extremely rare.

A day trip to Way Kambas costs around US\$50 per person for a minimum of two people and can be arranged through tour operators in Jakarta. Bandarlampung-based tour agents include Arie Tour & Travel (p470) and **Krakatau Lampung Wisata** (☎ 263 625, 486 666; Sheraton Lampung).

You could visit the park independently, but transport is limited and expensive. To strike out on your own, hire an *ojek* from Rajabasalama to Way Kanan, where you can hire a guide (50,000Rp to 100,000Rp) and arrange transport.

### Sleeping & Eating

Tourist facilities within the park are limited. About 13km from the entrance to the park is Way Kanan, where there is a collection of simple **guest houses** (100,000Rp) on the banks of Sungai Way Kanan. **Food stalls** nearby cater for day trippers and close after dark, so you'll need to bring food if you're staying the night.

### Getting There & Away

The entrance to Way Kambas is 110km from Bandarlampung.

There are buses from Bandarlampung's Rajabasa bus terminal to Jepara (25,000Rp, 2½ hours). They pass the entrance to Way Kambas, an arched gateway guarded by a stone elephant, in the village of Rajabasalama, 10km north of Jepara. Alternatively, you can catch a bus to Metro (10,000Rp, one hour) and then another to Rajabasalama (15,000Rp, 1½ hours).

From the park entrance, you can also hire a motorcycle to take you into the park and to pick you up.

### KALIANDA

☎ 0727

Kalianda is a quiet little town overlooking Teluk Lampung 30km north of the Bakauheni ferry terminal. The main reason for passing through is to visit Krakatau, but the town can also be used as an alternative base to Bandarlampung. Nearby are pretty white-sand beaches and simple fishing villages. Jakarta weekend refugees fed up with Bali have begun small migrations to Kalianda.

### Sights & Activities

Overlooking the town is **Gunung Rajabasa** (1281m), an easily scaleable volcano. Afterwards you can soak in the **hot springs** at Wartawan Beach, just beyond Canti. Beaches around Canti have relaxing sea breezes. An *opelet* to the beach costs 6000Rp.

Situated off the coast, **Pulau Sebuku** and **Pulau Sebesi** have snorkelling and swimming. Cargo boats leave from Canti to these islands, or you can charter a tour from the local fisherfolk.

To reach Krakatau, stop in at Hotel Beringin and ask about organised tours, or head down to the Canti harbour on weekends to pair up with local groups chartering boats.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Beringin** (☎ 322 008; Jl Kesuma Bangsa 75; d incl breakfast 55,000-75,000Rp) Close to the centre of town, this is an old Dutch villa with high ceilings and languid fans. The hotel has lots of information about local attractions and can arrange trips to nearby attractions.

**Kalianda Hotel** (☎ 322 392; d with fan/air-con 69,000/198,000Rp; 🚻) On the way into town from the highway, this is a more upmarket choice.

**Laguna Helau** (☎ 081 172 7638; Jl Sinar Laut 81, Ketang; cottages from 250,000-700,000Rp) Just outside town, this ocean-side resort has cottages inspired by stilt-frame fishing villages nestled between a private beach and palm-fringed lagoon. Larger bungalows have four bedrooms and kitchen facilities.

The **food stalls** that appear in Kalianda's town centre at night are the best places to eat.

### Getting There & Around

There are regular buses between Kalianda and Bandarlampung's Rajabasa bus terminal (20,000Rp, 1½ hours). Most buses don't run right into Kalianda, but drop you on the highway at the turn-off to town. From there, simply cross the road and wait for an *opelet* into town (3000Rp). There are a few direct buses from the Bakauheni ferry terminal to Kalianda (20,000Rp), but it's usually quicker to catch any north-bound bus and get off at the junction for town.

There are regular *opelet* from Kalianda to Canti (5000Rp) and along the road that rings Gunung Rajabasa via Gayam and Pasuruan.

There are also cargo boats from Canti to nearby Sebuku and Sebesi (15,000Rp). Canti can be reached by public bus.

## GUNUNG KRAKATAU

Krakatau may have come closer to destroying the planet than any other volcano in recent history, when it erupted in 1883. Tens of thousands were killed either by the resulting tidal wave or by the pyroclastic flows that crossed 40km of ocean to incinerate Sumatran coastal villages. Afterwards all that was left was a smouldering caldera where a cluster of uninhabited islands had once been. Perhaps peace had come, thought local villagers. But Krakatau, like all scrappy villains, re-awoke in 1927 and resulting eruptions built a new volcanic cone since christened Anak Krakatau (Child of Krakatau).

Tours to the island launch from West Java (see p123) or from Kalianda (p473) on the Sumatran coast. Organised tours typically cost US\$90 per person. Hotel Beringin (p473) in Kalianda can also organise tours for 650,000Rp.

You can also join up with weekenders chartering boats from Canti, a fishing village outside of Kalianda, or from Pulau Sebesi. Charters usually cost 500,000Rp to 1,000,000Rp for 15 people.

## BAKAUHENI

Bakauheni is the major ferry terminal between Java and southern Sumatra.

There are frequent ferries between Bakauheni and Merak, Java's westernmost port. A fast ferry runs between the two ports every 30 minutes from 7am to 5pm and costs 42,000Rp; the crossing takes 45 minutes. A slow ferry runs every 30 minutes, 24 hours a day and costs economy/business 15,000/18,000Rp; the crossing takes three hours.

The journey between the two islands sounds like a snap until you factor in land transport between the ferry terminals and

the major towns on either side. Bakauheni is 90km from Bandarlampung, a bus journey of about two hours. Buses to the port leave from the Bandarlampung town centre (see p472) or from the Panjang bus terminal (20,000Rp). A taxi to Bakauheni from Bandarlampung should cost 30,000Rp. In Java, the bus transfer from the port of Merak to Jakarta is another two-hour journey; see p115 for more information.

## BUKIT BARISAN SELATAN NATIONAL PARK

At the southern tip of Sumatra, this national park comprises one of the island's last stands of lowland forests. For this reason the World Wildlife Fund has ranked it as one of the planet's most biologically outstanding habitats and is working to conserve the park's remaining Sumatran rhinos and tigers. The park is also famous for many endemic bird species that prefer foothill climates, and several species of sea turtle that nest along the park's coastal zone.

Of the 365,000 hectares originally designated as protected, only 324,000 hectares remain untampered. The usual suspects are conversion: illegal logging and plantation conversion, and poachers are also at work.

Tourist infrastructure in the park is limited and most people visit on organised tours. The easiest access point into the park is through the town of Kota Agung, 80km west of Bandarlampung.

**Kantor Taman Nasional Bukit Barisan Selatan** (☎ 072 221 095; Jl Raya Terbaya, Kota Agung; 🕒 8am-4.30pm Mon-Thu, 8am-noon Fri) sells permits into the park (5000Rp) and can arrange guides and trekking information.

Less-accessible access points are Sukaraja, 20km west of Kota Agung, and Liwa, the northernmost entry way.

Kota Agung has several basic hotels and there is a camping ground near Sukaraja.

There are frequent buses from Bandarlampung to Kota Agung (10,000Rp).

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