

20th Edition!



Enjoying Indonesia 2024

A Guide for Travelers *and* Expats

Chris Soebroto

Enjoying Indonesia 2024

What readers have said:

"I wish this book had been available before I came to Indonesia many years ago. It would have eased my learning curve." David

"This book is simply...wow." Carol

"The book takes out a rather complex culture and simplifies it by bringing out important aspects and explaining them. This sets it apart from the other travel books." Roger

"Light and entertaining reading with serious substance nonetheless." Anna



Cover picture: [Gede Adhiputra](#) on [Unsplash](#)

This is the insider perspective you'll learn in this book:

"We walk slowly, not just to enjoy the scenery or the shop windows, but because walking slowly is less tiring. Foreigners always walk too fast for a tropical climate. For us it's hard to understand why."

"*Bakso* is so popular that it is also vended from pushcarts making their way through the neighborhoods. The vendor announces his presence tapping a spoon against an empty soup bowl. He is never short of customers."

"We have a range of 'yes' answers. The intonation and the body language' reveal if it is a real 'yes', a 'maybe' or a 'forget it'."

"We behave like this especially towards seniors. After all, it is 'not done' to challenge their opinion. So, it is far better to pretend than to create an unpleasant atmosphere at home or at work –and thus disrupt harmony."

"The captivating and hypnotizing metallic sound of the *gamelan* with its wooden drums pounding the rhythm and the heavy sound of the gongs resonating through the valley can be heard for hours until deep into the night."



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<http://indonesia-ok.com>

For Ibu Pertiwi



With thanks to my friends Roger Braden for suggesting I should write 'something about Indonesia' and Pak Eddy Supangkat for his help to make it happen.

Enjoying Indonesia 2024

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Volcano eruption 2006

Monitor [Indonesia.travel](https://indonesia.travel) for the latest visa information.

Please note: indonesiaevisas.com is *not* a government site and contains serious errors.

Welcome to Indonesia!

How many travel guides have been written on Indonesia? The justification to add yet another one, *this one*, is that *Enjoying Indonesia* looks at Indonesia from a different perspective. It's the perspective from within Indonesia, the personal perspective of the author who loves his country, but who is not blind to some of the less beautiful aspects of Indonesia. This guide therefore does not 'sweet talk' you to travel to Indonesia but attempts to make your stay in Indonesia a positive one through a better understanding of the behavior of Indonesians.

We hope that you will have time to read this book *before* setting out on your journey through Indonesia, instead of during your trip. Many tourists, including the adventurous backpackers seem to prefer traveling while reading. They read on the bus, on the train, while eating in a restaurant, in their hotel room and even when walking or shopping. Their (online) travel guide is always within reach. The recommendation we would like to make is to enjoy your trip by looking around, being conscious of what goes on around you, instead of 'experiencing' your environment from a book.

There is a lot to experience in Indonesia with much to enjoy and an awful lot to learn. Indonesia is known as the country with many ancient cultures, court dances and mysterious shadow puppet plays. Indonesia is the country of

Hindu and Buddhist temples dating back to the 9th century or even earlier. And the country is also famous for its breathtaking views of volcanoes, green rice paddies and buffaloes pulling heavy plows through the muddy fields. Too many foreign tourists equate Indonesia with Bali, our major tourist destination with its wide and relatively quiet beaches and its magical dances. The Kecak dance is probably the most well-known, but there are many other dances featuring the good lion Barong and the witch Rangda. They all come with the accompaniment of the enchanting whirling and cascading sounds of bamboo and metal xylophones, gongs, and bamboo flutes of the *gamelan* orchestra on tropical moonlit nights. With the silhouettes of palm trees in the dark of the night, one cannot help but feel the presence of spirits, witches and gods all around.

Yet, Indonesia is much more than Bali. To some, Indonesia conjures up the scent of incense, mysterious practices, dark backstreets and something we may all be looking for: our Shangri-La. Indonesia is all that and much more. You may find your Shangri-La here (most likely you will because there are several five-star Shangri-La hotels), the romance, the fiction, the dream. You may also find the mysticism and the mystery associated with the Far East. But whatever you see and experience, Indonesia is a rapidly developing country. Fortunately, we still have rice paddies but over half of the population now lives in urban centers. We have our young democracy, but also our deep social, religious, and ethnic divides. We have mysticism, but also boast WOOSH, our

very first high-speed train connecting Jakarta and Bandung. Just for starters!

Indonesia suffered heavily during the Asian monetary crisis of 1997. It precipitated the fall of the 32 years long suppressive Soeharto regime in 1998, finally signaling the entry of Indonesia to the brotherhood of democratic nations.

Yes, Indonesia is all of that and much more. Looking at the economy, Indonesia remains one of the economic 'powerhouses' in the region. Its international standing is growing. Meanwhile in 2024's general elections, 60 percent of voters trusted Prabowo Subianto to be their next president, as popular president Joko 'Jokowi' Widodo will step down after two terms in office.

President Jokowi offered a much-needed break from the past, thanks to his support for ethnic and religious minorities. His large-scale infrastructure improvements have made traveling the country much more comfortable.

Through *Enjoying Indonesia*, you will discover that Indonesia is very much an OK country, especially so because Indonesians are easygoing and amicable people, and very interested to know you.

Happy reading,
Happy traveling,
Welcome to Indonesia!



Shocks

Traveling to an unknown country is exciting and adventurous. It is definitely one of the reasons why we want to travel in the first place. Watching documentaries and adventure programs on our screens only adds to the itch to go and see for oneself. But, being jetted to a strange society, being inside the TV documentary as it were, may expose the traveler to a phenomenon called culture shock. It is just that simple; after arriving in the new cultural environment one may experience a shock, because immersion into a foreign culture leaves you without many of the accepted social rules and regulations of one's own culture. It's impossible to switch off the documentary because we are right inside it. This is reality and we must find ways to cope with a strange language, with people who behave differently, and with sights, smells and sounds that are unfamiliar. We must adjust to food that is different. Everything is different, even the humor. It may be exciting, but eventually, it can become overwhelming, and you may feel shocked. Culture shock is more than confusion. It usually comes in stages. The worst stage is the one where the visitor completely rejects the culture and can only see its negative sides.

There are short courses to prepare travelers to understand the most important aspects of the foreign culture and to reduce culture shock as much as possible. There are also

books on preventing culture shock. How about Indonesia? Not everything is romantic and not everything is beautiful. Traveling through Indonesia, foreign tourists may begin to suffer culture shock after a week or two.

With so many new impressions to process, it is not surprising if culture shock occurs. The foreign traveler complains about the food and is prone to make an issue out of even the most insignificant mishaps. He or she may have more than enough of the sight of another group of vendors offering their trinkets or snacks. He is sick and tired of having to admire yet another temple.

There are many opportunities to experience culture shock in Indonesia. But there are even more opportunities to appreciate and value the many new experiences without shock. In fact, there are so many of these, that many visitors, after returning home, experience culture shock right in their hometown. Some or many of the aspects in their own culture suddenly may seem odd or no longer relevant –at least for a while. This phenomenon is known as re-entry shock or reversed culture shock. For most people reversed culture shock happens unexpectedly. Overcoming it may be more difficult than it seems. In bad cases, the traveler may need up to six months or longer to re-adjust to the situation at home and to lose the acute sense of yearning to be back in Indonesia.

The best way to prevent both forms of culture shock is to be aware that it may hit, and to be prepared. Read as much as you can before setting off on your trip. This book, by going into some key aspects of the behavior of Indonesians, hopes to contribute to make your stay in Indonesia a very positive and

enjoyable one. Enjoyment comes with understanding and understanding comes with communicating. The Indonesian language or *Bahasa Indonesia* is what most Indonesians use to communicate. How to join our communications? For as long as you are not fluent in Indonesian, use any language and use your hands and feet to convey a message. And smile! Many doors will open almost immediately!

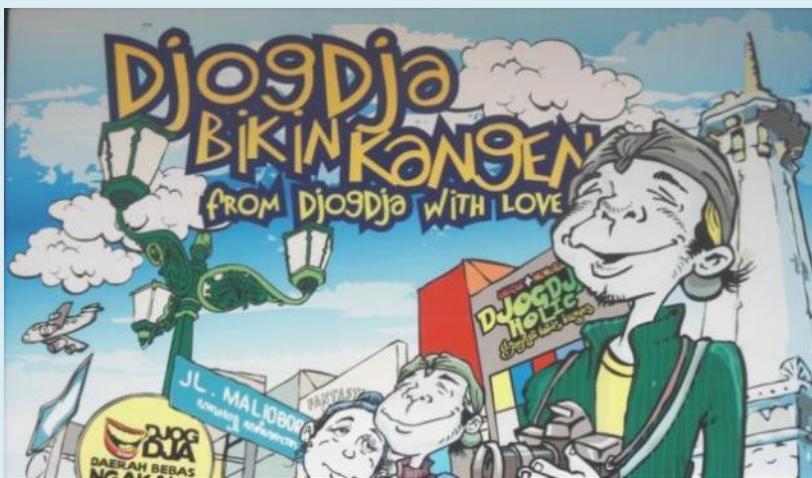


On *Bahasa Indonesia*

Indonesia is a huge country. With over 270 million inhabitants it's the fourth most populous country after China, India, and the USA. They have more than 18,000 islands to live on, but in fact 'only' 6,000 are inhabited. So, most of the Indonesian archipelago is empty, simply because these islands are too small or lack the required resources to sustain human life.

Nevertheless, having lived on islands, big and small for more than a thousand years, it is easy to understand that the 700 or so different ethnic groups developed their cultures in different ways. With cultures come languages. Indonesia today has some 600 different languages, not even counting the many local dialects. Some languages are spoken in a very small area only: just a few municipalities or villages. With such a diverse linguistic palette, it would be unattainable to create anything that resembles a national identity if there would be no *lingua franca* or a national language. That language is called Indonesian or *Bahasa Indonesia*. The promotion of *Bahasa Indonesia* as the national language became an important aspect of the struggle for independence in the 1940's. The origins of the Indonesian language lie not only in Sumatra, but also in Malaysia, where until this day it is called Malay. Malay and Indonesian have the same roots and with some effort Malaysians and Indonesians can understand each other speaking their own languages. Yet, Malay and *Bahasa Indonesia* quickly develop in different ways.

Long before the struggle for independence in 1945, merchants and seafarers, sailing through Southeast Asia used Malay as the language to communicate with people throughout what are now Malaysia, Sarawak, Singapore and Indonesia. For many years Malay was also the language, without much of a grammar, used by the Dutch colonizers to communicate with their indigenous servants. They called it *Passarmaleis*, the Malay used in the markets. Meanwhile, during colonial times, the accepted language used by anyone who aspired to be someone was Dutch. However, for the growing group of intellectuals who envisioned a free Indonesia, Dutch as the *lingua franca* was unacceptable. Instead, they began developing *Passarmaleis* into a real language. Almost all Indonesians today speak *Bahasa Indonesia*.



Yet, there are isolated rural communities where the residents still only speak their local language, and that applies even more so to women than to men.

One thing that is very easy to understand about our language is how to make a plural. We simply double the noun. One automobile is *mobil*. Automobiles are *mobil-mobil*. Plurals are usually written by adding a ² after the noun: *mobil²*. Many automobiles are *banyak mobil-mobil*.

It is said that *Bahasa Indonesia* is easy to learn, far easier than English. That is probably true, given that many tourists are quite capable of expressing themselves with simple sentences after only a few days. On the other hand, many language students become really confused when they try to master the intricacies of grammar. Although Indonesian has no conjugations such as in most European languages, the system of adding something in front of and behind the root words to make them into nouns, verbs and tenses requires some rewiring in the brain. Here are a few examples of root words and how they can change to mean something completely different.

<i>Main</i>	: play
<i>Main-main</i>	: kidding
<i>Mainan</i>	: toy
<i>Permainan</i>	: game
<i>Pemain</i>	: player
<i>Bermain</i>	: to play, playing
<i>Dimainkan</i>	: played, showing (a play, movie)

Dipermainkan : used (especially in the sense of a person tricked into doing something -negative)

Memainkan : playing (an instrument)

Mempermainkan: using someone (negative)

Malu : shy/shame

Malu-malu : pretending to be shy

Memalukan : shameful, making to feel ashamed

Dipermalukan : made to feel shameful

Kemaluan : genitals

Pemalu : a shy person

Pukul : beat

Memukul : to beat, beating

Memukulkan : (someone) beating something as requested/
told

Memukuli : to beat something/someone

Dipukuli : having been beaten (repeatedly) by some-
thing/ someone on purpose

Dipukul : having been beaten on purpose

Terpukul : having been beaten accidentally, feeling
depressed

Pemukul : someone who beats, tool to beat

Tiba : to arrive

Tiba-tiba : suddenly

Here and there in this book, you will find some *Bahasa Indonesia*. The pronunciation differs from English. Here is a short guide to pronunciation:

- A : pronounced as in **are**
- C : is pronounced as in **ch**atter
- G : is pronounced like **g**ood
- I : is pronounced like **i**s
- J : sounds like in **j**azz
- K : at the end of a word is not pronounced, instead the vowel preceding it is cut short
- Y : is pronounced as in **y**ogurt

Two vowels are pronounced individually: *main* (play) is pronounced as mah-in, and not as the English main.

When you pick up some Indonesian, you will soon notice a feature that is part humorous, part discomfoting: the many abbreviations we use. It is said that the habit of combining words into abbreviations originates from the military. The armed forces have played a decisive role in Indonesia's freedom struggle and enjoyed vast popularity and admiration during the early years of the Republic. The armed forces also obtained seats in government. Indonesia's first two presidents, Soekarno and Soeharto relied heavily on the military to consolidate and maintain power. They organized for the military to be present in all sectors of society, including commerce and the councils of all municipalities. Linguists deplore that military lingo (not to mention military culture) has penetrated into the language to such a wide extent. Some even say that the use of so many abbreviations is creating a language within a language. Here are a few of the most common abbreviations you may encounter while traveling through Indonesia.

Angkot	: <i>Angkutan Kota</i> (public transportation)
Bandara	: <i>Bandar Udara</i> (airport)
Depkes	: <i>Departemen Kesehatan</i> (ministry of health)
Jubir	: <i>Juru bicara</i> (spokesperson)
Kapolda	: <i>Kepala Polisi Daerah</i> (Regional Police Chief)
Karhutla	: <i>Kebakaran Hutan dan Lahan</i> (the illegal annual burning of forests and fields)
Lalin	: <i>Lalu lintas</i> (traffic)
Mayjen	: <i>Mayor Jenderal</i> (major general)
Nasgor	: <i>Nasi goreng</i> (fried rice)
Pemkot	: <i>Pemerintah Kota</i> (municipal government)

That's it. So, now that you know all this, nothing can go wrong. Fasten your seatbelts, switch off your electronic devices, the cabin crew will now collect the headsets. It's time to land.



First Impressions

Wether your first port of call in Indonesia is Medan, Jakarta or Bali, we hope you'll be impressed with the recently upgraded airport terminals and the efficiency of Immigration and baggage handling. All the old terminals have been replaced with shiny glass and steel constructions, such as Jakarta's Soekarno-Hatta US\$ 560 million Terminal 3. It is unlikely to win any awards for clear signage, but it is beautiful.



Clearing Customs is a smooth operation, unless you bring arms, pornography (Playboy magazine equals pornography), or drugs. All these are criminal offenses. Drug offenses are likely to be honored with capital punishment. The courts are notorious for the death sentences they pass out to drug traffickers.

The Custom Declaration Form you filled out online may be checked and you are required to put your bags through an X-ray machine again.

From Medan, Bali and Jakarta, many domestic airlines will fly you to your final destination. Jakarta has a second (domestic) airport called Halim Perdanakusuma in the city of Bekasi, east of the capital. The drive between Soekarno-Hatta and Halim may take at least two hours due to Jakarta's notorious gridlock. The new airport train will eventually connect Soekarno-Hatta with the city of Bekasi.

If nobody is there to meet you at the airport, taxi (and in Jakarta, buses too) will take you downtown or (in Bali) to the hotels and resorts. There are many taxis available. But if you are on a first visit to Indonesia it is recommended to rent a Blue Bird (or Silver Bird or Black Bird) Taxi. By local standards these are not cheap, but they are highly reliable. The fare includes a mandatory airport surcharge and the toll fees.

When your luggage is being loaded into the taxi, some unsolicited help may show up out of nowhere to arrange the suitcases inside the trunk. This illegal help is not for free. So, if

you don't want to be assisted, be firm and tell the person to keep his hands off your stuff.



Indonesia's currency: Rupiah

That was that. Now inside the taxi, you are whisked off the airport. Don't worry if the taxi is overtaken from the left, or on the shoulder, by a speeding bus or truck. And don't be surprised if your driver does the same. This is a cultural aspect; we like to use road space effectively and that includes the shoulders that are empty most of the time. What a waste of good tarmac! Don't be surprised either to find mopeds rushing along the toll road, or a cyclist leisurely pedaling to or from work and even people crossing the road on foot.

In Jakarta, while driving through a maze of overpasses, there is little indication that you are covering the first kilometers in a country that first became known to the West as the Spice Islands, its spices sought after by Portugal and Holland, eventually resulting in the colonization of swathes of current Indonesia by the Dutch and, briefly, by the British. Indonesia was then called the Dutch East Indies. Only few people know that long before the first Europeans set foot on Indonesian soil, our archipelago had been the seat of several ancient kingdoms.

The first accounts about highly developed civilizations in what is now Indonesia are from Chinese records. The earliest mention diplomatic ties between China and kings in the island of Java in the second century AD. Indonesia was once part of the huge kingdom of Sri Wijaya, which in the seventh century extended all the way to Burma and Siam (now Thailand). Other ancient kingdoms include Majapahit (its kings reigning from 1293 to 1520), Mataram, and many more. The small Buddhist kingdom of Sailendra holds the credit for building the famous Borobudur stupa around 800. At the same time the competing kingdom of Boko, a Hindu relative of King Sailendra, built the Prambanan temple complex at the village of Prambanan, just outside Jogjakarta.

The ancient kingdoms were not limited to Java. While touring the archipelago, you will certainly come across artifacts of kingdoms in Sumatra, Bali, Sulawesi, Maluku, and the Nusa Tenggara islands.

Returning to this day and age, in Jakarta and other cities you will soon see the artifacts of the modern kingdom of economics; tall office buildings, banks, shopping malls and condos dominating the skyline. Is this a developing country, you may wonder? Yes, Indonesia is developing: even during the Covid-19 crisis our annual economic growth continued to hover upward of five percent.



With an estimated 10 to 15 million legal and illegal inhabitants, Jakarta is Indonesia's largest and heavily over-populated city. Jakartans, hailing from all corners of the Indonesian archipelago, don't exactly live in Jakarta, but in Greater Jakarta, with its Indonesian acronym known as Jabodetabek

which includes the municipalities of *Jakarta*, *Bogor*, *Depok*, *Tangerang* and *Bekasi*. Cruising the streets of Jakarta with its noise, gridlock, and pollution, you may ask yourself why people feel attracted to such a city. The answer is that most Jakartans came here from smaller towns or from rural areas in search of a better living. It is obvious that all Jakartans work, although probably not in the kind of jobs they dreamt of when imagining life in the big city. They have an income, but they must work very hard to earn it. But all in all, Jakarta's poverty rate has dropped to 3.6 percent (the national rate is just below 10 percent).

All those Jakartans have turned the city into the world's fastest sinking city (some 10 centimeters annually), largely because of the over-extraction of groundwater. In addition, traffic and industry make Jakarta one of the world's most polluted cities. Jakarta is beyond repair, one might say. So much so, that in 2019 the government decided to build a new capital, named IKN (short for National Capital) [Nusantara, in East Kalimantan](#). Construction started July 2022.

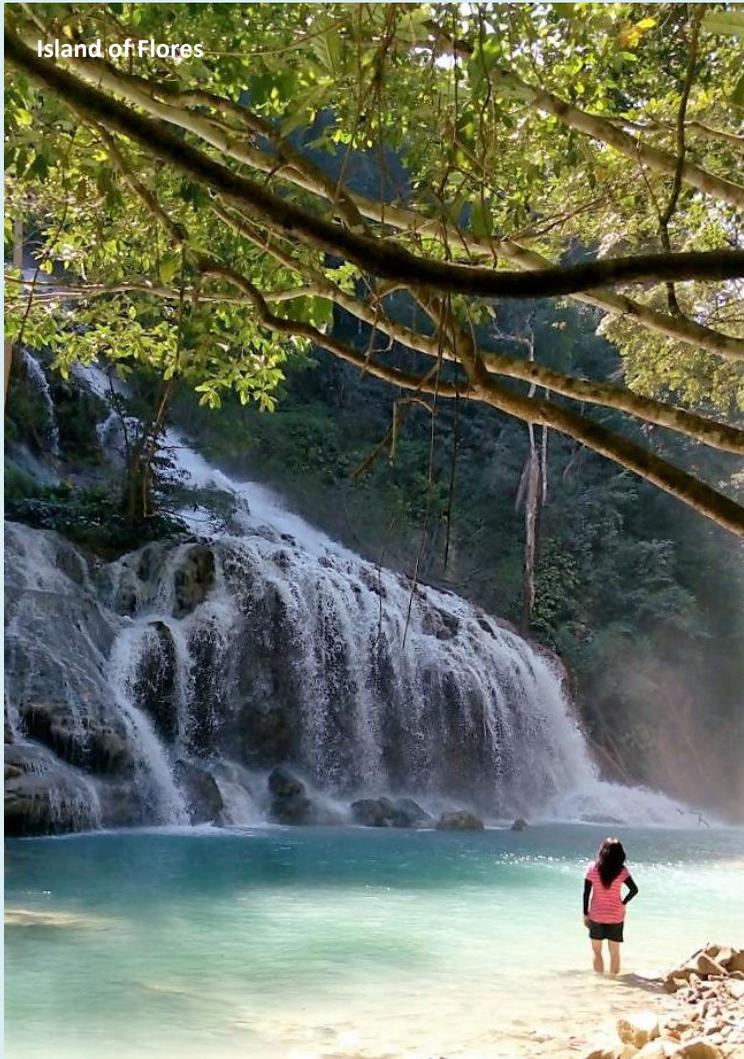
Being the melting pot of all that makes up Indonesia, our capital city offers anything from culture to crime. The former will allow any visitor or affluent resident to enjoy every day in one of Jakarta's many theaters and numerous other attractions. The latter is best to be avoided. Therefore, venture outside your hotel only with a trusted person who knows the city inside and out.



Eventually you will arrive at your hotel. From there everything is easy. Hotel staff are friendly, efficient and you will be in your room in no time. If you wish to tip the bellboy, you may do so, but it is not a requirement. In the cheaper hotels the bellboy will not even expect a tip.

To get in touch with the outside world most hotels, coffee shops and shopping malls offer wireless connectivity. Or, consider purchasing a local portable Wi-Fi router. All providers offer a variety of modems and internet data plans. The shop assistant will be happy to register the sim card for you, if needed. All you need to do is to plug and surf. So, now is the time to take it easy and to get rid of your jet lag and to

get used to the new environment, the (tropical) climate and the food. Let's address the climate first.



Enjoying Indonesia 2024

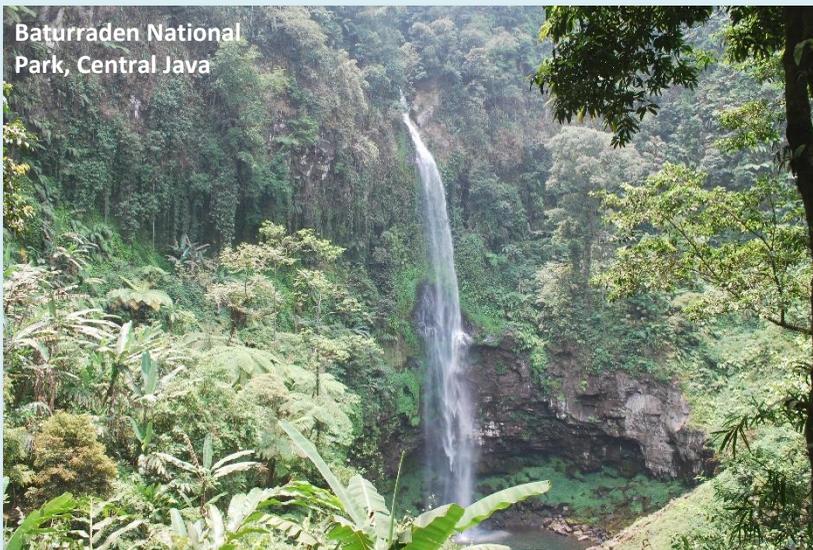
Climate

While resource books on Indonesia don't seem to be able to agree on the exact number of islands the country is made of, they all agree that it must be at least some 17,000¹ and that Indonesia's climate is tropical with two distinct seasons or monsoons: the dry season and the rainy season. A tropical climate means high temperatures throughout the year and high humidity levels. What this technical language means is that, at sea level, you should count on daytime temperatures of up to 35 degrees Celsius all year. At higher elevations temperatures drop accordingly. Locations like Prapat in Sumatra and Bogor, Puncak Pass, Bandung, Wonosobo, Kaliurang, Tretes, Batu, and Malang on the island of Java are well known for their cool climates. They are popular weekend resort areas for the residents who live in the hot lowlands cities.

The high daytime temperatures and humidity make walking a tiring activity. Sunbathing, so popular during the summer season in moderate climate zones in Europe, Australia and the Americas borders on self-destruction in the tropics. You will soon discover that Indonesians hate to walk, that they only walk outdoors in the early morning or in the cooler

¹ Satellite imaging has shown that the Indonesian archipelago includes 18,108 islands.

evenings, only for short distances and only in the shadow. No Indonesian in his or her right mind will dress in swimming gear and lie down in the sun on the beach or near a swimming pool. It will take only five minutes or so to get some serious sunburn. Indonesians, and many other Asians, value a light complexion. This is to indicate that they don't have to expose their body to the heat of the sun, such as farmers and laborers.



Foreign tourists, on the other hand, like to seize the opportunity to catch every ray of sun and they also like to walk long distances, just as they would in their home countries. Frequent offers from *becak* and *ojek* drivers to take a ride with them can be explained as an attempt to make some money on the part of these drivers, but also because they can't make

sense of this strange habit of recreational walking during the heat of the day.

If you really must get that valuable tan, be very careful. Don't lie in the sun for more than ten minutes at a time and do so only with a very good sunscreen. Between 10 AM and 4 PM the sun is too strong, so you might as well schedule those hours to do some shopping or sightseeing.

At any time of the year you can dress in light clothes, with cotton as the best choice to absorb perspiration. Sunglasses come in very handy too.

Although it may rain sporadically during the dry season, most of the rain falls during the five- or six-months' rainy season. Rainfall varies from some drizzle to heavy downpours causing flooding. Contrary to some beliefs, these downpours don't last only half an hour. More commonly they last for several hours, accompanied by lightning and heavy wind gusts. Small tornadoes do now occur. When it rains, umbrellas will not keep you dry; fine spray will soak you up to your eyebrows. The best strategy, when you are caught in a rainstorm is to take shelter and wait until it's all over. Children approach rain differently. They will jump at the occasion of running through the rain or to go swimming in the pools of rain in the streets. In some locations in Indonesia, such as in the city of Bogor and in the rain forests on the islands of Sumatra, Kalimantan and Papua it rains almost every day all year around.

In the more arid eastern provinces of Indonesia, east from the island of Bali, the dry season lasts longer. The islands

of Sumbawa, Sumba, Timor and Flores have a rainy season that may last only two or three months.

Indoors, the outside heat is tempered by air conditioning or fans. It is often said that air conditioning has made a significant contribution to Asia's economic boom in the 1970s and '80s, allowing productivity to jump dramatically and allowing people to work longer hours without getting exhausted. Maybe that is why the siesta in Indonesia's and in all of Asia's cities is definitely a thing of the past. But obviously, air conditioning is only available inside buildings, cars and trains and that means that when you go outdoors, you will be exposed to rapid and frequent temperature changes of up to ten degrees Celsius, sometimes even more. These rapid changes may be why you easily catch a cold in a tropical climate. As far as you can influence the air conditioning in your hotel room or in your house it may be worthwhile to set it at between 25 and 28 degrees Celsius, instead of 17 degrees.

The bigger picture about Indonesia's climate is that it is heating up rapidly and becoming more extreme. Daytime and nighttime temperatures regularly break records. Where just a few years ago it rarely got any warmer than 29⁰ C, now 32⁰ C may be the norm. During the dry season, when nights are coldest, a record low of -11⁰ C was recorded in Dieng in 2019.

Indonesia, one of the world's main coal exporting countries, is a main contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions. Unfortunately, most Indonesians are unaware of

the climate problem. And the central government only now is preparing policies to become carbon neutral. If only in 2060.



Indonesia's hot and humid tropical climate is very conducive to a range of life forms, including some insects and bugs that you may not want to hear about, but that's what we'll talk about anyway. Briefly.

Bugs and Health

Some travelers who come to tropical countries for the first time, are a bit apprehensive to step off the plane and into the unknown. It's the fear of snakes, tarantulas, crocodiles, and creepy crawlies that make them wonder why they wanted to come here in the first place. For those and everybody else there's good news. Most snakes in Indonesia's tourist areas and inner cities have been unseen for decades. Your tropical expedition will not become more adventurous than with encounters of cockroaches, ants, flies, and mosquitoes.

Cockroaches love people, or at least the mess that people create in dark cupboards and other storage spaces. Don't be afraid to open the cupboards, also in your hotel room and listen for any rustling sound that signals the presence of cockroaches. Kill them with one of the many insecticides and clean cupboards and other storage spaces regularly.

Flies are a daily nuisance in areas with a lot of trash and decay and a lack of sanitation. The solution is to keep your environment clean and, if you are a resident, to check that your household staff dispose of trash in an adequate manner, keep food covered and clean the kitchen area several times a day. During the first few weeks in Indonesia, the sight of a fly perched on your coffee cup may send the shivers up your spine, but eventually you will get used to it. A practical way to protect drinks from being shared with flies is to cover the cups

or glasses. Cup covers (*tutup gelas*) are widely available in stores and supermarkets.

Mosquitoes thrive in most regions, especially shortly before the rainy season. This is the time when Dengue Fever occurs, transferred by a little mosquito with black and white stripes on its body. In Indonesian Dengue Fever is known as *Demam Berdarah* (literally: bleeding fever), abbreviated to *DB*. It used to be a fatal one, until a treatment was developed. Children are especially susceptible to Dengue Fever, but if they are taken to a doctor soon, the treatment is simple, affordable, and effective. These days more and more adults also get Dengue Fever. Symptoms of *Demam Berdarah* are headache, dizziness, loss of appetite followed by fever and painful joints. The mosquito carrying Dengue Fever usually strikes during the afternoons when many children play outside.

A different, larger kind of mosquito may give you malaria. Humanity is gradually losing the battle against malaria. In our country, only West and East Java are still free from malaria. Before leaving home, your physician will have encouraged you to take a malaria prophylaxis. That will certainly help, but it is not foolproof, unfortunately. In addition to your medicines, it is strongly recommended, when you spot mosquitoes of any type or size in the hotel or in the house, to use mosquito repellent. A very effective repellent, available in Indonesia is sold under the brand name Soffell, but there are many more. Some skin types may be sensitive to such creams.

An old fashioned way to keep mosquitoes away is by burning coils. Be careful with these as they contain chemicals

that may hurt you more than the mosquitoes. A better alternative is to use an electric repellent.

The most environmentally friendly and entertaining mosquito hunters are *cicak*, little geckos crawling along the walls and ceilings of homes, palaces, hotels and shacks. No need to be afraid of them, they are more afraid of us, people. Please don't eradicate them!

Talking about geckos is only a step away from talking about dinosaurs. Although dinosaurs are also extinct in Indonesia, you may encounter some animals that seem to have escaped from Jurassic Park after all. One of them is a fearsome looking but very shy insect eating creature, known as *tokek*. It is usually heard rather than seen, especially during the evening and night. The sound it makes gave it its name: "to-keeeeh" it calls, with a very low '-keh' sound. There is a belief that one can make a wish if the *tokek* calls seven times (not more and not less). *Tokek* usually hide under roofs, or in trees.

Centipedes too are among the many bugs that call Indonesia home. They even manage to live in urban environments. We also have furry caterpillars. Indonesians are very careful to avoid both species as they cause fiery itches on contact with the skin. Fortunately, caterpillars eventually become beautiful butterflies that you will certainly enjoy.

Ants in different colors and sizes will be impossible to avoid. Ants in tropical climates are omnipresent: in the sugar pot, in your bed, on the porch, everywhere. Outnumbered by



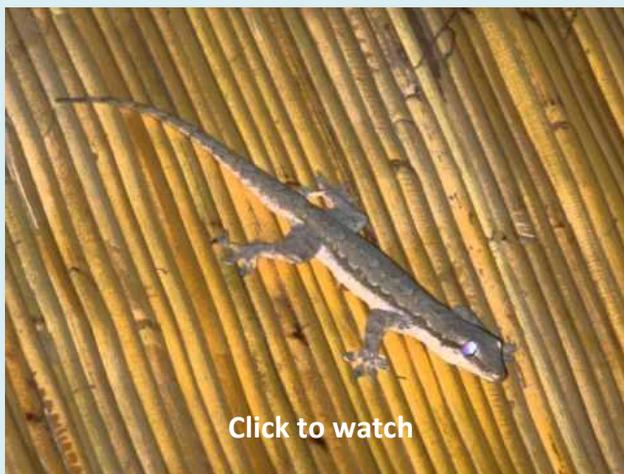
ants Indonesians have developed a way to live side by side and usually in peaceful co-existence. The point is that ants are very clean little animals. If you had time to study their behavior more closely they would even manage to create a feeling of empathy. Look at those little ones working and working for the benefit of their community that lies hidden under a stone or inside the wall. They don't ask why, and they never complain about their workload. In some respects, they are like computers: working around the clock if they must.

The biggest species, the black ants are the friendliest. Would it be because one can almost see their eyes? Do they have eyes? Children like to play with them sometimes, and these big black ants never bite.

The smaller ants, such as the red ones and the very tiny, almost translucent ants are the bad guys. They like to bite, so keep your distance (that may be the essence of peaceful co-existence anyway).

Ants will not give you any health problems. Their bite only itches for a short while. You may get rid of ants by keeping all the sweet stuff and other food (sugar, chocolates, cookies, honey, drinks, meat, and bread) in tightly closed containers and inside the fridge. Even so, you'll be amazed to see that your definition of tightly closed may mean 'open house' by ants' standards.

If you find ants in your bed, simply sweep them out. Indonesians always have a sweep (*sapu lidi*) in the bedroom, and it is customary to sweep the bed before we switch off the light (*if* we do so at all) and enjoy a long and reinvigorating sleep, free of ants.



For expatriates, it is good to know that termites are called *rayap*. They are said to be fond of wood, doorposts, windowsills and your antique furniture. Others say it is not termites, but a different bug that does so. Whatever the case may be, a whole industry has developed to eradicate *rayap*. What the entrepreneurs have in common is that the treatment is expensive and needs to be repeated several times for the best effect.

While insects can sometimes be heard eating away the wood in the house, you will usually detect their presence only when it is too late –when small piles of what looks like dust saw show up on the floor around wood furniture. The trick to keep your wood in good shape is to prevent them from entering the house. The only prevention you have in that respect is to keep a sharp look at the different kinds of insects marching up and down your premises. Alternatively, the wood should be kept in good order by treating it with a good varnish or oil. Several kinds of woods are termite proof, but these are very rare these days and therefore very costly.

When buying wooden handicrafts, pay attention to any tiny round holes in the wood. If you identify them, it is almost certain that the wood is infected with a wood nibbling creature. Dealing with these insects is rather easy. Put the article in the freezer for 24 or 48 hours. That will teach them once and for all! However, it may require quite a freezer to treat the termite-infested sofa you bought in Indonesia.

Other life forms that may bother you when you stay for a long time are fungi. They love to grow in places on the human body where it is dark and humid, such as between the toes.

Fortunately, drugstores have many products that take care of them effectively.

Belly problems and diarrhea are a common occurrence in tropical environments and on long trips. Contrary to popular belief, food is not the major and not the only culprit of diarrhea. The rapid climate change and jet lag are contributors too. That is one of the reasons why it is best to take it easy for one or two days after arrival, and preferably a bit longer. Most air travelers need at least a week to recover from jet lag and approximately three months to get used to the climate.

After several weeks in Indonesia, or other tropical country, you may have attracted intestinal worms. No need to worry: go to any drugstore and buy *Combantrin*. It's an effective treatment to prevent or cure intestinal parasites. One dose will keep you free from worms for three months.

If you need a doctor or a dentist, it is best to visit a well-equipped hospital or a private clinic. Public village or neighborhood clinics (*Puskesmas*) or health posts (*Posyandu*) are not always well equipped, and doctors and nurses will probably not speak English. Common painkillers and antibiotics are the standard prescription for most doctors. Indonesia has a growing number of hospitals of international standard in Jakarta, Surabaya, Jogjakarta, and Bali. The same applies to dentists; there are many dentists, especially in the major cities, whose professionalism and equipment match that of their *amices* in the more developed countries.

Expenses for healthcare in Indonesia are generally many times lower than abroad. If you need new glasses, for example, you might as well bring your prescription and order

the frame and glasses in Indonesia. It's probably several hundreds of Euros or Dollars cheaper than at home.

Things that live in the water may give you different health problems again. So, don't drink water from the tap anywhere. Only a few hotels boast that their tap water meets international standards and is safe to drink, but even then: be careful. Otherwise, buy bottled mineral water. It is safe for consumption and fortunately it is available in the most remote villages and almost at every street corner. There are four or five local brands. In several supermarkets, you may also encounter imported mineral water, which is much more expensive. Anyhow, drink plenty of water, tea or soft drinks to avoid dehydration.

Preparing for the trip to Indonesia, your physician may convince you to take a shot against typhoid. That makes sense. Typhoid in Indonesia is a common disease. Patients attract it, among others, through contaminated water. Typhoid is so common, that nobody panics when the doctor diagnoses it. The treatment consists of a simple diet, medication and at least one week of bed rest.

Tuberculosis is still endemic in many areas, particularly among residents of poor urban neighborhoods and in villages. Unless your health is weak, and you plan to stay in TBC endemic areas for extended periods, you will have little if anything to fear.

So, don't worry too much about getting sick in the tropics. It will most likely not get any worse than catching a cold

or having some belly problems. As mentioned previously, going in and out of air-conditioned rooms is the perfect recipe to be coughing and sneezing after a day or two. A cold and flu are nothing new to us in Indonesia.

What is different is how we experience colds and other illnesses. We talk about *masuk angin*, which means that ‘wind’ or air has entered our system. A certain form of *masuk angin* can be life threatening, especially when the ‘wind’ cannot leave the body. Symptoms can be a swollen stomach, inability to fart or difficulty to breathe. The treatment that is often effective is to lie down on the back and to tap on the left side of the belly, generating a fart -or to have a good massage.



While in the West you would say that you have the flu, Indonesians want to be more specific and you may hear the expression *panas dalam*, which means that the fever is felt inside the body, while the skin temperature reads normal. Whatever the case, the preferred medication for *masuk angin* and *panas dalam* is *kerok*. The treatment requires an old coin and tiger balm and goes as follows. The patient calls the assistance of one of the house members and lies down on a bed or on a mat, back uncovered. The assistant lightly rubs an ample amount of balm onto the patient's shoulders and back. Then he or she uses the coin to rub away from the spine along the contours of the ribs. A good *kerok* may take half an hour or longer. The rubbing causes red or almost black stripes to emerge immediately. The darker the stripes the more *angin* is said to have escaped. After the treatment, all patients will feel some relief already and the next day the cold or the flu will have subsided considerably.

Indonesians, when they feel sick, will often blame the blood circulation for their condition. It may surprise the westerner to hear something like: "my blood circulation (*peredaran darah*) is not balanced" and an added statement that the blood pressure has gone up or is low or that the blood is too thick to run well.

Should you travel through Indonesia with an old back pain or if you suffer from migraine, it is a good idea to ask around to find a good masseur or *tukang pijat*. A professional massage or *pijat* will be able to cure a variety of ailments, new or old. The treatment may require several sessions to be effective. There are as many *pijat* treatments as there are

masseurs. Some will massage with their hands; others will not even touch you. Nevertheless, even the latter will be able to make their patients scream with pain when they 'hit' the spot that causes the health problem. Hotels often advertise masseurs to relieve fatigue after a long day of trekking or shopping. On the beaches of Bali, you will find masseurs who have an excellent track record of rejuvenating exhausted tourists.

Dukun belong to a different category of traditional healers. There are many good *dukun*,_but also some that are not good. Many have psychic powers, like some of the masseurs. Their treatment may consist of meditation or medicines or a combination thereof. Traditional, often costly, Chinese medicines also have an esteemed place in the medical treatment of Indonesian patients. In drugstores and in specialized Chinese drugstores you will find a wide choice of ointments, powders, and solutions, readymade or to be prepared at home. Most of the ingredients of Chinese medicines consist of herbs, dried leaves, plant roots, and dried mushrooms, but also parts of animals, such as snakes, and worms.

Bugs, crickets, ants, worms, snakes, and dogs are valued items on the menu or as ingredients for medicines in several countries. To the relief of many, in Indonesia you will find more regular and very tasty fare.



Kerok relieves flu

Food

Indonesian food is often compared to Thai or Malaysian food and in general it's a feast that dazzles the senses with its different colors, smells and flavors, all in one meal. Many dishes are prepared with chili and Indonesian food is therefore generally spicy. However, there are numerous local variations on this theme and more and more restaurants, catering to the foreign public (especially in Jakarta and Bali) adapt their recipes to the taste of their clientele.

The staple food in most of Indonesia is rice. It's a challenge to produce enough rice to keep up with the growing population, even though the most fertile irrigated rice fields (*sawah*) yield up to three harvests a year. One of the causes is that rice production is still an occupation of small farmers, who till the fields manually, or with buffaloes or at best with mini tractors. A second reason is that more and more fertile fields are turned into suburbs and industrial zones.

The shortage of homegrown rice is addressed through imports from countries like Thailand and Viet Nam. Rice is so important in our lives that we have four words to describe its different stages; *padi* is rice that grows in the field, while it becomes *gabah* after the harvest. After husking we call it *beras*. Cooked and ready to eat it is *nasi*.

Only in the more arid regions in the east of the archipelago rice is replaced with maize or tubers. The traditional breakfast is fried rice (*nasi goreng*), often with a

fried egg and chili (*sambal* or *cabe*) and a piece of tasty shrimp crackers (*krupuk*). Alternatively, there is steamed rice with one or more side dishes, either meat, fish or vegetables, left over from the previous day. Other typically Indonesian breakfasts are chicken porridge (*bubur ayam*) or a sweet porridge of soybeans (*bubur kacang hijau*).

Generally, we like our food fried; that goes very nicely with the steamed rice. We also like our drinks very sweet. So now you will understand why the most essential food items are always listed as rice, sugar, and cooking oil. This food pattern also explains why there are relatively many patients suffering from diabetes, cancer and strokes.



Pomelo, mangosteen,
manggo, lychee, starfruit,
papaya, passion fruit, and
water apple

Bread, peanut butter, jam and cereals are gaining in popularity among the vastly growing urban middle and upper

classes. Unfortunately, most of the bread in Indonesia has been stripped of all its nutrients. If you plan to stay in Indonesia for more than two months and if you prefer to have bread for breakfast, you need to be prepared for some loss of hair. That is the effect of a shortage of vitamin B. Fortunately whole-wheat bread is available in the better bakeries and hotels, but you may want to bring your stock of vitamin B Complex from home or shop locally for whole-wheat products, including cereals or wheat germs. If you favor yogurt, you will be happy to know that there are both local and imported brands in more and more supermarkets. You may also find ham and other pork meat there, which is a relatively recent development in this dominantly Muslim country. Yet, most hotels, except for those in Bali, rarely serve you ham or pork.

A good introduction to the variety and tastes of the dishes that we offer is to have breakfast, lunch or dinner in one of the many Padang restaurants. You will recognize them easily: they have all their different dishes exhibited in the shop window. There is take away service too: the assistant will draw the curtain that protects the food in the shop window from the flies and then you can make your selection. Everything is wrapped in banana leaves and newspaper. Although Padang restaurants are no fast-food outlets, nowhere will you experience a faster service than there. The waiter or waitress will serve a dozen or more dishes plus steamed rice within minutes after you have seated yourself (sometimes even *while* you are seating yourself). Don't despair. You don't have to eat it all. You're not even *expected* to eat it all and you will only pay for what you eat. There is a wide selection of fried fish, boiled

fish, boiled eggs with spicy or not so spicy sauce (tantalizingly red, yellow, or green), fried chicken, soybean curd (*tahu* or *tofu*), squid, raw vegetables and cucumbers and several kinds of *sambal* (chili). And then there are two or three kinds of vegetables. One of these will probably be *kangkung* (water spinach). This is the cheapest and likely the most popular vegetable in Indonesia. Very tasty and very healthy.

When you notice that the food is cold, there's nothing wrong with it. We are used to eating that way. After all, our climate is hot enough and eating warm rice and vegetables will only make us perspire more.

Most local guests prefer to eat their Padang food using their hands. For that purpose, small bowls of water, often with a slice of lemon, will be put on the table, one per person. You should not drink this water; it is only to clean the tips of your fingers before and after the meal. Those who require cutlery can simply ask for a spoon (*sendok*), fork (*garpu*) or a knife (*pisau*) if it's not already on the table. Using your hands correctly is an art that one learns from childhood. The only part of the hand that is supposed to touch the food and get dirty is the tops of the fingers of your right hand.

Whatever you decide to use, fingers or cutlery, the different flavors of the dishes can be enjoyed best if you do not mix them all on your plate. Analyzing the plates of the other guests you will see that they start by putting rice in the center and then arrange one or more side dishes on the perimeter, selecting a mouthful, or fingerful of rice together with one of the dishes.

After the meal, you may hear some of the guests release a burp. Don't take it as an offense, but as a sign that the person has enjoyed the meal. There's no need to say sorry.



An old fashioned, or better, a colonial variety on the theme of Padang food is *Rijsttafel*. That is a Dutch word meaning rice table. Only a few remaining hotels in Jakarta, Bandung and Bali have *rijsttafel* on their menus with a selection of dishes from Sumatra, West, Central and East Java. A more modest and contemporary alternative is *nasi rames* or *nasi campur* (in East Java) a composition of steamed rice,

vegetables, and some meat. According to the colonial Dutch, with *rijsttafel* comes beer. You might want to try.

Indonesia is not a beer drinking country, but there are several good local brands, such as Bir Bintang, Angker Bir and Bali Hai. The temperature of the beer is not an issue to Indonesian beer drinkers. Whether cold or warm, beer is beer. Don't be surprised, having asked for a cold beer, if you are served beer with a big lump of ice in your glass.

A classier alternative is wine. Indonesia is a wine producing country, but the only wine so far is from Bali. Otherwise, there are imported wines from all over the world, including Australia and Chile. In most Padang restaurants and other simple eateries alcoholic drinks are not available.

In principle selling and consuming alcoholic drinks is a criminal offence. But regional authorities can decide if alcohol is allowed or banned in their jurisdiction.

After your experience with Padang food you are in an excellent position to experiment and savor a bit more. Of course, all the international menu items are easily available in uptown restaurants and in the hotels. There you will have a wide choice of spareribs, Caesar salad, spaghetti Napolitano, pizza, French onion soup, burgers, French fries, banana split and so on, but it would be a wasted opportunity not to venture into the roadside food stalls and small restaurants with their local menu. What we Indonesians cannot do without for too long are: *bakso*, *gado-gado*, *nasi pecel*, *soto ayam*, *mie goreng*, *pecel lele*, *tahu*, *tempe* and instant noodles. Fascinating, you may say, but what does all that mean?

Bakso is a clear broth with some vegetables and slices of tahu, but its main attraction are meatballs or fish balls. *Bakso* needs to be consumed while it is steaming hot. In a roadside *bakso* stall you will find several ingredients on the tables to bring the *bakso* up to your taste. First of all there are two or three different kinds of chilly and a bottle of sweet soy sauce. You will also find a small bottle of vinegar and salt. *Bakso* is so popular that it is also vended from pushcarts making their way through the neighborhoods all day long and every day of the week. The vendor announces his presence by tapping a spoon against an empty soup bowl. He is never short of customers.



Nasi pecel and *gado-gado* are excellent for vegetarians. *Nasi pecel* consists of steamed rice and several cooked vegetables, slices of boiled egg, *krupuk*, cucumber and, of course a (tea) spoonful of chili on the side. Everything is

covered with a few scoops of sweet peanut sauce and tasty, deep fried onions on top. The difference between *pecel* and *gado-gado* is that the latter uses no rice but slices of glutinous rice or *lontong* steamed in coconut leaves. Furthermore, in *pecel* you will not encounter tomatoes or eggs and it is spicier than *gado-gado*. There are more subtle differences, such as in the preparation of the sauce and in the selection of the vegetables.

Vegetarians and vegans will be happy to know that veggie and vegan restaurants are sprawling in the main cities.

Soto ayam translates best with chicken soup, but it is more than just chicken soup. *Soto* has many ingredients, the most important of which is turmeric (*kunir*), which colors the broth yellow. Be careful when eating *soto*, because a few drops spilt on your clothes will waste them forever. The yellow stains are almost impossible to remove. Furthermore, you will obviously encounter pieces of shredded chicken in the soup and lots of vegetables, rice vermicelli, slices of boiled egg and maybe even a bit of potato. *Soto* comes in many varieties, depending on the region. Apart from *soto ayam*, well known varieties include *soto Madura* and *soto Lamongan*. From Makasar, the capital of the province of South Sulawesi comes *coto Makasar*, which is another *soto* variety. It comes with horse meat. You may eat a bowl of *soto* with or without rice at any time of the day, either for breakfast, lunch or dinner.

Mie goreng and *nasi goreng* are fried noodles and fried rice respectively. Every Indonesian housewife has her own recipe. It may come with chicken, meat, or seafood. She may

add sweet soy sauce (*kecap manis*) or salty soy sauce (*kecap asin*) and the family's accepted amount of chili –which can be quite a lot.

Pecel lele is a popular food, especially in Central Java and Jogjakarta. Restaurants and specialized food stalls will have it. What you get when you order it is fried catfish with steamed rice, chili and a salad of raw cabbage, tomatoes and cucumber. It's very cheap and very tasty.

Tahu and *tempe*, as explained earlier, are soy bean curd (or tofu) and fermented soybean cake respectively, rich in proteins and very good for the vegetarian menu. These are frequently used in all sorts of (vegetable) dishes. You may remember that we like our food fried and both *tahu* and *tempe* are often fried and eaten as a snack with a few fresh green and very spicy chilies (*cabe*). A very tasty variety of *tempe* is *tempe busuk*. That may sound interesting, but it simply means *tempe* that has exceeded its shelf life. Fortunately, the extra fermentation gives it a very nice taste, perfectly suited for a vegetable dish called *sayur lodeh*. Don't worry about intestinal problems; *tempe busuk* will not cause any of those.

A menu item more familiar to foreigners will be *sate* (satay or skewered meat). The most popular kinds of *sate* are those with chicken (*sate ayam*), goat meat (*sate kambing* - watch your blood pressure; goat meat makes it rise), but there are also *sate* from quail eggs (*sate telur puyuh*) and shellfish (*sate kerang*). The *sate* is usually taken with spicy peanut or soy sauce.

Chicken (*ayam*) is probably the most popular source of protein for Indonesians. You will encounter numerous fast food restaurants serving fried chicken. Our own local specialty is available in every town or city. One of those is *Ayam Goreng Nyonya Suharti* (Mrs. Suharti's Fried Chicken), sometimes with the notice "the only real one". Lovers of chicken meat will agree that chicken in Indonesia tastes different than it does in Heidelberg, Amsterdam, or Ottawa. It is tastier, they say and the meat is, how can we put it, not tough but the texture is stronger. Indonesians will smile with pride and explain that all those positive characteristics can be attributed to *ayam kampung* or free ranging and skinny 'village chicken.' These have the very best taste. Touring through the countryside nobody can avoid sudden encounters with our tasty *ayam kampung*. They range so freely that their territory includes the other side of the road.

The best drinks to go down with Indonesian food are water, (ice) tea or juice. When you order juice, you should know that in Indonesia the juice is a solution of a bit of fruit, water and lots of sugar. If you don't like the sugar, explain the waitress that you don't want sugar (*tanpa gula*) or only a little sugar (*sedikit gula saja*). Of course, there are hundreds more exotic drinks. We don't mention coconut water, simply because we use it not so much as a drink but as an ingredient for cooking. It is then called coconut milk. However, most restaurants will offer *es kelapa muda*, which is coconut water straight out of the young (thus green) coconut, with ice and sugar.



Roadside fruit shop selling durian, rambutan, mangosteen

Indonesia has a dazzling variety of local drinks, hot or cold, with or without alcohol, too many, in fact, to summarize here. One drink, like the bottled mineral water, has obtained the status of a national icon. It is bottled sweet tea, known as *teh botol* or *teh kotak* and as *Teh Sosro*. It is believed that a small local entrepreneur, Mr. Sosro, successfully developed an affordable local alternative to the Cokes and Fantas. In addition to bottled tea, the same brand also produces tea bags and tea in small cartons.

International fast food chains have since long been a common sight in the major cities. If, after all the Indonesian food you would crave for a hamburger, a pizza, a fried chicken

from Kentucky or a donut from Mr. Dunkin you will find plenty of outlets. The food may taste a bit different from what you are used to at home. You will also find some interesting local adaptations or innovations on the fast-food menus here. Obviously there has been an adaptation to Indonesian tastes. Our national fast food, or rather convenience food, without any doubt is instant noodles. Pioneered under the brand name *Indomie*, it has become a household name, even for the numerous other instant noodle brands now available. Indomie is a product of an Indonesian multinational, Indofood Makmur Jaya, the world's biggest instant noodle producer. It is sold nationwide in all supermarkets, neighborhood shops and even at *kaki lima*. It is also exported around the globe.

Tropical fruits are available all year round and also those from moderate climates, such as apples and pears. The latter are grown in the cool mountainous regions of the country, such as in Batu in East Java or imported from Japan, Malaysia, Thailand, or Australia. Like apples and pears, papaya is available in supermarkets and traditional markets throughout the year. The smell of papaya may remind you of the exhibit with the tropical birds in the zoo, but nevertheless it's a tasty and cheap fruit. But be careful; eating too much papaya may cause belly problems. The natural remedy is to eat the young, boiled leaves of the papaya tree.

Mango, banana and pineapple are familiar to most travelers. Mango is available most of the year. We also have many kinds of bananas and it is recommended to leave the familiar large Cavendish banana for when you get back home,

and instead enjoy our local bananas and their different tastes. In case you come across black bananas in the store or in the supermarket, these are not ready to be thrown away. On the contrary, the black skin indicates that these bananas (plantains) are now ripe enough to be fried and become *pisang goreng*.

More exotic fruits include *rambutan* and *durian*. The first is a small hairy fruit (*rambut* means hair) with a thin reddish skin. It peels off easily revealing the juicy white flesh that resembles the more familiar *lychee*.

Durian has strong supporters as well as others who hate it profoundly. The supporters will not be able to stay away from *durian*, simply because it tastes so great. The others hate the fruit for its penetrating smell, which they call a stench. Whatever it is, *durian* lovers are not allowed to bring the fruit on board aircraft, buses, ferries and trains.

Manggis, *salak* and *srikaya* are other tropical fruits you may not easily find at home. Although the skins give away reluctantly, they may in fact hurt your fingers, the flesh is sweet. *Salak* (snakeskin fruit) may taste mildly sour. Well, there are many more fruits to explore and to enjoy. Your search parties along traditional markets and in the supermarkets will always result in a new finding.

Rujak is a fruit salad that comes with a sticky sauce. Depending on where you eat it, *rujak* can be very spicy or very sweet. In the central parts of Java it is both. A new variation on

the *rujak* theme is *es krim rujak* or fruit salad with ice cream; a shrewd combination of spicy, sweet and cold.



Desserts have never been part of our culinary culture. What restaurants put on the table under the name of traditional dessert are in fact snacks that we use to nibble at any time of the day.

Eating out

Both as a tourist and as a long-term resident you will eat out frequently. The food in Indonesia is still cheap, the variation is immense, and the quality is generally good. Restaurants of international standard are convenient but not very adventurous. To get to know Indonesia, let's explain how to enjoy a meal or a snack at one of our thousands of 'low end' eateries. We have several options for you. First, there are the many restaurants that cater to the local public. Then there are smaller establishments, known as *warung*, and finally thousands of food vendors using a small pushcart or *kaki lima*.

Regular, 'low end' or local restaurants are slightly different from what you may be used to at home or in other overseas countries. In many of these restaurants the waiter or, what is more common, the waitress may bring you the menu, a short pencil and a tiny note bloc and then returns to the back of the establishment. The idea is that you jot down your meal and drinks selection. Smart, eh? This way the waitress will not be blamed for possible errors. After a while the waitress will return, pick up your order, reads out aloud what you jotted down and disappear into the kitchen. If you're not so lucky, she will come back to the table saying that this or that item on your order list is *kosong* (empty, out of stock). If you are lucky she will appear with the drinks and finally with the meal. Please don't be surprised or upset if the different dishes are not

served all at the same time, but one by one, with intervals of five or ten minutes. That's how we do low-end restaurant business. The kitchen may have only one or two burners and then it is not easy to ensure that the complete order can be ready at the same time.

The portions will probably be smaller than you are used to, especially if home means North America. If you are a big eater, you may have to order more than you would at home. Maybe you would call this Asian Servings and we don't blame you. What you may not know is that, when the waitress looks at your large order, she will silently categorize it as *porsi turis* (oversized tourist servings).

After one or two visits to a restaurant you may begin to wonder if all waiters and waitresses behave so impersonally and if the service is always so slow. Often, the answer is 'yes'. There are several reasons. To begin with, restaurant staff (and most other workers in Indonesia) work very long hours for very little pay, seven days a week. If they take a day off, that means one day without pay. They simply have a job to survive, and not because they love to serve food and drinks. Secondly, staff training and motivation in these establishments is virtually non-existent. And finally, with the social relationships in Indonesia as they are, workers know that they have a very humble position and that they are not supposed to talk a lot. They have been conditioned to listen and to follow orders. For that reason, if you would inquire about the ingredients of one of the dishes, the answers, if the waitress has them at all, will usually just be 'yes' or 'no'.

However, times have changed, and you will find more and more excellent staff. They smile, they understand your needs as a client, and they are quick to give you the best service they can.



In several restaurants, you may observe that the owner sits in an enclosed area behind the cash register and that he or she seems solely in charge of making the checks. That is a correct observation. It's a phenomenon that is not unique to Indonesia. We also see it in other Asian countries. It shows that the owner, who once took the calculated risk of investing in his or her enterprise, now that it is running well, can focus on the core business of making money and dozing off. Unfortunately,

if you would call the owner to compliment on the quality of the food, or to suggest improvements he or she may not respond the way you expect an owner to respond, that is from a customer service perspective.

Basically, the underlying phenomenon is that we are not used to commenting or to give compliments. If you invite Indonesian guests for dinner, don't expect them to say how great your cooking was.

A traditional restaurant's interior is often very bland. Walls will be painted blue, the lighting consists of fluorescent tubes, tables and chairs look cheapish and it's not really clean. However, a new trend is for restaurants to be decorated more elaborately and to have a theme (such as with bamboo or like a Dutch *café* or a British pub) and to dim the lights.

Some guests may bother you as they smoke in the restaurant. Even though most restaurants now have smoke free areas, not everyone observes the rules. Yet, it is acceptable, albeit uncommon still, to inform the smoker that you have a problem with the air pollution he sends your way. If you decide to ask him to extinguish his cigarette, do so with a smile and with an attitude as if you apologize for the inconvenience. You may add that you are allergic to smoke ("*saya alergi asap, Pak*").

Eating in the street is one of the most interesting experiences in Indonesia. Let's talk about the *kaki lima* first.

Sambal Udang and Sayur Asem



The words *kaki lima* mean five feet. It does not refer to the dimensions of the cart, but simply to the number of ‘feet’ it uses. The feet of the vendor count for two. Then there are the two wheels of the cart, which adds up to four ‘feet’. Finally, the cart’s support, used when it is stationary, is the fifth foot. In cities and towns, you will have an unlimited choice of food offered through *kaki lima*. The quality varies and it is recommended to start your discovery tour only when your stomach has got accustomed to some extent to Indonesian food. In general, it is good to eat at stalls where the food is prepared on the spot and to stay away, for the time being at

least, from uncooked food, such as salads. Another suggestion is to try stalls where it is crowded. It indicates that many people are positive about the food there. When you observe the preparation process with some attention to detail, you may notice that most cooks use MSG (mono sodium glutamate) a white taste enhancing powder liberally. When consumed regularly MSG may cause cancer and even forms of addiction. You may want to tell the cook not to use MSG ("*tolong, tanpa vetsin, Pak/Bu*") and to stick to salt and sugar instead. The traditional, Chinese remedy to neutralize the side effects of MSG is to drink green tea. MSG is mostly sold under the brand names Ve Tsin and Aji-no-moto. In supermarkets, you will find not just one small spot with Ve Tsin and Aji-no-moto, but an entire lane. That indicates the popularity of the chemical. Passing the shelves, find yourself some green tea to drink at home, because the *warung* or *kaki lima* will not have it.

Food vendors, either making their rounds through the neighborhoods, rich and poor, or selling their products through a *warung* make a significant contribution to the (informal) economy. The number of these food vendors increased sharply during the economic crisis in 1998 and onwards. Many office and factory workers who had become unemployed because of the many layoffs, initially were kept alive through their networks of relatives and, sometimes, close neighbors. But sooner or later they had to find an activity to sustain themselves, simply because Indonesia has no welfare system for the unemployed. Many opted to enter the informal sector selling food, drinks, or snacks. In Indonesia, there is never a lack of demand for tasty food and refreshing drinks and most food

vendors managed to stay afloat economically. On the other hand, many city officials opine that the sight of rows and rows of *warung* and *kaki lima* are a soar to the eye. In several cities, successful or not so successful attempts have been made to regulate or curtail the *PKL* (*penjual kaki lima*: ambulant vendors who use a pushcart).

Anyway, despite Indonesia's rapid economic development you still have an overwhelming choice. Prices in restaurants are fixed, so there's no need to haggle. In fact, most prices in Indonesia are fixed, although when you buy expensive articles (consumer electronics, cars and the like) it's often possible to negotiate a 5 or 10 percent discount.

Most *warung* are straightforwardly simple open-air constructions. They have a long table with two benches on either side and are protected from the sun by a tarpaulin. One or two kerosene burners on the ground mark the cooking area. There will be a big wok on each stove. An alternative is for a stationary *kaki lima* to be the cooking area. When you have found a *warung* with an interesting menu, simply enter through the open end of the tarpaulin and find yourself a place at the long table. At some very popular *warung* you stand a chance of having to queue for a few minutes. Usually the menu is posted on one of the poles that support the tarpaulin. Make your order, wait for the meal and enjoy. There is always a choice of salt, *ve tsin*, chili and soy sauce available.

To order something from a *kaki lima* you don't have to go far. All *kaki lima* have their fixed rounds through the neighborhoods. It would take a real effort to find a location in

Indonesia where *kaki lima* has not penetrated. If you wake up in the middle of the night, yearning for a bite, it is comforting to hear the distant sound of a *kaki lima*. These nighttime vendors either sell *mie ayam*, *bakso* or fried rice and fried noodles. *Mie ayam* is a bowl of boiled noodles with chicken soup. The *bakso* vendor's sound is the light 'ting-ting-ting' of a spoon against a *bakso* bowl. The vendors of fried rice and fried noodles use a wooden stick against a hollowed piece of wood, which sounds like 'dok-dok-dok'. Ah, to wake up in the middle of the tropical night and to hear those reassuring sounds is enough to make one feel safe and secure.

Eating at a *kaki lima* is as convenient as it can be. You don't even have to bring out a plate, glass or cutlery. The vendor will provide it and patiently wait until you have finished and paid. He will collect the plates and cutlery you used and quickly rinse it in a bucket of water without detergent dangling under the cart. Maybe next time, it *is* better to bring out your own plates and cutlery.

Sometimes one can still see a traditional *sate* vendor, almost always a woman, balancing a tray on her head with raw skewered meat and a small charcoal grill. The grill is always burning. The best way to eat *sate* is with sweet soy sauce and *lontong*, sticky rice rolls, steamed in a banana leave. On a hot afternoon, it's more than yummy!

Another yummy food item, *martabak*, originating from Sumatra also offers some craftsmanship to admire. *Martabak* is a giant folded thin pancake filled with meat, eggs and finely cut vegetables. It is only available from *kaki lima* and not in

restaurants. Some of the best *martabak* stands are hardly visible from the street because of the crowd gathered around it, patiently waiting their turn. The preparation of *martabak* has a few similarities with pizza: like a pizza the cook makes it into an almost transparent fleece by rolling and tossing it into the air. Then the filling is added, and the final stages of the preparation consist of folding the fleece several times around the filling. One order of *martabak* is more than enough to feed a family of five.

Eating at a *warung* or a *kaki lima* is a straightforward experience. Eating out in a restaurant is likewise convenient and straightforward. One of the reasons is that as a majority we hardly have a culture of social dining, engaging in small talk and enjoying *entrees*, main course, desserts, and wines. We go to a restaurant because we happen to be hungry. We order, we eat, we pay and we leave. The only exceptions are the ethnic Chinese who do have a culture of enjoying sumptuous meals with the entire family or many friends and who like to stay at the table for several hours.

Therefore, if you have invited Indonesian colleagues or friends for lunch or dinner, don't be surprised when immediately after the meal they will apologize and leave, or (worse) the conversation stops, and they show signs of wanting to leave.

Nevertheless, many things are changing in Indonesia. One of those changes has penetrated many restaurants where it is now almost common to be entertained or to entertain yourself with karaoke. Establishments boasting a wide screen, TV set

and karaoke equipment will switch it on without consulting you, assuming loud karaoke is the ultimate in lunch or dinner entertainment. If nobody in your party wishes to sing, the operator of the karaoke set will be more than happy to do so for you. As soon as the karaoke is on, it will abort all conversation at the tables.



Try eating *lesehan*, which implies eating at low tables, sitting cross-legged on mats spread out on the floor or the sidewalk. One of the most popular dishes there is *pecel lele* (the fried catfish with raw vegetables, steamed rice and chilly discussed earlier).

Dinner entertainment will show up in seconds; singers with or without a guitar and with or without a talent for singing. The sooner you give the singer some money the sooner he or she will move on. But then again, a second and a third may already be waiting.

The good thing of those eateries is that usually you don't have to wait in line before being seated.



Smoking and Community

Until recently, on disembarking from a plane, many male passengers would light up a cigarette immediately. These days, a smoking ban is strictly enforced in airports, office buildings, public transportation, shopping malls and other public places. Indeed, Indonesian men are fervent smokers, and they smoke all the time and everywhere, sometimes still in public places and non-smoking areas. The cigarette industry is an important money-making and tax revenue industry. Simply looking around, you may conclude that most male Indonesians (70 percent and probably even more) are smokers. It makes Indonesia one of the countries with the world's highest percentage of smokers.

Among the poor, tobacco is estimated to account for 60 percent of their household expenditure.

The anti-smoking lobby in Indonesia is getting stronger, but education about the health hazards of smoking is yet to sink in. Smokers consider themselves adult and mature men. Very few women smoke, but in circles of urban, independently thinking women, smoking is trendy.

When you arrived in Indonesia, waiting in front of the Immigration booth, you were probably not surprised that everyone was neatly standing in line. Standing in line for the Immigration booth and standing in line at a bank or in front of a *martabak* stand are relative novelties in Indonesia. We are

not really used to waiting our turn, and still feel that we need to be assisted first. The same goes for check-in counters at the airport. For some reason, travel agents who need to check in a group seem to think they can get ahead of everybody else.



Selling anything from instant coffee, noodles, chips and cookies

You may soon become irritated by this behavior. Observing and analyzing our behavior while you travel the country, some contradictions may emerge after a while. You may ask yourself why the smiling and gentle Indonesians you see in airline ads and other travel related literature behave so selfishly. After some time, you may wonder why the potholes

in the street and the flooding in town don't seem to bother the officials (*pejabat*). It is puzzling why those officials seem to think they know everything and behave like gods. And why don't we, Indonesians, care about beggars in the street and the poor in general? Why do we throw our litter all over the place, to the point that it jams gutters, rivers and pollutes the country and the oceans? In traffic, why don't we behave like the well-mannered, responsible, and caring *Bapak* (gentlemen) or *Ibu* (ladies) that we are at home and among relatives? Why do men smoke everywhere and in the presence of non-smokers and children?

Why do we seem so uncivilized and even selfish, despite the symbols of unity we exhibit such as wearing uniforms on any occasion?

Part of the answer may be that we are victims of our own tradition or that we simply copy the behavior of some high-ranking members of society. But there is more. Behavior in public places, whether it is on the street, in the post office or the zoo, is governed by how we define 'community' and how we see social relationships. Despite 79 years of nation building, nearly to the point of indoctrination, the concept of community is still very narrowly defined. The community with which most Indonesians identify first and foremost is the immediate family. A second layer of 'community' consists of close neighbors, colleagues, and the community of the mosque, church, or temple. We treat the members of these communities with all due respect and consideration. We are ready to help when they call on us. We fulfill our obligations to go and make visits when there is a birth, a prayer meeting, a

marriage, or a death in the neighborhood. We go to visit when someone in the neighborhood is admitted to hospital. We join the neighborhood chores, such as cleaning the gutters or painting the curbsides before Independence Day celebrations, August 17. In our relations with the members of our community we have been trained to be polite and to comply with social norms. We chat with our neighbors, and we ask “where do you come from” or “where do you go to” each time we meet in the street. And yet, most if not all these relations are not very deep.

The social norms of any community in Indonesia are intrinsically simple; life in the community needs to be quiet and harmonious. We hope that all the residents will contribute to achieving and maintaining harmony. There are many watchful eyes in the communities that observe the behavior and attitudes of all its members. Those whose behavior comes close to the narrowly defined borders of what is good and acceptable, will become subjects of gossip.

But anybody who does not belong to our narrowly defined ‘community’ is virtually an alien. We don’t see the need to treat them with respect. It will still take a long time before we realize that those ‘aliens’ are part of our wider community. That also means that it will take a while before we begin to be polite and considerate to people we consider ‘strangers’. Lots of work, education of adults (including teachers and our leaders) and advocacy lie ahead to arrive at the point where we realize that all of Indonesia is us, that all Indonesians are our close neighbors, and that the well-being of

our extended community is our collective and individual responsibility.

But there is hope. More and more smokers honor no-smoking zones. We also see more and more people standing in line. And if you find yourself in a situation when somebody can't wait his or her turn, don't be upset, but ask the person to step back in line. That usually helps, but if it doesn't, just smile and do as the natives do. Nobody will feel offended.

A similar attitude may be helpful in traffic.



Salak (snake skin fruit)

In Traffic

First-time visitors to Indonesia often feel appalled at the sight of our traffic. Driving along the left side of the road is not the issue, but the noise and pollution levels are! They wonder if there are no traffic rules.

That's a good point. Maybe there are, but honestly, we don't know. Our driving instructors hardly teach us anything else than 'keep moving!' Of course, during the driving exam we need to complete multiple-choice forms with questions about traffic rules and the meaning of traffic signs. Fortunately, the police officers taking the exam often are kind enough to provide the answers too. All we need to do is pay a little extra and then we are ready for the road. Expatriates need to obtain their Indonesian driver's license after a year. It's not too difficult. Usually, their office will take care of the procedure, so that the applicant only needs to show up for a 'mug shot', a signature and a fingerprint.

In fact, traffic in Indonesia is not so bad. It's easy and driving your own vehicle through Indonesia is even a nice experience. At least it's a great cultural experience. When you dare to take the wheel after having been used to the orderly traffic situation in Europe, North America, Japan, Singapore, or Australia you will say that it's great. It's fun. Look, no rules! Just fill in the gaps, don't use the mirrors and go for it. No need to anticipate the traffic situation 100 meters ahead. Just blast the horn to the obstructing car bumper in front. And when the

going gets tough, all you should do is open the window and throw out a smile.



There are traffic rules, although you will not find them in any book or traffic regulation. Here they are. First and foremost: be flexible. Drivers in Indonesia survive because they do not insist on their traffic rights. Second: Big is Boss. Drivers in Indonesia reach their destination most of the time because they know that any vehicle older or bigger than theirs will have the right of way.

Flexibility in Indonesian traffic situations is essential. Unlike motorists (and pedestrians) elsewhere, we have no rights in traffic. It's therefore futile to insist on getting the right of way. Flexibility and the wish to survive will allow you to veer off the road in case an oncoming vehicle can't or doesn't want to get back into its lane fast enough.

Buses and trucks are the biggest vehicles you will encounter. Please remember that they always have the right of way, even if they are on the wrong side of the road or ignore traffic lights.

You will see many police officers patrolling the streets, or more commonly, waiting at intersections for motorists to commit a traffic violation. Our police officers don't like to talk a lot and perpetrators are fined immediately. If this happens to you, you will also be told to hand over the driver's license because it must be sent to court to process your criminal case. Don't worry about this kind of happy talk. Fortunately, motorists have some bargaining power about the exact amount of the fine and even about the process. Rp 50,000 is the usual rate for a fine and you can keep your driver's license. There is no point in asking for a receipt. After all, poorly paid police officers must make a living somehow and they also must ensure that they make their daily *setoran* (assigned number of fines to hand over) to their supervisor.

We all hope that these practices will end soon now that the government is fighting corruption seriously.

Are you ready to show your driving skills? Why don't you try to negotiate a sizeable roundabout? Remember to just dive in.



Ngejaman traffic circle,
Yogyakarta

Don't use your rearview mirrors. Just consider them ornaments. From the corners of your eyes you will be able to see, or sense, traffic on your left and right. Changing direction or changing lanes may seem impossible but is easy. Fortunately, traffic in the cities goes slowly, not more than 20 kilometers per hour and that helps to keep your vehicle undamaged. Changing lanes begins by slowly steering in the desired direction. Use your direction indicators, even though nobody will pay a lot of attention to them. Turning down your window and slowly gesturing that you want to go *that* way is often more effective. But not always. The vehicle on your left or right will continue as if you did not exist. That's fine; if your

car is slightly ahead of the opposing one you will get the right of way, but only after the vehicles have approached each other to only half a centimeter. After this experience, you will need to focus on the exit you want to take. Missed it? What a great opportunity to try again. And tonight, when the streetlights don't work, or at least not all of them, try the same roundabout again and with a velocity of, say, 40 kilometers per hour.

Added to the excitement of taking roundabouts at night will be the cars, motorbikes, *becak*, horse-drawn carts and bicycles that have no lights. It's better to assume that the streets are never deserted, even if they seem empty.

Especially at night, you will see that the road is used by everyone. Outside the cities, curbsides are rare and everyone must use the same two lanes available. Apart from most motorbikes and cars, other vehicles rarely have working lights. For villagers, the road is also used as a place to gather during the cool hours of the night. Men crouch by the side of the road, chatting and exchanging news and opinions.

Eventually, some may in fact use the road to lie down while continuing the chat. When you least expect, you will encounter something or someone.

But the best experiences in traffic are when you decide to hold back and allow pedestrians to cross. With surprise and relief, they will smile and wave at you. Be careful though, other motorists will not interpret your stopping as a gesture to allow pedestrians to cross, and they, especially the bikers, will only rejoice at this opportunity to overtake you.

Ah, almost forgot to mention our basic traffic attitude; we don't want to get at our destination safely; we want to get there ahead of the rest. If that means blocking an intersection, racing on a sidewalk, or overtaking using the shoulder, so be it.



Traveling by *Travel*, Train and More

The only reason to brave our traffic, obviously is to get from here to there, to see things and to meet people. Indonesia offers many opportunities to travel. After all, our archipelago with its thousands of islands, big and small, has many opportunities to hop from one island to the other. The major islands, in terms of size are Sumatera, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Papua and Java. However, you will find most Indonesians, more than 60 percent living in Java and Bali.

Before discussing long-distance means of travel, let's talk a bit more about taxis. Most taxis in Indonesia have meters and, fortunately, the drivers use them. Most taxis are therefore hassle free and many drivers like to chat with you, if you feel like having a chat. Taxi drivers, like anywhere else, are excellent sources to gauge public opinion. One would think that ministers and high-ranking civil servants would occasionally take a taxi home, if only to be able to hear public opinion and to keep in touch with reality. That is not what happens.

Sometimes, especially at night or during holidays, taxi drivers may refuse to use the meter and they will charge you an inflated fare. Don't blame the driver; like their passengers they too are victims of the system that their employers use. Drivers, renting their taxi by the day, must return it when they have earned a certain amount of money. That amount, the *setoran* is high and it is not uncommon drivers make 20 hours'

shifts to earn it. No wonder, then, that by the end of the day they charge inflated rates so that they can finally go home.

On the positive side, with the arrival of app based transportation, the taxi scene has seen serious disruption. The most popular of these transportation providers are Go, Grab and to a far lesser extent Uber. For a longer stay in Indonesia it makes sense to download one or more apps and to enjoy hassle-free transportation.

It is possible to rent taxis by the day. All you need to do is to hail a decent-looking cab and then negotiate the fare with the driver. Usually, he will jump at the occasion to earn his *setoran*, and probably more, without a lot of trouble and in a relatively short time.

Indonesians are highly mobile and experienced domestic travelers. Many of our relatives may have moved to opposite corners of the country and that means that you will always find airports, railway stations, ferry terminals and bus terminals packed with passengers. If you can avoid travel in the week before and after Lebaran (also called Idul Fitri, the celebration after the end of the fasting month of Ramadan), so much the better. Lebaran calls for visits to one's parents and eldest relatives and that means traveling. One to two weeks before Lebaran fares go up. Extra flights, trains and intercity and inter island buses are scheduled. Ferries are packed as well and even navy ships are used to ferry passengers between islands. Hundreds and thousands of us don't mind to move slowly across the island of Java in our own vehicles in what is probably the longest traffic jam on earth. Every year around Lebaran at least two million residents of Jakarta alone decide

to go home to their native cities or villages. TV stations and newspapers cover the progress of the herds moving across Java. Once a couple was interviewed on TV traveling with their small child from Jakarta to Surakarta on their motorbike, a journey that took them three days, covering more than 500 kilometers. All travelers are eager to arrive on time, but delays are inevitable. Every year there are reports of tragic accidents; a bus slamming into one or more cars or diving into a ditch, because the driver was exhausted after sitting behind the wheel for 15 hours or longer.

But fortunately, most of the annual 20 million or so Idulfitri passengers arrive safely. They have a great Lebaran at home and after one week they all go back to work. That's 40 million passenger movements in just two weeks; a major logistical challenge.

Now that traffic is back to normal, it's time to select a suitable means of transportation to travel through Indonesia. Travel by air on one of our many domestic airlines is by far the fastest way to get there. Domestic flight tickets, by Western standards are still cheap. We'll talk about flying domestic in a separate chapter.

If you prefer to keep both feet on the ground, you could choose the train, the intercity bus, or the *travel*. Trains operate frequently but there are train services only in the island of Java, in North Sumatra and in South Sumatra (construction of its first railway line in Sulawesi nears completion). Indonesian Railways still mostly use single tracks, constructed during the days of

colonial rule. But these are in the process of being expanded to double track across Java.

The railway company is making strides in upgrading stations and trains. Access to platforms and trains is restricted to passengers and stations have been cleared from vendors.

The best trains for long distance travelers are those with either business (*bisnis*) or executive (*eksekutif*) class.



Indonesian Railways diesel loc

The table shows the characteristics of the different rail classes.

	Eksekutif	Bisnis	Ekonomi
AC	✓	✓	✓
Reserved seat	✓	✓	✓
Reclining seat	✓		
Catering	✓	✓	✓
Security guard	✓	✓	✓
Rented pillows	✓	✓	✓
Rented blankets	✓		
Video	✓	✓	
Announcements in English	✓	✓	✓

Executive class, compared to business class, is up a notch or two. You enjoy reclining seats and a little better soundproofing. But this advantage may not always be noticeable when the cabin doors are jammed and don't close. In that case earplugs or patience are the only remedy. The air conditioning requires a bit of advice. Sometimes it is so strong that you will leave the train with a bad cold. That explains why most executive class passengers wear warm sweaters or jackets. The coldest part of the train usually is the carriage immediately connected to the one that houses the diesel generators and the air conditioning unit.

Maintenance remains an issue for the Indonesian Railways -and for many other sectors of society. Once bright and shiny carriages quickly deteriorate through a lack of maintenance. Like we explained above, the announcement system, and the TV may not work properly. And more problematically, the bathrooms often lack essential taps. Seats may not recline properly. Windows are often damaged.

Onboard service for business and executive class commences shortly after departure. Attendants come by regularly balancing trays with drinks and food.



Part of the catering may include a plastic cup of (free) mineral water. It is closed with a plastic seal. There is no lid. So, don't try to remove it. If you do, you will find the seal unusually resistant and, if it eventually gives up the struggle, your victory will come with a lot of water spilled all over. The best way to gain access to the water is to use the short straw that is supposed to come with the cup (sometimes you must ask for it). The straw has a sharp point at one end. Drive the point

through the seal. You may have to try a few times to become an experienced mineral water cup opener.

Train tickets are sold at the train stations for same-day travel only. The major ticket outlets are IndoMaret and Alfa Maret super and mini markets. Although intended to be quick and easy, this ticketing process is cumbersome for foreigners. So, it is best to order train tickets through a travel agent. Executive class tickets can be booked 90 days ahead of travel. Passenger names are checked with their IDs during the reservation process and again, after having printed your boarding pass at one of the machines, before entering the platform.



Indonesia now enjoys its very first highspeed rail link between Jakarta and Bandung. It will eventually be extended all the way to Surabaya.

Long-distance buses are an even cheaper travel alternative. They can take you almost anywhere in the archipelago. The services are frequent and all one needs to do is to buy a ticket from an agent or at the bus terminal, find the bus and hop aboard. The amount of luggage you can bring on board a bus is limited. It is not recommended to leave your luggage in the back of the bus, while you are seated elsewhere.

Long distance buses are notorious for a few things. One is that they colonize the roads and often cause accidents and the second is that robberies occur with some frequency on board those buses. Bags may be slit open, even when you put them in front of you. Therefore, taking the bus requires some vigilance and can best be done when you have only little luggage and a bag or a suitcase that is virtually indestructible. Having said that, as bus operators are busy upgrading their armada to compete with the very convenient trains, if you favor traveling by air-conditioned bus, nothing may stop you from traveling all the way from Medan in North Sumatra to as far away as Kupang in West Timor, a journey of more than 3,000 kilometers!

Unfortunately, long distance buses are often involved in traffic accidents.



A different customer friendly and very affordable means of city-to-city transportation is known as *travel*. It is a scheduled minibus service that will pick you up from your home or hotel and drop you off at the address at your destination. *Travel* usually travel during the night, when it is cooler than during the day. Tickets can be obtained through one of the many agents or you can simply telephone a *travel* operator. You need to develop an eye to recognize an agent. Often, they will sport signs in front of a restaurant or a shop or in other locations showing destinations, fares and freehand drawings of airplanes, ships and trains.

The *travel* will make several stops enroute to allow the driver a short rest and the passengers to stretch their legs and to have a drink and a bite and a visit to the bathroom.

If the *travel* would not suit you, or if you don't want to travel with a vanload of other passengers, there is yet another alternative. It's called *borongan*, which means borrowing (renting) a van with driver just for yourself and your party. *Borong* is a lot more expensive than all other means of transportation, some Rp 400,000 per day (including driver but not the fuel) but it has the advantage that you can decide on the route, the duration, and the stops -where and when. The driver will simply comply. If you rent a vehicle plus driver for more than one day, the costs will go up with a hotel room for the driver.

In an archipelago as vast as Indonesia, it stands to reason that there must be ferry services, connecting the many islands. There are! Several shipping lines maintain regular services between major ports. One-way first-class ticket prices are higher than airfares to the same destination. But then again, a journey at sea takes a lot longer, you will enjoy more fresh air, the sight of dolphins jumping out of the sea or swimming alongside the ship, good food and there will be many people to chat with during the one, two- or three-days' trip.

Economy (*ekonomi*) class boat tickets are far cheaper than airfares.

On several stretches, you will be able to book a trip on board a twin hull (catamaran) high-speed ferry, such as between Surabaya and Balikpapan and from Kupang to Surabaya, via Flores. Furthermore, a daily hydrofoil service connects Bali (the small port of Padang Bai) with Lombok.

Sailings of small (wooden) and roll-on roll-off ferries are often disturbed when bad weather strikes, and the boats are ordered to stay in harbor.

In several cities, among others in parts of Jakarta and in Medan, Bandung, Semarang, Jogjakarta, Solo, Surabaya and Makasar you will find the *becak*, or pedicab or (incorrectly called) rickshaw. A *becak* is a tricycle with the driver (*tukang becak*) paddling the vehicle through the muscle power of his legs. The passengers are sitting in front of the driver, enjoying a wide panorama of oncoming traffic. *Becak* have seating capacity for two not so big passengers, but you will soon witness that the carrying capacity of the *becak* is phenomenal. The seating area can also be used to transport furniture, a hundred kilograms of agricultural produce plus the trader on top of the stack or a group of six youths and their guitars.

In Sumatra's *becak*, passengers are seated in a sidecar, such as in The Philippines.



Many *becak* are being converted to a noisy and polluting motorized vehicle, called *Bentor*. A *becak* ride usually only covers a short distance and calculated distance for distance is more expensive than a taxi. The advantage of a *becak* ride is that the conversation with the driver can be very interesting. Sometimes the *becak* driver demonstrates deep philosophical or religious insights. Especially at night, the *becak* also offers a romantic way to cover a distance, especially so when it rains, and plastic covers are lowered to protect the passengers from rain.

Some tourists initially shun the *becak* reasoning that it borders on slave labor to move the *becak* under the blazing sun. On the other hand, not using the *becak* would make it very difficult for the driver to make a living. Many *becak* drivers do

not own their vehicle but rent it by the day. They may live far away from where they work, and it is a common sight to see *becak* drivers sleeping inside the *becak*. Many go home only once a week for some rest, and to bring money home. It's not uncommon to encounter a driver who has completed high school or even has a college degree. The lack of job opportunities is the most common reason of this phenomenon. On the other hand, if you come across a very youthful driver, chances are that he has dropped out of school and is now forced to work, or has voluntarily chosen to work, maybe to enable one or more siblings to go to school.

Using the *becak* as a passenger takes some negotiating the fare. Never board the *becak* before agreeing on the fare. Of course, the driver will ask an amount that is too high for the distance. Don't expect the fare to go much lower than approximately 20 percent on normal days and not at all on holidays. Depending on the estimated weight of his passengers, the driver may not even be willing to drop 10 percent of his asking price. Obviously, even when you think you have made an excellent deal, you will still pay more than the regular city folk. But then again, in discussing the fare you will hardly ever exceed the equivalent of one or two dollars.

In Jakarta, you will meet the motorized follow-up of the *becak*. It is a noisy, polluting vehicle called *bajaj*. Decades ago the Jakarta administration decided the *becak* was no longer of this day and age. They were banned from most of the city and could operate only in several neighborhoods. A more modern alternative was found in the *bajaj*, imported from India in huge

numbers. Like its cousin in Thailand, the *tuk-tuk*, the *bajaj* also has only three wheels. The driver sits in front, almost on top of the hot engine. The *bajaj* is smaller than the *tuk-tuk* and tall westerners will have a real problem squeezing themselves in and out. Finally, the officials in smog covered Jakarta have come to realize that the noisy and polluting *bajaj* is no longer tolerable and have decided on an ear and nose friendlier alternative, running on natural gas.



A different phenomenon in transportation is the *ojek*. An *ojek* or *tukang ojek* is a person who rents out his motorbike as a taxi. Initially *ojek* started in villages without taxi services. The phenomenon quickly penetrated the cities. However, the

traditional ojek has almost completely become extinct, as Go-Jek, Grab and Uber offer very successful ride hailing apps.

Public transportation within the cities includes buses and *angkot*, a contraction of *angkutan kota* (city transportation). In most cities *angkot* are minivans. The seating capacity is up to 15 Indonesians with bags and boxes or 6 foreigners. *Angkot* always have a two men crew; the driver and his aide, who is known as *kernek*. This word traces back to an old Dutch word for helper (*knecht*). The *kernek* is usually a young guy, sometimes as young as 10 years old, who looks as if he has seen the world, who smokes a cigarette, and holds a stack of Rupiah bills in his hand. He works as the conductor and the marketing manager, hailing passengers, calling the destination, and collecting the fare (some Rp 1,500 per trip). When the *angkot* is full, he will stand in the doorway, one leg dangling freely outside, one arm holding him in place and the other, the one with the stack of Rupiah, waving to potential passengers. Indeed, the job of *kernek* is highly valued, especially by village boys who dream of dropping out of school, going to the big city to become *kernek* and make a lot of money. And to impress the girls. So, following their dream, that's what many of those boys do (dropping out of school).

The *angkot*, like other public transportation stops anytime and anywhere to load and unload passengers, even at intervals of ten meters, preferably in the middle of the road or at street corners. If there are hardly any traffic rules in Indonesia, *angkot* drivers have even fewer rules they observe. The road is theirs. Scouting for passengers they usually drive at

walking speed, ignoring any number of vehicles trailing behind them and unable to pass.

In some cities *angkot* look bright and shiny, as if they just rolled out of the showroom. In others, they are mostly battered vans, held together with wire and magic spells, moving along with groans and other noises only thanks to the sheer mental powers of the driver.

Do you fancy a fast ride through narrow streets? Take a city bus. The fare is cheap, the excitement intense, comfort and safety almost absent.



[Click to watch](#)

Throughout the country you will also encounter more ancient, or traditional, forms of transportation, dating back to the 19th

century. There are several types of horse-drawn carriages, either two or four wheeled, known as *delman*, *dokar* or *andong*. In the eastern provinces, such as on the islands of Lombok and Sumbawa there are scores of small horse-drawn carts, known as *cidomo*. In the island of Lombok, they are known as *benhur*, like the Roman carriages that Ben Hur used in the blockbuster film in the early '60s. In Java they are known as *dokar* (from dog cart). Especially in Lombok and Sumbawa the *benhur* and *cidomo* maintain a prominent role in public transportation, easily outnumbering buses and private vehicles.



Flying Domestic

For many years Indonesia had only four domestic airlines. Garuda and Merpati were the two state owned airlines, while Bouraq and Mandala were private companies.

Apart from Garuda, they have all gone to airline heaven. Garuda Indonesia remains the national carrier. A few years ago, it earned an international 5 Star rating, was voted the best Airline in Asia and Australasia, the best regional airline in Australia, the airline with the world's best cabin crew and even the 'most loved airline in the world.' Note the past tense.

The youngest domestic airlines include LionAir/WingsAir, Jatayu Air, Pelita Air, Kartika Air, Star Air, Riau Air, Citilink, Batik Air and Indonesia AirAsia. Lion Air/Wings Air is the largest and most successful low-cost carrier so far. It's the proud owner of the youngest and largest fleet of Boeing 737-900s in the world.

Even so, LionAir's commercial success comes with the downside of relentless delays and other operational issues.

The fleets of Lionair and Garuda Indonesia are now larger than Singapore Airlines'.

Remarkably, while the traveling public used to complain bitterly about the service (or lack thereof) of the airlines before the 1997 economic crisis, during the crisis the

service improved dramatically. On-time performance became the rule. The airlines introduced frequent flyer programs, better cabin service, better service on the ground and a choice of more flights to more destinations.

Unfortunately, with full skies and airport infrastructure operating at maximum capacity, delays and cancellations have made a comeback.



Airports, even on remote islands, are being expanded and renovated.

Airport authorities are investing heavily to upgrade the domestic and international terminals. Dark and smelly terminals are gradually being transformed to light and fresh ones, with more and better shops that sell food, drinks,

souvenirs, jewelry, books and magazines, art, and music at reasonable prices.

Flying domestically is just as easy as in any other country. Most airport workers speak at least some English and are able and happy to assist.

In the waiting lounge and during the boarding process it is always fun to see how co-passengers handle or struggle with their carry-on pieces. In addition to the more regular bags, laptop cases and briefcases, most passengers will bring *oleh-oleh* (souvenirs) for those at home. The traditional form of *oleh-oleh* is homemade food, packed in cardboard boxes. The most popular boxes are those of Indomie instant noodles, Gudang Garam, one of the popular cigarette brands and Aqua, the most popular mineral water brand. A more contemporary *oleh-oleh* can be bought in the airport, or in the bus terminal or at the railway station: donuts. You will see quite a few passengers opting for this convenient contemporary *oleh-oleh* variety.

Usually there is a choice of English language newspapers for inflight reading. Immediately after take-off you will enjoy the attractions of flying across a vast archipelago like Indonesia: the sight of blue seas, islands big and small, mountains, smoking volcanoes, valleys, white beaches and white clouds like fluffy cotton, floating in the air.



If you're not in the mood for reading or to enjoy the view of clouds, islands and mountains, chances are that your co-passengers will be in the mood to get to know you. Chat first, have family photos and business cards ready and shake hands afterwards.

Your Right Hand

During your initial walks or trips through Indonesia, you may not have noticed immediately that cleanliness is deeply ingrained in our lives. Much of that has to do with Islam, the religion of more than 80 percent of Indonesians. Islam stresses that we must be clean, both inside and out. Cleanliness and purity go hand in hand. And modesty too. We'll talk about that in more detail later.



Although most Indonesians realize that life abroad is different, there is one thing that we will never be able to accept: using our left hand to give or receive something. From our perspective, the right hand is the only right hand. The left hand, on the other hand, is the inferior one, because we use it to clean ourselves after using the toilet. So, always use your right hand, wherever and with whomever you are to give and to accept things. For most people that will not be too difficult, but if you happen to be left-handed it is essential to rewire your brain a bit. You will not find it easy to identify people in Indonesia who are left-handed. At home and in schools, as soon as an adult detects that a child prefers the use of its left hand, it is forced to use its right hand.

The head, the seat of our mind, our psyche, our personality and maybe even of our soul is considered a very private part of one's body. Children are not allowed to touch the heads of adults, including their parents. Adults will touch the head of a child only if they are relatives or know each other well. In all other cases, to be touched by the head is insulting.

Talking about toilets and bathrooms, the rule in Indonesia is that a clean toilet is a wet toilet. All toilets and bathrooms have drains in the floors, which makes cleaning easy. Other Indonesia travelers may have warned you that in most bathrooms and toilets you will not find tissues. These seasoned travelers may have urged you to bring your own supply of toilet paper. And so, we see that many tourists travel with at least one toilet roll in their backpack or in their briefcase. And they are happy that they did so, because indeed

toilet paper in toilets is hard to find (although it is widely available in supermarkets and even in small neighborhood stores). What you will find instead is a plastic scoop (*gayung*) and a bucket or a small tub with water. How many tourists must have been in tears and desperate during a toilet visit, discovering the absence of their trusted toilet tissue, when it was too late?

On the other hand, how many Indonesians, during an overseas trip must have looked desperately for water during a toilet session? We can only guess, but toilet visits must be one of the most fundamental contributors to culture shock. And yet it is all so easy when you know it. Indonesians use water to clean themselves. We use the *gayung* to scoop water from the tub or from the bucket and splash it freely where the cleaning needs to be done. We hold the scoop in our right hand and do the cleaning with the left hand. Easy as can be. Maybe you should try it at home first. Nowadays, there is a more contemporary alternative to the *gayung*. It's like a mini shower on a hose. Before using it, test to see whether it works and how strong the water flow is. Too strong a flow can hurt.

When using the toilet, don't worry about splashing water all over the place, including the toilet seat and the floor. Like we said, a clean toilet is a wet toilet.

Traditionally, we have what in Europe is known as a French toilet with two footrests. To use it, one is supposed to squat. The regular, western toilet is always available in hotels, railway stations and airports, although in public places its maintenance may not be excellent, to say the least.

For some obscure reason, Indonesian Railways is replacing its western toilets on board the trains with French toilets.

If you traveled to Indonesia on a Garuda Indonesia flight and visited the toilet, you may have noticed a step-by-step pictorial instruction on how to use the toilet properly. That instruction is meant for Indonesian passengers, not used to a modern toilet.

At home, we also use the scoop and the small tub of water to take a bath, if a shower is not available. We never use the tub to sit in. Some tourists who assumed that the tub is to get into, quickly found out that it is too small to do anything else than try to get out again. We stand outside the tub and scoop the water all over us. In our climate, it is the most refreshing manual shower you can imagine.

We take at least two such showers a day. One in the morning, getting ready for work and one when we come home to wash off all the heat and the dust of the day, so that we feel refreshed when we relax during the last part of the day in the company of the family.

Walking through the neighborhoods, either in the morning or in the late afternoon you may be surprised to see women dressed in what appears to be baby dolls or nightgowns. Indeed, many women like to do that after their afternoon shower. Sometimes we can even see men dressed in

pajamas, sitting on the porch. The explanation is that we do not associate nightdress with the confinement of the bedroom.



We often don't make a difference either between clothes we wear during the day and other clothes for the night. We simply lie down with whatever we wear.

We hope you're not offended by our bathroom culture. Apologies if you do. To us, it is the best way, linked to other

traits of behavior in Indonesia, such as the concepts of *halus* or refinement, modesty, forgiveness and avoiding confrontations.



Tanah Lot temple, Bali

Refinement and Related Topics

Like the number of travel guides about Indonesia, the number of academic publications on Indonesian culture are numerous and growing. Many try to explain our behavior from a cultural perspective. That is a challenge because there is not one single culture but there are well over 700 different cultures and countless sub-cultures.

Many authors, maybe writing from the perspective of the single-culture concept, believe that an important aspect of Indonesian behavior is refinement or *halus*. While it exists, the concept of refinement is limited largely to the court cultures of the Javanese Sultans and the Balinese Kings. Most Indonesians are not refined at all. Niels Mulder, a Dutch anthropologist defined *halus* as “Refined, ethereal, delicate, noble, cultured; spiritual, subtle. The quality in life to search for. Opposite to *kasar*.” Refinement is only one aspect of how Indonesians perceive the world. There are three major realms in our worldview, each with several characteristics. Let’s see if we can make some sense of this all:

1. *One’s place in the universe*

We all have our place in the universe, not just during our lifespan in the here and now, but also in the past and in the future. There is a purpose in living our lives as human beings, subject to ups and downs. Although we are not certain what the purpose is, we know that we must try and achieve a better situation, not primarily in a material sense, but in a spiritual

meaning. This sounds like the Buddhist or Hindu philosophy, which is not surprising, as these were the very first 'official' religions that came to Indonesia.

Here on earth the harshest form of human life can be found tilling the soil, fishing in the seas or doing other manual labor. It is not only a harsh life, but also coarse (*kasar*). We need to aspire a more refined (*halus*) way of life, as far removed from the dirt as possible.



Dutch colonial
architecture, Yogyakarta

It explains why in general, Indonesians have little regard for material possessions and why maintenance is not taken seriously. It also explains why children don't mind if their toys

break down soon. The disregard for the material also extends to animals and vegetation. Both are valued only for their contribution to helping people sustain themselves, and are rarely enjoyed as pets or as nature. Maybe that is one reason why the environmental movement makes little progress.

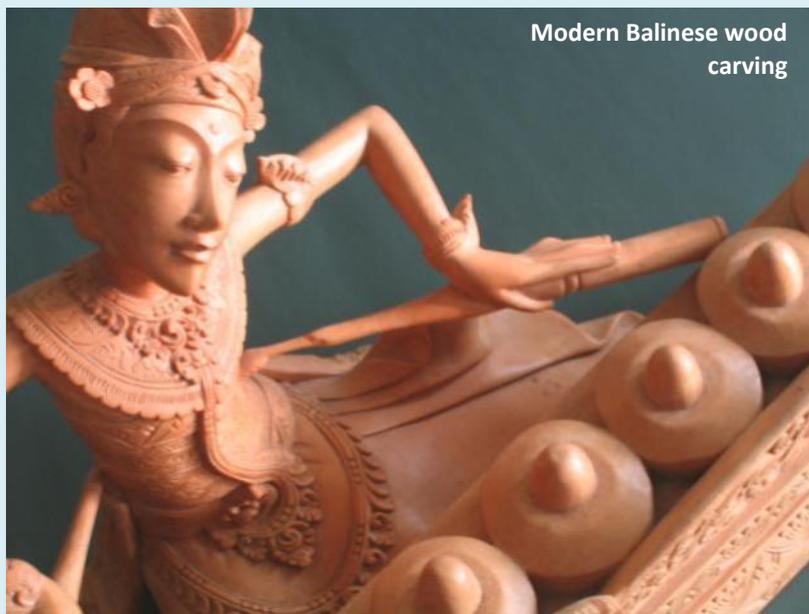
Hierarchy

A keen sense of hierarchy is common in all the Indonesian cultures. Within families we not only distinguish a hierarchy between grandparents, parents, and children, but also among siblings. In the Javanese universe, parents are in the center. Parents fulfill their roles in life by giving birth, raising their children, and ensuring that they become parents themselves. That is the essence of life. The older one is always superior to the younger one. Except for one or two cultures, such as in Sumatra, we are also convinced that men are higher in the hierarchy than women.

Bapakisme

Therefore, patriarchies are the norm and also paternalism and something we call *bapakisme*, a culture of accepting what adult men say, opine and decide. The word contains the root word *bapak*, which means father, Mr. and Sir at the same time. A *bapak* is supposed to be a leader, a good father, the provider, the protector and the one who knows everything and has the correct answer in all occasions. Women, children and subordinates are keen to listen to what *bapak* says and to follow and to oblige immediately. Boss and *bapak* are almost synonymous. Questioning *bapak* is not the norm. A farmer is a

bapak for his family. The village head will be the *bapak* for the entire village.



Civil servants will be *bapak* for the municipality, the district or the province. The culture of *bapakisme* has gone so far that we are inclined to say only those things that please our *bapak*, even if it means adjusting the truth. Westerners would say, in their direct way of speech: that is lying. To us, it is simply a matter of highlighting selected aspects of reality.

In our concept of hierarchy and order the president is the ultimate *bapak* of everybody. Not surprisingly, when a female president once led the country, several individuals and groups

questioned if this was the correct situation. After all women follow, they don't lead.

The opposite of *bapak* is *ibu*, which means Mrs., Madam and mother. A person who is married, or over the age of say, 25 years is traditionally addressed as *Ibu* or *Bapak*. What you may guess is that being a father, or a mother is an important social position in Indonesia. Which is true. Being a married person and having children is a highly regarded and expected achievement in life. A person who is not married, if asked will respond that he or she is not married yet.

Anyone who is too young to be married is addressed as brother (*Mas, Bang* etc.) uncle (*Om*) or sister (*Mbak*). Children are usually addressed with *adik*, which means younger sibling. Everyone, including siblings will address each other similarly and rarely by their name only. Only recently have teenagers begun to address each other by their given names leaving the traditional *mbak* or *mas* to those outside their circle of friends.

The roles of *bapak* and *ibu* come with a clear distinction between their respective responsibilities. *Bapak* as the heads of everything are focused most with life outside the family circle, making a living and making decisions for the family, but rarely involving the family members, let alone the children in decision-making. The role and responsibilities of *ibu* include all that is related to the household and the education of the children. *Ibu* can be found in the kitchen, a domain that is completely off limits to most *bapak*.



Traditional Dayak dress,
Kalimantan

The concept of 'ladies first' has its opposite in Indonesia. Here we never say 'ladies and gentlemen' but always *bapak-bapak dan ibu-ibu*. Gentlemen enter the elevator first, the house first, the theatre first, are greeted first and are served first.

Indonesians constantly look up to a *Bapak* and are keenly aware of who is 'higher' or 'lower' to oneself, who is 'junior' and who is 'senior'.

Modesty

We are also very conscious that our proper attitude should be one of being humble, modest, polite, and pious. Arrogance has no place in our mental framework, and we detest it. When we are very young and begin to talk, our parents teach us to use our name if we want to talk about ourselves. It is not modest to say 'I' or 'you'. The only polite way to address someone, while we don't know the person's name is to use *anda*, which is a polite form of 'you'. In French it would be *Vous*, in German *Sie*, in Dutch *U*, and in Spanish *Usted*.

A different aspect of modesty shows when you ask someone for his or her plans for the future or hopes and dreams. The sentence that will likely pop up is that the person hopes to be or to become useful for the people and the nation. In Indonesian: *berguna bagi nusa dan bangsa*. Personal ambitions, stepping out of the box, being creative, doing things differently are all concepts that do not fit with the traditional values of modesty, politeness and obedience. And yet, there is this other side of the coin. Observing *Bapak* in Indonesia, especially those who are well off, have a high position and supervise people you will notice a high degree of arrogance in quite a few of them. Arrogance does not match the ideals of modesty and being humble. It's probably not the fault of the arrogant *bapak*, they may not even be aware that they are arrogant. Maybe it is because so many people look up to them that makes that one eventually loses a sense of reality. High

positions, being praised all the time, having power and easy access to resources, becoming arrogant, and becoming involved with corruption (in the name of obtaining resources for the members of the *bapak's* group to redistribute them); it's a vicious circle that is extremely hard to break.

A bit more on names; Indonesians generally have more than one name, but these are first names. The custom to have a family name has not been introduced to Indonesia. Trying to trace one's family tree is a challenge. Even more so because individuals may change their names once or several times in their lives. Sometimes, parents decide to change the name of their child if it continues to be weak and sick. The rationale is that the child's name is not appropriate, or that a spirit who causes the child to be sick will be fooled if the child suddenly has a different name. Names also may change when one changes his or her social or professional position.

2. Religion and beliefs

Although Indonesia is officially a secular state, the state philosophy, called *Panca Sila* (Five Virtues) mentions that all Indonesians need to adhere to one of the acknowledged religions: Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Taosim or Hinduism. It is very difficult to find an Indonesian admitting he or she is an atheist. That idea is incomprehensible because atheism and communism are synonymous. Indonesia, which has the world's largest number of Muslims, goes through a process of deepening religious experience -and growing radicalization. Not only more and more nominal Muslims become more pious, the same goes for Christians, Buddhists, and Hindus.



Prambanan temple,
Klaten, Yogyakarta

In addition to the five acknowledged religions, ancient beliefs, such as mysticism and remnants of animism find fertile ground in the hearts and minds of Indonesians without causing conflicts with their official religion.

From an anthropological standpoint one could say that religions provide meaning and direction to life and an understanding of one's duty, as ordained by the Creator.

Tourists often find it hard to be asked a few questions repeatedly, that is; what is your name, where do you come

from and are you married. If you have a partner, but you are not married, consider bending the truth a little to make yourself understood and to avoid a difficult discussions. Common law is a concept that does not (officially) exist in Indonesia. It is very little understood or appreciated. Indonesians are supposed to get married and to have children.

The urge to get married is so strong that traditionally children were married off at a very young age. Girls of 12 years old were of the correct age to become wives. Boys usually were a bit older, but not by much. Even in today's Indonesia this practice, early marriage, is the norm in rural communities and even in poor urban neighborhoods. Fortunately, more and more children, with access to modern communication media begin to have second thoughts about becoming a mother at age 13 or 14, but it will still take many years before the practice no longer exists. Poverty is one of the contributing factors today why parents (and grandparents) may push their children and grandchildren into an early marriage, relieving the economic burden for the family of the child bride. The deeply ingrained fear that 'something unfortunate' might happen to the adolescent girl if she begins to interact with boys, or attracts the attention of boys is another driving factor to ensure that she finds herself a husband. In many rural communities, an unmarried fifteen-year-old girl is considered an old spinster, and every attempt will be made to marry her off. Even if the marriage would break down after a few weeks or months, she has fulfilled her duty in life (especially if a child has been born during the brief marriage). Being a 'widow' (*janda*) is preferred to being a spinster.

Whatever the case, in 2019, the national government finally raised the minimum age for a wedding to 19 years.

Purity

But despite the many traditions, times are changing and with them have come new demands to survive. Old distinctions like the Javanese social class of *priyayi* (the scholars and administrators) and the low class of *abangan* no longer exist in modern Indonesia. What remains are traces of their values and corresponding behavior, such as being indirect.

Especially from a Javanese perspective the higher one's social status, the more refined one is, the more removed from the coarse and the closer to the ethereal. Observing one's religious duties fits perfectly in this pattern and in order to do so, one needs to be pure, inside and out.

Purity is achieved by ritual cleansing as prescribed in one's religion and through reading, discussing, understanding and interpreting the Holy Scriptures of the religion.

3. Stability and harmony

The problem with human life is that nothing is constant and that everything flows in directions that are not always favorable to the individual. Power too has a tendency to shift. Balance in life and balance of power is often as elusive as it is desired. In Indonesia the situation is not any different.

Maintaining and restoring the power balance

We might say that history shows that the overwhelming majority of the people who lived in Indonesia many centuries ago and who live in Indonesia today have very little power.

They are taught to accept their fate, to be patient and to work hard to improve life and to strive for harmony. Apparently that message comes across, and several foreigners who have lived in Indonesia for many years are amazed at the seeming ease with which Indonesians are capable to accept.

Maintaining harmony in all aspects of life is an important objective, and to achieve it many Indonesians have developed a set of behaviors such as deference, modesty and forgiveness.

Acquiring power

Accepting one's fate and trying to maintain harmony is one thing, trying to acquire a little more power is what many people do. Although lotteries and gambling are illegal practices, they still occur and can be seen as attempts to acquire additional financial means to make life a little more pleasant. And obviously, the larger the sum the more power one will create.

There are other ways to increase one's power. To practice mysticism or martial arts to develop the inner strength that lies dormant in everyone, is increasingly popular. Walking through markets you will undoubtedly come across vendors selling stones, including gemstones. Their clientele are men who carefully select a stone set in a silver or gold ring. Each stone has particular characteristics. The art is to find one that matches the personality of the person. Almost all adult men in Indonesia can be seen wearing one or more rings, sometimes with small stones, but more commonly rather large ones.



Ceremonies

While we struggle to maintain balance and harmony, we need markers at important milestones. These markers are the many ceremonies you may see, either a genuine ceremony or one transformed into a performance for tourists, such as traditional dances. All those ceremonies mark the passing from one stage in life to the next. In fact, the stages of life begin even before birth, when the pregnant woman and her family (including the neighborhood) celebrate different stages of the pregnancy as they signify the development of the fetus. The ceremonies continue after the death of a person. All these ceremonies, in any of the cultures in Indonesia emphasize that

we are part of the cosmic cycle and that we need to take all precautions to maintain the cosmic balance.

One of the most impressive ceremonies in Indonesia is *Nyepi*, celebrated by the Balinese Hindus once a year. The word *Nyepi* means keeping quiet. In the Balinese worldview, the Gods, spirits and ghosts play an important role. There is an eternal struggle between good and evil and it seems that throughout the year evil gets the upper hand. The island of Bali becomes polluted in a sense, and a purification ritual is needed. The priests announce when it is time for this ritual. On the day of *Nyepi*, which is a national holiday, all Balinese will stay indoors. They use no electricity and make no fires. Traffic is not allowed, and they receive no visitors. The aim is to fool the wandering demons into believing that all Balinese have fled and that the island is deserted. Eventually, by the end of the day the demons will leave the island in disappointment, giving the Balinese the opportunity to start with a clean slate the following day. While the demons are becoming confused the Hindu will use the opportunity for a day of self-reflection and prayer.

In the past the government allowed tourists to arrive and leave the island during *Nyepi*. Arriving tourists asked to be driven around the seemingly deserted island to experience the eerie atmosphere and eventually there were many tour operators offering special *Nyepi* tours. The government no longer allows these tours. Seaports and the airport are closed for 24 hours. Bali is once again silent during *Nyepi*.

The example of *Nyepi* is to illustrate the importance of ceremonies in our lives.



Catering to international and domestic tourists

Indirect behavior, Basa-basi, Forgiveness

Being modest or humble has its expression in that we don't want to create problems. The other one is that we forgive easily.

Not wanting to create problems we (especially the Javanese) may say things that are not always truthful from a foreigners' perspective. We have been said to be deferential: avoiding conflict and confrontation. From our side of the story, there is no harm at all to say that we agree, while in fact we don't. We behave like this especially towards seniors. After all, it is 'not done' to challenge their opinion. So, it is far better to

pretend than to create an unpleasant atmosphere in the house or at work –and thus disrupt harmony. The unpleasant atmosphere will linger for weeks or years, but the pretense will be forgiven soon.

In the colonial days, the Dutch were puzzled about the Javanese rulers, so aloof that they almost completely seemed to ignore the colonizers and continued to live as usual. The Dutch also complained that those ‘natives’ couldn’t be trusted. The consensus among them in those days was that ‘natives’ were never straightforward. When they said ‘yes’ they would do ‘no’. When they smiled in front of you, the next moment they would stab a dagger in your back. From an Indonesian, or Javanese standpoint many westerners and, for that matter, also countrymen from Sumatra, Kalimantan, Madura and East Java are rude and inconsiderate. They are direct, hurting people while doing so and causing loss of face. Some of us wonder why foreigners can’t behave like we do. How nice it would be if foreigners took time to sit down and talk about things or talk about nothing. Even if the topic would be a difficult one, involving a refusal, it would be best to wrap the message into nice words and phrases, allowing the other person to catch the message indirectly, without being hurt or embarrassed in the presence of others.

Changing perspectives again, even today some foreigners are inclined to see Indonesians as dishonest and impossible to work with. Of course, among us there are dishonest people. However, what you might call dishonesty can be classified in many instances as indirect behavior, aimed to avoid

disappointing you and disturbing harmony. Let's take an example. Suppose you would ask the receptionist of the hotel or an Indonesian colleague, neighbor or friend for a favor, to join you to go somewhere or something similar. The response usually is affirmative. It may happen that long after the confirmation nothing has happened. At some point you would certainly remind the person, only to hear that he is still working on it, or still trying to comply. Finally, after hours or days you may conclude that this is not going to work. In case you would reprimand or complain about the situation, your friend, neighbor, or colleague would certainly be surprised. After all, the initial confirmation was meant to sound as a 'maybe'. For Javanese at least, it is next to impossible to say 'no' or 'can I get a rain check.' That would be extremely rude and would, we know, hurt you.

The point is that we have a whole range of 'yes' answers. Only the intonation of the 'yes' and the corresponding body language or 'eye language' will reveal to the experienced observer if it is a real 'yes', a 'maybe' or a 'forget it'.

Obviously, to the outsider, that must seem like a very confusing, inefficient, and ineffective way of communicating. The simple solution, if you indeed need to have a firm yes or no, is to ask a little further. Give details of what you need, how you need it and when. Ask questions about how the person would go about and do it or get it and where. Your asking will emphasize that you are serious about the request. Gradually, applying these filters the true answer will emerge, with a smile and nobody will feel offended or embarrassed.



Having said that, things are changing in Indonesia. Modern business requirements leave little time for elaborate questions and answers that can be interpreted either way. A deal is a deal and time is money. You will find that well educated people who are used to interact with foreigners or who are professionals will tell you straightforwardly that something can or cannot be done. Another sector of society that will give you a firm 'no' are shop attendants and customer service staff. Having a discussion with them, trying to convince them is a waste of time. It is difficult to blame these individuals as they only follow the rules that have been laid out to them. If the *peraturan* (rule), handed down hierarchically says that it must be done this way then automatically it cannot be done in any other way.

Some former Dutch soldiers, who fought in Indonesia during our struggle for freedom from 1945 to 1949 (through President Soekarno and Vice-president Mohammad Hatta we claimed Independence in the morning hours of August 17, 1945), still feel bad about all the fighting in their beautiful former colony. Troubled by homesickness and feelings of guilt, after all those years they were yearning to visit Indonesia but feared that their former enemies harbored hard feelings. Those who eventually ventured to Indonesia and met Indonesian veterans were often moved to tears when they received the warm welcomes and friendship they had never expected. Let bygones be bygones and let's be friends, is our message. We don't have to forget, but we already forgave any wrongdoings and hostilities as soon as the weapons went silent and expect that we are forgiven likewise.

While being direct or indirect depends on where you are in Indonesia, there is one characteristic that applies to members of all our cultures. It is known as *basa basi* or small talk. There is a tremendous amount of small talk going on, both within the family, among business partners, and especially in casual contacts. Indonesians love to talk and they can talk for hours raising lots of topics, without touching on the core and always taking care not to offend the other. Small talk is related to being evasive while still maintaining a positive appearance and a pleasant atmosphere.

Basa basi, if not well understood, may cause embarrassment and oftentimes foreigners fall into the trap of misunderstanding *basa basi*. If for example you will be casually

Candidasa Beach, Bali



invited to come over and visit, it is best to assume that the invitation is *basa basi* only.

With this observation, the cycle is almost complete. We have seen that a sharp sense of hierarchy and seniority, being indirect (or direct), being evasive (such as comes with *basa-basi*), modest, and being careful to maintain the cosmic balance as well as harmonious relations between people are the most common and most recognizable character traits of Indonesians.

Forgiving is especially obvious in the annual Muslim celebration of Idulfitri or Lebaran after the fast during the month of Ramadan. On the occasion, we visit our senior relatives and neighbors to ask for forgiveness for all the mistakes and wrongdoings we committed, either on purpose or involuntary during the previous year. We are forgiven, especially by God. Reinvigorated, we begin with a clean slate, trying to be better persons in the year ahead, knowing that we have purified ourselves and restored harmony.



Idul Fitri

For Indonesians, being aware of one's limitations and the errors one makes is so important, that we need to talk about it in more detail. One celebration is especially important to reveal essential aspects of the Indonesian mind and soul. During the Holy month of Ramadan Muslims throughout the world, including Indonesia, observe the fast that starts before daybreak and lasts to sunset. During that time, they are not allowed to eat, to drink, to smoke, to become angry, to have improper thoughts and to have sexual intercourse. Fasting is meant to purify one's mind from urges of the flesh or our animal instincts. The women get up before 03.00 AM to prepare the early meal (*sahur*), which needs to be eaten before the *muezzin* from the mosque calls for the first Morning Prayer. At this early hour it is busier in the streets than usual. People go to the mosque for a special early sermon and Koran teaching. Others may prefer to take a quick nap before going to work. All day long there are religious programs on TV, on the radio and religious articles in the newspapers and magazines. The most difficult hours every day are those shortly before *buka puasa*, the breaking of the fasting when the mosques sound a siren and signal that it is *maghrib*. The women have already been busy in their kitchens for several hours to prepare the evening meal. There are special menus during Ramadan, and it is a custom to break the fast with a sweet hot drink and dates. It is not a good idea to start eating immediately, in order not to upset the stomach.

After the meal the faithful hurry to the mosque for prayers and more religious teachings.

During the first two weeks of Ramadan everybody is getting into the rhythm of the fast, which is not very difficult. The early mornings are solemn. In the third week, two more weeks before Idulfitri, the atmosphere gradually changes and



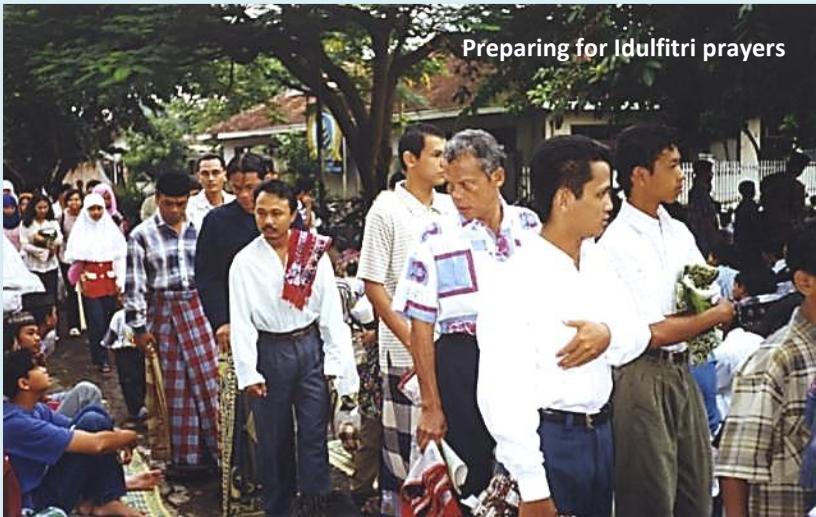
becomes more festive. Most Muslims are convinced they will complete the fast without breaking it before *maghrib*. There are more and more Idulfitri decorations, and the shops begin to sell Idulfitri cards. Christians would say that the atmosphere is not unlike a Christmas mood. Schools and neighborhood mosques begin to prepare themselves for the parades, called *takbiran* held after *maghrib* on the last day of Ramadan. Especially for the children this is one of the major events in the

year. The participating schools and the mosques' youth groups prepare banners, torches and floats to be carried along. There is a committee –usually the sub-district head is an invited member- that ranks all the exhibits and selects a winning group in each of several categories as they march past the committee.

As soon as the siren sounds for the last time, announcing not only the end of the 30 days' long fasting, but also the end of the month of Ramadan, the festivities erupt. People wish each other happy Idulfitri and they ask forgiveness for mistakes made consciously or unconsciously during the past year. Families usually conduct a family prayer at home before participating in or simply watching *takbiran*. During *takbiran* the children chant *Allahu'akbar* (God is Great), while carrying homemade torches, there are firecrackers and drums sound without stopping. TV stations broadcast Idulfitri programs all night and will continue to do so during the nights to come.

The following morning, the first day of Idulfitri, everyone has a quick breakfast and prepares to be ready for the all-important *Sholat Idulfitri*, the group prayer that begins around 08.00. The previous day, in the major fields or *alun-alun* workmen have set up a tarpaulin, a sound system and marked rows with thread. These rows indicate where the faithful need to position themselves, facing west, towards Mekkah (Mecca). Often, the fields cannot accommodate all the faithful children, woman and men who assemble there for the important prayer session. They spill into the side streets and even find a place in

the front yards of the houses around the field. The men are dressed in their special *sarung*, a white collarless shirt and their *pecis*. They also have their prayer rug and a newspaper.



Preparing for Idulfitri prayers

The newspaper is put on the ground first, so that the prayer rug doesn't get dirty. Women wear their white prayer robe, covering them from head to toes. Underneath the white robe they wear their best festive, colorful dresses. Boys and girls are dressed like the men and the women. Everyone is quiet, and only the sound of a few thousand sandals and the recorded "Allahu Akbar" can be heard, which creates a very special atmosphere. Meanwhile, dozens of *kaki lima* are finding themselves a good spot around the field. They are selling sweet drinks, ice cream, cheap toys, and colorful balloons. The prayer commences exactly on time and is over in a few minutes. Next is the sermon. Most the men light up the

first cigarette they are allowed to smoke during the daytime. The longer the sermon continues the louder the voices from the audience begin to sound. Mothers and girls take off their white robes, immediately changing the field in a colorful spectacle. Many women, especially if they look after their toddlers leave the area and make for the *kaki lima* to buy their impatient kids drinks, toys, ice cream or balloons.

After the sermon, the crowd of a thousand or so individuals loudly go home, wishing each other happy Idulfitri and asking for forgiveness. Within ten minutes the fields are deserted once again, except for thousands of newspapers left behind. Idulfitri is a good time for everyone, including the poor who come to clean up the newspapers to sell them for recycling.

Back home there is food. One of the special Idulfitri dishes in Java is *opor*, made with chicken, coconut milk, and spices and *ketupat*, sticky rice wrapped in tiny baskets woven from palm leaf. There is no fixed time for the meals and it does not take long for the first guests, relatives and neighbors to arrive. They make their rounds through the neighborhood, to ask for forgiveness. Everyone is invited to eat something, to drink something or at least to have some of the English or Danish butter cookies that have become traditional elements of the Idulfitri celebration. In most of the houses it is crowded, even though the visitors stay for 15 minutes or half an hour only. Children will receive some money for the occasion.

Once the crowd has gone, the family members congregate for a ceremony that is called *sungkeman* in Java,

meaning asking for blessing. The most senior members of the family; grandfather and grandmother, or great grandfather and great grandmother sit in the largest room and all their younger relatives, down to their great grandchildren kneel in front of each of them (one by one), wishing happy Idulfitri, asking for forgiveness of everything they have done wrong, either on purpose or unintentionally during the past year and



asking for blessings for the new year. The senior relatives likewise wish for a peaceful and happy Idulfitri, forgive all errors and pray that all endeavors may be fruitful, that the younger relative may continue to become an even more pious person and that there may be harmony in his or her nuclear family always. “*Amin*,” is the response. The *sungkeman* ceremony at the Presidential palace is usually broadcast on TV. These are very formal and solemn, but in the family homes there is also a lot of laughter. Brothers, sisters, and cousins, as

well as nephews and nieces of the same age group, more and more ignore *sungkeman* in the traditional way and feel more comfortable hugging each other.



[Click to watch](#)

After the *sungkeman* it is time to repeat the ceremony at the homes of other relatives who, because of their old age, cannot go out themselves. First, the deceased are visited. The cemeteries are crowded, many families paying their respects to those who are no longer on this earth, asking for forgiveness and their blessings. As said before, Idulfitri is an auspicious day for everyone, including the women and children, working at cemeteries, cleaning the graves for a few Rp 1,000 bills.

In the days and weeks following Idulfitri, when office workers return from their leave, the asking for forgiveness continues, but now among co-workers and business relations until the daily routine sets in.

‘Hello Mister’

Plying the streets, looking for merchandise, souvenirs or entertainment, you will frequently hear ‘Hello Mister’. When you look up there is the face of a boy or girl with bright eyes and a big smile. You may also hear ‘Hello Mister’ if you are a Ms. The first few times you may even respond, but eventually, you may become tired of all those hellos. The significance of these ‘Hello Mister’s’ is that we are genuinely interested in getting to know foreigners. It also gives us a unique opportunity to spruce up our English.

After a few minutes, you may feel it is time to shake hands. Shaking hands is not the traditional way of greeting in Asia, but these days, in Indonesia, it is. Still, we don’t shake hands like Europeans or Americans do, squeezing hard, almost crushing the hand of the other person. Is that a sign of friendship? It’s more like the beginning of a wrestling match. We prefer a handshake to be a light and friendly touch. After the handshake, Muslims will lightly touch their heart. Very devout Muslim women may not want to shake hands with men. Instead they will greet you with hands folded together, like the western praying gesture.

You may not notice it from the bright smiles that greet you and the invitation for a chat, but foreigners also frighten us a bit with their tall bodies, big steps and incomprehensible languages and behavior (including body language) that is so

unfamiliar to us. We assume that you must be incredibly wealthy; otherwise, you would not be able to travel so far, stay in expensive hotels and buy so much. We would love to know how you live, what kind of work you do and what is important to you. What secret do you, westerners have that has made you so wealthy? What can we learn from you? In Indonesia, as you may have discovered, religion is paramount to most Indonesians. We assume that it is likewise in other countries, although we are confused that foreigners dress so casually, or to put it bluntly that the women expose so much of their bodies.



Yes, foreigners are confusing. Since you can travel overseas, you must be of a high social class. But at the same time, your behavior says that you are more like us. Your movements tell us that you are strong and independent, but at the same time they seem to express that you are short-tempered and impatient and that you have no time.

We hope you will forgive us for being afraid, sometimes almost xenophobic, and for not knowing a lot about customs outside of our vast country. In our defense, we can say that Indonesia has isolated itself from the outside world for quite a long time after independence. Maybe it was necessary as part of the nation building process (that has not worked very well anyway), or maybe it was helpful in the 30 years of the oppressive regime, but now we want to be open and learn.

Conversations with Indonesians who shout ‘Hello Mister’ are easy in one sense and difficult in a different sense. They are easy because there is a strong desire to talk with you. They can be difficult because the level of English that he or she (it’s usually a youthful ‘he’) masters does not go far beyond ‘What’s your name?’ ‘My name is so and so’, and ‘Where you from, where you go’ and ‘You married?’ These questions may seem rather personal and intrusive. They are superficial. As we discussed in the previous chapter conversations are usually shallow and full of *basa basi*, just like many of our relationships. The essence of relating with Indonesians is to keep in mind that we always make conscious efforts to maintain balance and harmony or to restore it if something has gone wrong. We hate to feel or to be made to feel *malu*, which

means both shy and ashamed. We believe that, if needed, it is preferable to create a make-believe world of superficial harmonious relations rather than to be confrontational. If you would meet an Indonesian whose English is good enough to explain with some depth about being Indonesian, you may discover that instead of 'think' we often use the verb *merasa* or 'feel'. And, that in estimating our proper position vis-à-vis someone, we are acutely aware of things that don't feel right. *Tidak enak* means that something doesn't taste well, but it also expresses one's feeling if something is not right. For example, if a younger person would be asked about his or her opinion in the presence of an expert senior, it will be very difficult for the younger person to express the opinion candidly. Instead, he or she may give an evasive answer or, bluntly say: "*Saya tidak enak...*" In this case, it would mean that it is not appropriate for the junior person to infringe on the area of expertise of the senior.

Of course, if you could speak Indonesian you would understand much more of what goes on around you. We understand that there are very few foreigners who speak Indonesian well, especially if they come for a brief visit only. While most of us struggle with English, we admire anybody who tries to speak Indonesian. Even if you master just a few words, by any means use them wherever possible. Don't be put off by the laughs of the people when they hear you struggle with pronunciation and grammar. That is probably part of our sense of humor, or maybe it's how we express surprise. The laughs are not to ridicule but thumbs up for trying. Even if you can't express

yourself very well, we'll be quick to figure out what you mean and help you along.



Come to think of it, our sense of humor may need some explanation. You can get a good impression of what makes us laugh when you turn on the TV and tune in to one of the programs with a high element of humor and slapstick. Even if you can't follow the dialogue, it is not difficult to figure out that a degree of physical and mental abuse, such as kicking, stomping and ridiculing is most hilarious. Stupidity and being uneducated, as visualized by one or more of the characters is reason enough to be subjected to abuse, especially mental

abuse, by the more educated characters. The uneducated on stage will also resort to physical abuse among them.



Class differences are clearly visible in any of the popular TV shows. The underdog makes us laugh too, probably because they protest social or political shortcomings, such as arrogance among the leaders. The way to expose arrogance is by

ridiculing it, which makes for a few good laughs. Not the kind of sophisticated laughs from a show like Seinfeld, but rather like seeing how someone opening a door is hit by a bucket of water.

On some occasions, especially when you chat with someone, you will see a smile or hear a laugh that is difficult to put into the category of humor. It happens most when we share our misfortunes. Usually, we do so with a smile.

“My brother had a motorcycle accident and he broke his leg,” a dear friend once said, smiling if it were a joke. A TV documentary several years ago featured a Vietnamese girl whose back had been maimed for life with napalm when she was caught in an air raid during the American War (the Vietnamese obviously don’t consider the event the Vietnam War). She told her heartbreaking story with a smile, while tears ran across her cheeks. So, it’s not only Indonesians who tell about disastrous events with a smile or with a loud laugh. We find it in many other Asian countries too. It is to reassure the listener that the problem is not so serious after all. It also tries to convey not to worry and that it could have been a lot more serious.

And maybe most of all, it is part of our outlook on life. There is a joke in Indonesia, aptly explaining that outlook. It says that if someone would lose a leg, the patient will say: “God is good to me, I still have my other leg.” If he would lose both legs, he would say: “Praise God, I still have my hands, my arms and my head.”

Always looking for the bright side.

Dress Code

Several weeks before the celebration of Independence Day, August 17, preparations for the festivities are in full swing. Late in the afternoons and on Sundays you may see groups of children, youths or adults marching along the street, as if they were military conscripts. They are perfecting their marching skills. Marching is a popular part of the celebrations. The objective is to march as professionally as possible, exactly like an army. During Independence Day, marching groups from different neighborhoods will compete. Schools have their groups as well. The early morning gymnastics group of middle aged and elderly neighbors will participate as well. What all groups have in common is that the participants wear uniforms and carry a flag. Not a military uniform, but one that represents the neighborhood, or the social group, the school, and so on.

On different occasions, you may see more uniforms. And not only among the armed forces and the police. Teachers and other civil servants wear uniforms and so do pupils and high school students. Tourist guides wear uniforms as well as shop assistants, and staff of offices and banks. Even the women from the neighborhood, who are members of an *arisan*, wear a self-designed uniform. Uniforms are important to us.

The *arisan* is a traditional revolving lottery system. The most attractive aspect is that it has no losers. All participants

win the jackpot in turns. The *arisan*'s rules are simple, it is democratic and egalitarian: the *arisan* member who has 'won' will not be able to draw a next time because his or her name is not included on the little pieces of paper that determine the next winner. A slightly different system is that a schedule is made at the beginning of the *arisan* cycle so that each participant knows when he or she will be the 'winner'.

In the old days, when Indonesia was a farming society with many poor farmers, the *arisan* provided a welcome lump sum of money every now and then, while the small monthly contributions were affordable to all the members. In today's Indonesia, the *arisan* shows no signs of becoming obsolete. There are *arisan* groups at schools (among the teachers), in offices, extended families, among neighbors, yes in any location where it is important to have good relations.

We find it important not only to be members of an *arisan* or other group, but also to show that we belong to a group by wearing a uniform. To belong to a certain group means that we feel comfortable there, that we are happy or proud to be a member and, not in the least, it gives us an identity.

Keluarga besar, or extended family is the notion that is most appropriate to use when we wish to express that we belong to a group. The notion of *keluarga besar* may mean the real extended family of several generations spreading across islands, or living in one neighborhood. There is, however, also

the notion of a *keluarga besar* of workers and employees of a company, a workshop or an office.



Obviously, we don't wear uniforms all the time. When there are no group activities, we wear what we like. The traditional dress, such as *kain*, and *kabaya* are now mainly used for official occasions, such as receptions and weddings. The everyday outfits are rather Western and informal. Jeans, baseball caps and T-shirts are common throughout the country. In several areas, such as in Sulawesi, one can still see women wearing a *kain*, but they complete it with a T-shirt.

The dress code is usually very informal. Since the days of the Soeharto regime Indonesia's batik and *ikat* enjoyed a revival that continues to this day. In parliament and during official receptions the male members or guests wear a long-

sleeved *batik* or an *ikat* shirt. Or alternatively a long-sleeved dress shirt and a tie.

But whatever we decide to put on, modesty is the guiding rule. We are modest and a shy people. Many of us are pious Muslims and all of that combined makes that we don't feel at ease to reveal much of our bodies. While in the early 90's it was an exception to see Muslim women wearing a headscarf, now it is a common sight. Situations can change dramatically. In the past, girls were expelled from public school if they wore a headscarf, now they may be expelled if they don't. The interpretation of the Muslim dress code in Indonesia, prescribes that women cover their hair, their arms and their legs. We are proud to have Muslim fashion. You will certainly find that covering one's hair, arms and legs doesn't mean dressing without making a fashion statement.

Muslim men only tend to wear something different when they go to the mosque. Then they wear a *sarung*, and a long white or light blue collarless shirt with long sleeves. They also wear a *pecis* or *kopiah*, the traditional Indonesian black cap, also seen in Malaysia where it is slightly taller.

Even non-Muslim women tend to dress modestly. The typical daily dress is the *daster* (duster), which gives women lots of room to move while doing their household chores. Especially in the big cities you will see miniskirts and T-shirts with short sleeves. But sleeveless shirts, cleavage and (mini) shorts are still largely out of the question.

Coming from a moderate climate, dressing lightly, exposing parts of the body to get that valued suntan, is tempting. Yet, it is recommended to conform to the local dress code, especially in rural areas.

Knowing all this about dressing and dressing up may help you when you go and visit someone. Leaving the tie at home is fine, but going on a visit wearing shorts is simply not done.



Visiting People

Visiting people is probably the best opportunity to learn about the culture. It is also a unique opportunity to get a glimpse of every day family life.

The fact that you are invited as a guest is a significant achievement. Please make sure that you understand the concept of *basa basi* when you are invited so that you don't show up on the doorstep, to be greeted with eyebrows raised in surprise for the unexpected visit. The invitation based on *basa-basi* is easy to detect. You will hear the expression “*Ayo, main ke rumah*” which means, “come let's have fun at my place”. This is an open invitation, even if it is repeated several times during the conversation, valid for as long as you will be in Indonesia. The proper response is to acknowledge that you will certainly do so –eventually, if at all. However, if you think it will be interesting to visit any time soon, the advice is to confirm with your friend on a different occasion, a few days later, for example. Express that you would like to say hello (keep the tone informal) and if it would be convenient. For a first time visit it is fine to set a day and a time.

Day and time: here is another topic to explain. As Indonesians, we also know morning, afternoons, evenings and nights. Nevertheless, our segmentation of the day is a little different. Mornings in Indonesia last to around 09.00 AM. We call the morning *pagi*. From then until about 03.00 PM it is *siang*, followed by *sore* until 06.00, when the afternoon turns

into *petang* and then, as from 06.30 into evening and night (*malam*). It becomes morning again when daylight is visible.

The best time to visit is after *maghrib*, the first evening prayer around 6 PM. But first of all you need to find the address. And here comes your next adventure. Cruising through the streets of cities and towns, trying to find your way to distant villages, you may have found it difficult to locate the place where you wanted to go. You may even have concluded that it is odd that major tourist attractions, such as the Borobudur, the Prambanan, Tanah Lot, the Mother Temple in Besakih and many others are so difficult to find. Admittedly, the positioning of signs is not a science yet in Indonesia. That also is applicable to road signs indicating how to get from Jakarta to Surabaya. Fortunately, GPS now makes a driver's life a lot easier. Experienced drivers in Indonesia don't need all that; like homing pigeons they have developed mental maps and a sixth sense of getting there.

That is not always easy either. There are quite a few people who don't want to give you directions. But if they do, they will tell you to look for this or that landmark and to turn at this or that corner. Or, more commonly, they will tell you to turn east, or west or north. Especially after dark it is not easy to know where east and west are. It will take time and patience to home in on the address. A complicating factor is the naming system of streets. Mangkuyudan, for example is a side street off Jalan Mangkuyudan in Jogjakarta, but not many people know that. Fortunately, there is the Health Academy (*Akper*) on

Mangkuyudan and that landmark, a former hospital, is familiar to many.

Finding your way through the city will become easier if you ask your host to sketch a map, not just showing the two or three streets next to where he lives, but a one describing where to go from your house or hotel. That also helps if Google Maps gets confused in the myriad of alleys.

Indonesia is divided into provinces (*propinsi*) and Special Territories (such as DKI Jakarta, and DI Yogyakarta) districts (*kabupaten*), municipalities (*kota*), sub-districts (*kecamatan*), villages (*desa*), sub-villages (*dusun*), neighborhoods (*kampung* or *RW*) and sub-neighborhoods (*RT*). Within the sub-neighborhoods the streets and alleys will have names, but to find them quickly one needs to know the number of the neighborhood and the sub-neighborhood. While the Dutch had introduced the concept of provinces, the Japanese during the Second World War came up with the system that divided the country down to the sub-neighborhood level.

Fortunately, there you are at last. Taking off your shoes at the doorstep is the very first thing to do. Traditionally, we love to walk barefoot. It is so much cooler and more comfortable than socks and shoes. But even in offices or formal meetings, if you look under the table, it is not unusual to see that people have kicked off their shoes or wear flip-flops. Shoes are associated with the outside world, with heat and dust and that is a second reason to leave them at the doorstep.



Holiday traffic off Malioboro Street, Yogyakarta

Passing houses, it is easy to determine if the family is at home or away, simply by looking at the number of sandals in front of the door.

'Modern' affluent families these days tend to adopt the western practice of wearing shoes inside the house. Just before entering glance quickly to see if the host is wearing sandals, goes barefoot or is wearing shoes. If it is shoes, then you will certainly be encouraged not to bother to take yours off.

After the shoe ritual, you will shake hands with the hosts. Of course, the *Bapak* is greeted first and after that the *Ibu* of the house and then children or other relatives if present. Remember to just slightly touch their hands and not to squeeze. Kissing as a welcome or goodbye is not done. The children and other relatives may soon evaporate to other rooms, while you will sit down with *bapak* and *ibu*.

Ruang tamu means guestroom. It is the very first room you will enter and most likely the only one you will ever see of the house. In a sense the guestroom is part of the public domain, of the outside world. It is kept separate from the privacy of the *ruang keluarga* (the family's living room) and the rest of the house, either by a door, a curtain or a sizeable piece of furniture. The arrangement of the furniture in the guest room is rather formal and always has one or more sofas, other seats, coffee tables and ornaments, such as an official family photo, photos of children graduating from university and at least one clock. The presence of the clock may be interpreted as an indication that the guests are not welcome, but in reality, it's just there out of pragmatism and because a wall clock is an

ornament that beautifies the room. Pragmatism comes in to allow guests to time the duration of the visit. In Indonesia, a casual visit rarely lasts more than an hour, also because between *maghrib* and bedtime there is only an hour or three, four at most. We go to bed early and rise early. In the villages after 9 PM it is quiet as most people go to bed early. In the cities where there is a lot of action around the clock, we still feel that it is time to retire around 10 PM. So, given that our guests also must travel all the way home, it is pragmatic to have a clock there, in the guestroom. You will probably also see a composition of flowers in a pot or vase, wrapped in plastic. On closer examination, you will see that not only the wrapping is plastic foil, but that the flowers are plastic too. Bad taste? It's pragmatism again; fresh flowers are expensive and will not last for more than two days, while plastic flowers only need some dusting off every now and then and may last a lifetime.

It's fine to say something about the interior, like you would do at home, but for Indonesians that is a novelty! Commenting on the style of the furniture, the decorations and the color schemes; why would someone do that?

Maybe you have brought something for your hosts. Flowers are generally not given during a visit, but only for weddings and funerals. Or during courtship. It is polite for the hosts to accept your gift with weak protests that you should not have done all that. Next, the gift will be put aside unopened, and the conversation starts. Don't feel surprised or upset; to us it is not done to open a present immediately or in the presence of the giver. It may be explained as being greedy

or as unacceptable curiosity. And if we are not pleased with the present, the giver may be disappointed to see our facial expression.



So, the best thing is to open presents after the guests have left.

As you might expect, conversation during a visit is light, full of jokes and is not supposed to go deep. Likely, you will not be asked what you would like to drink, but soon after you have been seated the maid will enter carrying a tray of drinks and a tin of cookies or something else to nibble. The domestic staff are not introduced to the visitors. A good guest will pretend to

be surprised to see all these drinks and snacks and will comment that he or she is obviously creating a lot of fuss for the hosts (*Aduh, merepotkan..!* or *Jangan repot, Bu!*). The hosts will respond that it is no trouble at all and that what they serve is really nothing much (*Ma'af, hanya seadanya..* sorry, this is all we have).

The traditional drink to be served for any occasion is sweet tea. A well-mannered maid will not look at you and not say a word but quietly kneel at the far side of the coffee table, putting the glasses in front of each of the guests. The host and his wife will not have to say anything to her either, unless there is a special snack that they would like you to taste.

In most parts of Java, it is considered polite not to touch the drink or the snack until the hosts have almost forced you to do so. And then, while drinking, even if you feel very hot and thirsty, especially after the long search for the correct address, you are not supposed to empty the glass completely, unless you would like to be known as a person who is uncivilized. A polite visitor will take a few small sips only and a small bite of the snack and finish the rest quickly after having requested permission to go home. In other parts of Indonesia, not finishing your drink and leaving it untouched until the last second of the visit is considered impolite, so there you must demonstrate a different behavior unless you would like to become known locally as someone from Java.

An interesting phenomenon during visits is that *Bapak* and *Ibu* may take turns in entertaining you. Of course, *Bapak* will be the first, both to welcome you and to chat. After a while,

when *ibu* has joined he may disappear into the family room, seemingly to attend to something important. On his return after several minutes or even after 20 minutes *ibu* may excuse herself. During his absence *Bapak* will have come up with more discussion topics so that you will not be bored, looking for things to talk about while watching how *cicak* are hunting the insects swirling around the lamps. A smooth conversation is essential, and a long period of silence is interpreted as the end of the visit.

It is unfortunate that you will not be able to see the rest of the house; it would give you an idea of how we live, behind the facades of politeness and superficial relations. If you were invited to come into the family room, you may not have expected to see that most family members sit cross legged on mats laid out on the floor or lie down on the floor with ample cushions and pillows. You may see some long round pillows. These are called *guling* and are indispensable assets in any bedroom. The *guling* is used in addition to the pillows for the head. The correct way to use the *guling* is to put it alongside the sleeping person, so that we can put an arm, a leg or an arm and a leg around it.

So, with all sorts of pillows and cushions we make ourselves comfortable in the family room. Even though there are sofas and other seats, we prefer the cool floor. If someone sits on a chair, it is likely the oldest member of the family. It is unheard of that a grandparent would sit on the floor while younger relatives sit 'high' (more elevated, more superior) on a chair, towering as if it were over the more senior person.

In the family room, everyone is probably watching TV, likely one of the many local or Chinese soaps or quizzes. It is very uncommon to see someone sitting curled up in a corner, reading a book. When we are together, we are supposed to talk with each other. Claiming privacy, sitting in a corner, not participating in the conversation is very odd. It may be hot in the room, but even so, people tend to sit huddled together, touching each other. Of course, women will not show affection to adult male relatives and vice versa. Gender is strictly divided in Indonesia. But still, huddling closely together is deeply ingrained in our souls. Probably because, being carried around in a *selendang* as small children, we have grown accustomed to feel the physical presence of our mother or other female relative. Babies and toddlers are carried around a lot and the *selendang*, the traditional cloth that mothers use to carry their children, is always within reach.

During the visit, sometimes you will be able to get an impression of family life, if the separation between the guestroom and the family room is only symbolical, mainly noticeable from the arrangement of the seats. You may observe that coziness, or homeliness as per western interior decoration standards is completely different in Indonesia. It may seem that we are indifferent to how we decorate the rooms. To some extent that is true. Interior decoration is becoming more popular among affluent urbanites. In most houses, you will find fluorescent lamps without shades hanging from the ceiling –if there is a ceiling at all, otherwise they will hang from a crossbeam. You may also notice that the walls are painted blue or are whitewashed. It all seems ‘cold’ and that is

exactly the objective. A house needs to be 'cool' and painted blue surfaces will not attract (many) insects. We also don't want others to think that we are *sombong* (arrogant) for displaying our worldly possessions.



Well, it's already approaching 9 PM or maybe it's as late as 9.30; time to go home. The common expression is to say that it has been sufficient (*cukup*) and then request permission to leave.

Would you stay any longer, the neighbors might begin to wonder what this guest is doing there so late at night. That's not appropriate for decent people. And besides, everyone knows that tomorrow the sun rises early over the neighborhood.

A Day in the Neighborhood

Maybe it's because of the tropical heat, or maybe the eternally chirping crickets play a role in this, but it's a fact that by 10 PM most of us begin to feel drowsy. It's time to go to bed.

The crickets continue their songs; they seem to talk to each other. Their discussions, or concert continues all through the night until the new day breaks. Before we doze off the distant sound of a *mie goreng* vendor can be heard. Will he come this way tonight? The low sound 'dog-dog-dog' of the piece of wood against a hollowed block of wood on his *kaki lima* carries very far. A little while later the high-pitched 'ting-ting-ting' sound of a *bakso* vendor sounds nearby as he beats a spoon against an empty *bakso* bowl. The sound of his plastic sandals can be heard when he passes in front of the bedroom window and then another 'ting-ting-ting'. A bowl of hot and spicy *bakso* is very tempting, but let's be strong and not be tempted.

Around 2 AM we may wake up briefly with the sound of a rooster. Silly bird; it must be confused, thinking the sun is about to rise. The Javanese say: when you hear a rooster at night, it sees an angel and you must say a brief prayer. Within seconds we doze off again, trying to continue our dream. Dreams often have a special meaning, so it is good to try and remember what it was about.

Around 5 it is time to wake up. The mosque calls for the first morning prayer; *subuh*. It may seem a very early hour, but already there are people in the street. The first faithful walk to the nearest mosque, alone or in small groups, chatting, and laughing. It's still dark outside, but in the kitchen the maid is making preparations for breakfast. She is boiling water. Soon, the smell of freshly made coffee or *kopi tubruk* fills the house. *Kopi tubruk* is the preferred way to drink coffee. It's very easy to prepare. While boiling the water, put one or two teaspoons of finely ground coffee into a tall glass. Add sugar according to taste. When the water boils, pour a little bit into the glass. Stir until all the sugar has dissolved and then slowly add more water, gently stirring the coffee. Leave it standing, with a cover so that the coffee can slowly settle on the bottom of the glass. Drink while it is still hot, with little sips.

The smell of the coffee soon competes with those of the food; steamed rice, fried eggs and fish. All that happens while we stagger to the bathroom for our traditional bath, using the scoop to pour cold water all over us. If that is not enough to wake someone up, nothing else will.

It's Sunday, a day without office work and we have all day to enjoy ourselves. There are no appointments. It's almost 06.00 now, the sky is blue, but the sun is yet to appear over the rooftops and the trees. The air is still cool. Outside, in the narrow street in our urban neighborhood, a group of men and women, dressed in their green and white jogging uniforms walk to the schoolyard for their morning exercise. It's a mix of Chinese *T'ai Chi* and gymnastics, all with taped loud music and taped loud instructions. These daily early morning gymnastics

sessions are very popular; especially so as more and more people begin to be aware of healthy lifestyles. The speaker can be heard all through the neighborhood. If anybody had still been asleep, not so anymore. The first noisy motorcycles make their way through the alleys. One of the neighbors loudly calls her daughter to bathe her little brother by the well. Several families share the well. It's a perfect meeting point. Discussions vary about the prices of vegetables, to gossip, to shouted instructions to children or, occasionally, angry words exchanged between neighbors.



Sipping from our coffee we see the first toddlers emerging. Invariably their mother, an elder sibling or the maid

closely follows them, holding a bowl of rice or porridge; feeding the children as they play and move around the neighborhood. It's difficult to find any street in Indonesia, town, or village where toddlers are not seen being fed by a parent.



By 0700, several *kaki lima* have already passed. It's not easy to decide to have a homemade breakfast of freshly steamed rice with a fried egg and chili, or something from one of the vendors. There is *bubur kacang hijau* and *bubur ayam*, there is also a vendor of bread and buns. Today let's go for rice and the fried egg.

Two teenage boys from the house across the street open the door, holding two pigeons. In front of the house, they

let one of the birds fly loose, using the other one to lure it to return to base. The bird flies a few circles around the house. Then they release the two birds together. They have small bamboo flutes mounted onto their chests, creating a characteristic sound as they fly. After this morning ritual, the pigeons are put back in their decorated bamboo cages and hung outside the house, under the protruding roof, so that they will be protected from the sun.

Indeed, while Sunday is not at all a day off for many Indonesians who work in the informal sector, construction, transportation, shops and so on, there are still many who have nothing to do today. Schools are closed and children play, riding their bicycles, chatting, or sitting in the shade playing a guitar. From one of the houses the TV can be heard and from a different house there is the sound of a radio or DVD player.

At the corner of the street several vegetable vendors appear, their bicycles and motorcycles full with dozens of varieties of vegetables. It's an impromptu market that always attracts the women, happy to haggle about the prices.

A few neighbors have their own small window shop, selling groceries, food, drinks, or ice cubes from their house. In Indonesia one never should walk far to get what one needs. Soap, paper clips, rice, sugar, cooking oil, photocopies, milk, ice cream, soft drinks, tea and coffee, snacks and prepared food; if it's not available around the corner it's probably because the world has come to an end. But with so many small shops, competition is a serious issue. Still maintaining harmonious relationships as neighbors, many of the shop owners find that

it is more and more difficult to make a profit. Many of the small shops or *warung* are look-alikes. They look the same and they sell the same. Copying a successful concept is easier than inventing something new and as a result many an innovative entrepreneur has become victim of his own success after the copycats took over. The *warung* business is so popular because it requires a relatively small investment, needs no permits and can be started immediately.

The customers of the many *warung*, they themselves being cash strapped most of the time, buy in small quantities, such as 500 grams of sugar or one small packet of detergent or shampoo that will last only today. They will often buy on credit, keeping the *warung* owner cash strapped as well.

By 11.00 the day is hot already. For the children that is no problem and they continue to run, yell and play. The newspaper boy delivers the Sunday paper. Throughout the neighborhood men and boys can be seen working on improving or repairing motorbikes, caring for a rooster or a pigeon, repairing the house or simply doing nothing much. There are cooking programs on TV, but most of the women are busy at the well or in their bathrooms, doing the laundry manually. Before noon the laundry is dripping from the lines in front of the houses, between the houses or in the backyards.

Lunch is basically the same as breakfast, but the difference is that for lunch there are usually one or more freshly prepared dishes with vegetables, fish or meat. Nevertheless, before lunch is ready there is still time for a quick

snack, offered by the passing *rujak* vendor. We quickly bring out a few plates while he slices fresh papaya, mango, cucumber, apple, pineapple, and banana and prepares the dark brown sweet and spicy sauce. He always asks how many *cabe*, chilies we want for the sauce. Three, four, five? *Rujak*, like most other Indonesian food is both refreshing and exhausting. The fruits are refreshing, but the spicy sauce makes us perspire and gasp for air. Still, we can't resist eating more and more of it.

The sound of the mosque can be heard, calling all Muslims to the noon prayer. Immediately, from all the houses people appear, men dressed in their *sarung*, wearing their *pecis* and with a prayer mat over their shoulder. The women, dressed in a white gown covering them from head to toe also bring their prayer mats. When they come home we'll have lunch.

After lunch and when the house has been swept clean it's time to relax. Some of us will watch TV, sitting cross-legged on the floor. One or two neighbors and a few children join us. Others will visit friends or go shopping. The ones sitting on the floor, watching TV will soon feel drowsy and lie down. It won't be long before one or two members of our company are sound asleep.

Just when we plan to go out to the supermarket a motorbike stops in front of the house and a little while later there is a call at the front door *kulo nuwun* (Javanese for may I enter) or the Muslim greeting *Asallamu Alaikum*, announcing

the arrival of a visitor. Ah, relatives from across the city with their two young children. An unexpected visit is always nice. The sleepers on the floor are awakened quickly and the guests are invited into the family room. They are all dressed in their Sunday best. We exchange news, we chat and it is all small talk. We offer them tea and *peyek*, self-made crackers with peanuts. Before the hour is over, they have requested to leave and are on their way home again.

Suddenly, by 3.30 PM more people appear on the street, performing the twice daily ritual of sweeping the street with a *sapu lidi* and watering the potted plants and the front yards. Leaves, dust, paper, and plastic are swept up and put in cemented bins along the street to be burnt later. Or, some families put the trash in waste bags to be collected the following morning. When the street is clean, the sprinkling begins. Some use a hose while others cling to the traditional method with a plastic bucket of water, scooping water over the plants with their hand, or a plastic scoop. When the plants have been taken care of, it is time for the road in front of the house to be sprinkled with water.

It's an ancient tradition, performed at the end of the afternoon. The objective is to prevent the dust from whirling up and for the street to cool down, making the environment fresh. By 5 PM in streets in towns all over the country, smoke still curls up from the cement trash bins where the trash is burnt. So much for a clean environment, eh?

Now it's time for us to go out and do some shopping. Not at one of the many *warung* in the neighborhood, though. It's too expensive there. As we can afford to buy larger quantities than the micro packages, available in the *warung*, it is more economical to go to a supermarket. Usually, we call for a Go Car with our app. But today, we hail a *becak* to take us into town. We know the fare, so there's no need to haggle about the price first. As usual the driver likes to chat, and he only stops talking if he needs to focus on the traffic. Late afternoon is a good time to go out. The sun is already low and the wind has picked up a little. Sitting in the moving *becak* the breeze is rather refreshing. Along the streets it's crowded with people. At the big square, the *alun-alun*, there are still not too many *warung* (in this sense they are not the neighborhood shops, but food stands). But there are ice cream vendors, snack and drink vendors and vendors of cheap toys. Tonight, it will be packed. The *becak* driver comments on the number of people watching the spectacle and that there are even a few foreign tourists among the spectators.

After another 2,000 meters the driver, perspiring heavily but still smiling, stops in front of the department store downtown. Here is where we prefer to do our shopping. It's not too expensive here and at this hour of the day it is not crowded either. Nevertheless, shopping always takes longer than anticipated and now we must face another important decision. It's already dark when we are done and the mosque calls the first evening prayer, *Maghrib*. Shall we eat out here or go home? Let's go home, otherwise Mom will be disappointed and there will be too much food to be put in the fridge.

Going home by *becak* early in the evening offers many temptations again. All along the streets the *warung* are now open for business, preparing all sorts of food and snacks. Back at the *alun-alun* we are tempted to stop and order *jagung bakar*, roasted young corn on the cob, marinated with butter, a bit of salt and spicy sauce. Well, maybe later tonight.



Although it is not even 8 PM, the *Pos Kamling* are already populated. *Pos Kamling* are the posts of the traditional night watch, both in the villages and in the cities. Early in the evening the young men from the neighborhood who are on duty come to the posts, simple wooden or bamboo platforms

with light roofing. They have put mats on the platform where they sit on. Some *pos kamling* have a TV set, near others there is a *warung* selling simple meals and hot drinks to keep the men awake during the night. They spend their time chatting or playing cards and their responsibility is to spot anyone who has criminal intentions. They are also supposed to make rounds through the neighborhood, checking that doors are locked.



[Click to watch](#)

Evening at home passes with washing the dishes after dinner, sipping a tall glass of sweet tea and nibbling *kripik tempe*, fermented soybeans crackers. By 9 we close the front door. It's unlikely that there will be guests now.

Another day has ended, giving way for the quiet of the night with its special sounds.

Sounds at Night

After a weeklong visit to Indonesia a colleague was ready to go home. Closing his briefcase, he looked out of the office window, listened attentively, and commented: “You know, Indonesia is a very noisy country,” slightly raising his voice as a motorcycle roared by, filling the air with hundreds of decibels of amplified engine sound. As with so many bikes, its exhaust pipe had been deliberately modified to create lots more noise. Indeed, there are many sounds in our cities and even in our otherwise quiet rural villages. The most enjoyable are the sounds of roosters and chicken, birds and crickets, even in crowded urban centers. Dense city traffic produces lots of noise, that’s true. It is not nice, but what can be done about it? And then, in our homes we have our TV sets on. It’s not unusual that at the same time someone else in the house, or maybe even in the same room listens to the radio or plays a CD. Nobody takes offense. Basically, all those sounds make our cities, towns and homes very lively and cozy. The only slightly annoying sound is the blaring music in supermarkets and shopping malls. Unlike the softly piped music in shops in Singapore, Europe or the States, we seem to lure customers with sound. The louder, the better. *Dangdut* and hard rock are the favorites in our shopping malls, rather than violins, enticing shoppers to buy more.

The colleague revealed that the noise in Indonesia had made him dizzy and that he looked forward to some silence.

How wonderful it is to wake up early on a Sunday morning and to hear nothing, he marveled.

Silence. Goodness, to us, silence is scary. We are collectively afraid of silence. That automatically makes the notion of sound pollution a concept from countries where people appreciate silence and say that ghosts do not exist. The slightest disturbance of silence there, such as a barking dog or a crying child automatically falls in the category of sound pollution. To us, it is silence that is a form of pollution. Silence is unreal. Graveyards are silent and that is the scariest part of any town or city. Silence creates opportunities for invisible entities to travel outside of their graveyards. Come to think of it, maybe we are afraid of the invisible that could come and haunt us. We are collectively afraid of ghosts. To foreigners, that must sound unreal. But then again, ghosts as most of us know, are not creations of the imagination, but facts of life. Many Indonesians have seen ghosts or see them regularly. When we enter a graveyard, many of us are acutely aware of the presence of the deceased. When we enter a house most Indonesians will feel the spirits or ghosts that reside there as soon as they enter. Indeed, it is rare for a house in Indonesia to be free from a residing spirit or ghost. Spirits are usually OK, but ghosts demonstrate bad behavior. They can make the residents sick and suffer lots of bad luck and even break up marriages or cause a miscarriage. Ghosts are complicated entities and the simplest way to deal with them is to make sure there is noise (and light) in the house. Even when we go to bed, many of us let a small radio play in the bedroom. And of course,

we leave the lights on. Just in case. After all, ghosts cannot disturb us for as long as it is not completely dark.

Powerful ghosts are capable of scaring people out of their houses. A house that remains uninhabited for some time almost certainly becomes *angker* or haunted. No person in his or her right mind would voluntarily rent a house that is *angker*. Fortunately, with more foreigners looking for rented property and are not bothered by our hang-ups about ghosts, many of the houses that are *angker* can be rented to them.

Meanwhile, when you switch on the TV, you may bump into a program that features apparitions, inexplicable sounds and lights and someone trying to defy the power of good and evil spirits by sitting quietly for hours in a haunted room or a forest. Regularly these participants themselves become possessed with an evil spirit. Millions of viewers are captivated night after night and go to sleep frightened.

Indeed, ghosts and spirits are very real. Essentially, ghosts and spirits are those who died and for some reason can't detach themselves from the mundane. Maybe because they died a violent or sudden death and were unprepared for the final change. Ghosts and spirits are powerful, some more than others, but at the same time they have their limitations. They can't speak to us and to communicate they need other means, such as making their presence felt, or by throwing objects from their fixed places. They can switch on the lights and make things disappear (including money) and later re-

appear again. Not everyone knows how to interpret these communications correctly.



When ghosts become a nuisance the services of a *dukun* are required. A *dukun* is a traditional healer or a wise person, who has developed his or her inner powers through meditation and frequent fasting. Apart from healing, some *dukun* can also cause harm by directing their inner strength or the powers of ghosts or spirits against others.

It is possible to attach a spirit to an artifact to make it powerful. Many traditional ceremonial daggers (*keris*) are powerful. But the ones sold in souvenir shops have no power at all. If you feel attracted to an antique *keris*, or a

woodcarving, be careful. When you hold it, try to focus, and see if you feel something? Is it a positive feeling or one that scares you? If in doubt, don't make the purchase.

While some houses may become *angker*, if the inhabitants lead good lives, pray and fast, the house may be infused with a different kind of energy. The *kraton*, the palace of the Sultan of Jogjakarta is one abode that emanates a strong and positive energy. When you visit the *kraton* and make yourself receptive to the spiritual atmosphere you will certainly feel it. This radiating energy may be the reason why so many find it hard to leave Jogjakarta after having spent their as few as four days.

Ghosts and spirits are not new to us. They are part and parcel of life, albeit in a different shape. Life is not just what we see around us. It is not just the material, the political, and the economical. Life has its invisible nooks and crannies with shadows that impact and even direct our actions. For us it is essential to keep a balance between all these different forces of nature. There is much we can do, such as leading decent lives, be good people, be faithful, pray, and honor our deceased relatives. Ceremonies and certain activities will also help to restore balance.

Most tourists will not be awake at 5 in the morning and thus will not witness one of the rare phenomena in Jogjakarta. On specific days, at that early time of the day thousands of people all over the city will hear the faint sound of a distant marching band. Isn't that odd at that time of the day? The band

has been playing its slow march for many decades and senior citizens know that this is not just an ordinary marching band. It does not exist, at least it cannot be found. Many attempts have been made to locate the band and its soldiers, playing the 'going to war' march. Many Jogjakartans say that the sound originates from the field of honor and that, if the band can be heard, it signals bad tidings for Indonesia. But, when we are at the field of honor, the sound of the band seems to come from a different direction again.

Many foreign observers have concluded that life in Indonesia is like *wayang*, our traditional shadow puppet play. Sitting in front of the screen one can watch the play unfold, but we can only guess what happens at the other side of the screen. The *dalang* or puppeteer controls everything.

In Java a *wayang* performance is always a very special and often sacred occasion. It is not only about the ancient stories of the Mahabaratha, the age-old Hindu epic, but most of all about the never-ending trials of life. *Wayang*, under the accompaniment of the *gamelan* orchestra is powerful of itself and helps to restore the balance in our lives that we need and that is so difficult to maintain.

While the Javanese *wayang* is rather difficult to understand, the Balinese version with its extrovert *gamelan* and traditional exuberant dances are far more accessible for visitors from abroad. Invariably they depict the eternal struggles between good and evil and the challenges to maintain a balance in life.

Night falls over the remote sub-village, high up in the mountains of East Java. A group of boys and girls, being trained to play the *gamelan* arrives at the village hall, laughing, shouting, and playing. They quickly sit down at the instruments and some of them begin to play a few rhythms



Bakso (meatball soup)
ingredients

independently until the teacher arrives. These first sounds soon attract a growing crowd of villagers, men, women with babies and toddlers. Tonight is just an exercise session and no formal performance. Yet, the crowd is curiously attracted to the sound and many will stay up all night outside the village hall wrapped in their *sarung* against the cold, sitting, chatting, smoking or lying down and listening.

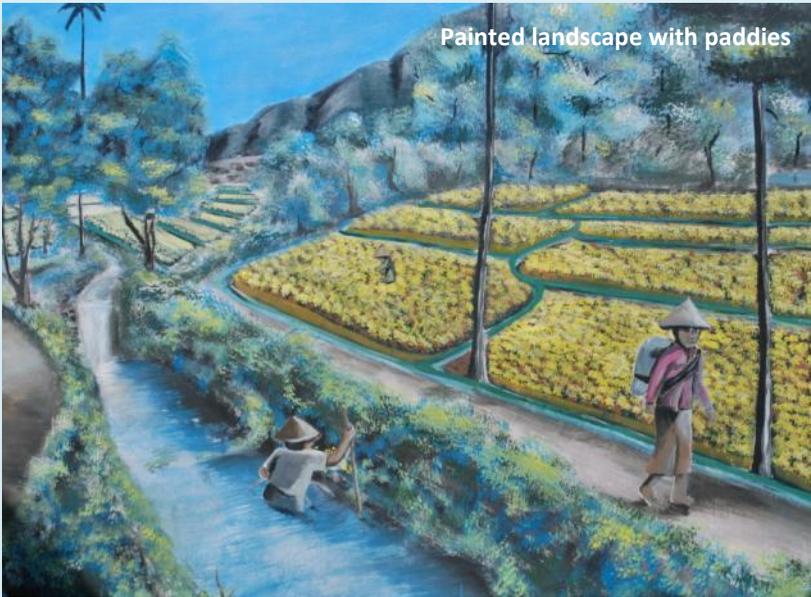
The captivating and hypnotizing metallic sound of the *gamelan* with its wooden drums pounding the rhythm and the heavy sound of the gongs resonating through the valley can be heard for hours until deep into the night.

Silence is death, sound is life in Indonesia, no matter if we are rich or poor.



Poor, but happy

From the esoteric, let's swing back to the mundane and harsh reality of everyday life. One of the contradictions western visitors experience when they visit a developing country is that despite the often overwhelming and clearly visible poverty, the poor seem to be happy. Why is that and –is it true? How can they be happy or at least, happier than many of us who have all we want and need, and maybe more than that and are still unhappy? Is there anything we can learn from the poor –on being happy at least?



Painted landscape with paddies

In the middle of the 1997 economic crisis in Indonesia, it was obvious that people began to economize. Instead of taking a taxi, they opted for the *becak* or the bus. Taxi drivers had a hard time finding passengers. Without any other alternative they had to extend their shifts, some even working a shift of more than 20 hours. Yet, this taxi driver was not upset at all. “Yes,” he said, “After 18 hours I feel tired now. But what can I do? I have four children and all of them are in school. My eldest is in second grade of senior high school. She is doing very well. My second eldest is in junior high school and he is also a good student. It is tough to make ends meet, but I don’t want to take my children from school and tell them to work. God is looking after us very well. I still have a job. At home, we are very grateful for all of this. We thank God every day for His blessings. I don’t know why we deserve it. Really, we can’t complain at all. It is true that God knows everything, so whatever happens with us, we will accept it. After I drop you off I’ll go home and sleep a few hours and then it is back to work again.”

It sounds like a contradiction. It seems like the poor in developing countries have a special secret to being happy, but they have not. It is all a matter of perspective. ‘The poor’ see the world from a different perspective. It is a much more limited world and not unlike the one of a child. It is a simple world and structured in a hierarchical way. In the family, the father knows everything and makes all the decisions. In the community, the leaders know everything and make all the decisions. Religion contributes with many rules, norms, and values and that gives even more structure, direction and

stability. The poor do not have many questions, simply because there is not much to question. The poor make few decisions because there is not much to decide. More specifically, the poor have limited choices. There is little uncertainty in their lives, even though it is not sure how the next harvest will be, or if there will be work next week. To that sense of uncertainty, the poor have developed an attitude called *pasrah*, which means surrender; they have put their destiny in the hands of God. It is not the same as fate or fatalism but rather, a deep sense of faith. Whatever happens to them, it is according to God's Will, they know.

So, that's why you see and hear people laugh so often –like children.

Just before the onset of the 1997 economic crisis, our government boasted that within a year or two the economy would 'take off' (a term used in circles of development experts) and change Indonesia from a developing country to a developed country. That dream has yet to be fulfilled. The economic crisis has hit Indonesia worse than any other country in Asia. The poverty rate shot up. Government data suggested that it peaked at 40 percent. But non-governmental agencies estimated that as many as 50 percent of the population had become poor in only a few months' time. Five years later, UNICEF published that, although the poverty rate had come down again and hovered around 30 percent, another 20 percent of the Indonesians lived just above the poverty line and were at risk of becoming poor if another crisis would strike. After the economic crisis, Indonesia's economy made a strong recovery. But still, poverty remains a troubling issue. Despite

all the years of development there are many poor in Indonesia. Finally, the poverty rate is now down, at least according to official figures, to below 10 percent.



Sometimes one can hear 'observers' say that the poor just need to work harder. From the comfort of an air-conditioned touring car or from behind the window of an air-conditioned train, watching 'natives' sit by the side of the road or in the shade of their house, seemingly doing nothing, such a statement seems valid. Reality, however, is not so simple. The poor work very hard, even to the point of physical exhaustion. One woman in Jakarta, unable to work outdoors because she must take care of her children, nevertheless is economically active. She manages several small-scale economic activities.

She produces soap and sells it out of her *warung* together with snacks that she bakes herself, such as fried bananas and cookies. If that were not enough, she packs dye for a bleach factory in the neighborhood, produces fermented bean curd (*tempe*) and raises and sells songbirds.

In Surabaya, as in other cities, potable water from the tap is not potable. Even after boiling the taste is too bad to use for cooking or drinking. Many households therefore rely on water vendors who make their rounds through the neighborhoods up to eight times a day. The water vendors, always boys or adult men pull or push a two-wheeled cart with room for 8 or 12 jerry cans. The total load they move around adds up to some 300 kilos. Often, they negotiate streets and alleys that go up and down. They work from the early morning to the late afternoon. First they need to fill the jerry cans from a tap, and then make their rounds, returning to the tap to refill. Vending water this way must be one of the most exhausting jobs, together with paddling a *becak* and tilling the land.

Although street children have been working in Indonesia for decades, the Asian economic crisis saw a rapid increase in the number of children selling newspapers, singing or begging on buses and at intersections or vending drinks and snacks. Contrary to what most people, including Indonesians believe, most street children work a few hours a day only, before or after school. They have a family, and they sleep at home each night. Only a minority of children working in the streets have lost contact with their relatives or have no known relatives. Life in the streets is tough for adults and even more

so for children. Street children are not necessarily economically poor. Their poverty is best defined as being deprived of opportunities to get out of their situation. And especially for girls who work in the streets and the younger children in general, there is the risk of becoming victims of sexual abuse. Let's give a face to the anonymous crowd of an estimated 20,000 street children in Indonesia.

Edis for example, is a 14 year old boy who lives and works in Jakarta. He makes his money singing in buses, while playing the guitar. He sings very well, with a voice strong enough to be heard even when the bus' engine roars. Although life in the streets is not only bad, Edis would prefer to be in school, studying to become a good citizen. When both his parents died, none of his relatives were able or wanted to take care of him and his three younger sisters. So, they ended up in the street and soon lost each other. Only recently, after three years of searching and asking and with the help of Plan Indonesia, an international development agency Edis managed to find one of his sisters who lives in Riau on the island of Sumatra. From what he earns as a street singer he now sends her money regularly so that she can go to school. Edis is deeply worried about his other sisters. If they still live in the streets, they would be very vulnerable to sexual exploitation and to other forms of abuse. Edis has only seen too many of his female peers fall victim.

Like all other street children, the police arrested him several times. One of the charges was that he was singing and in so doing was 'destroying the beauty of Jakarta'. In the police

station, they had beaten him with a stick, but Edis was fortunate enough to be released. Others are put behind bars



only because they ‘destroy the beauty of Jakarta’. One of the boy’s arms was fractured and another child was shot in the legs and is still limping. The charge? Destroying the beauty of Jakarta. Several girls recounted that they had been raped by police officers while in their custody. For destroying the beauty of Jakarta?

Edis has become the core of a group of children, all street singers, some as young as 7 years, who are determined to change their situation for the better. They have set up a Children’s Council with many activities. They produce films

about street children in Jakarta. They have even become official members of the Alliance of Indonesian Journalists. Edis composes his own songs, and he is also the choreographer of performances about street children in Jakarta. They have raised funds locally to help the victims of the flooding in Jakarta and, most importantly, they lobby and present declarations at the governor's office.

The street children in Jakarta will impress anyone who talks with them with their songs, their humor, their high spirits and radiant hope for the future. Edis pointed at a banner he and his group had made that said that street children want to be free from exploitation, abuse and violence.

Poverty is not only a matter of not having enough money. It is a social evil that creates a loop of low quality education, lack of access to education, a lowly educated workforce, child marriages, unemployment, low quality of work and products, limited or no choices, ignorance, and indifference of society at large to the problem of poverty, and exploitation of the poor.

Breaking that circle is a tough job. Without the active participation of the poor themselves and without a genuine commitment and decisive action from the government and the international community it's a mission impossible.



Hawking trinkets

Indeed, many of the poor seem happy. They accept their fate. Should they?

Shopping and Markets

Time for something completely different. Hardly a day goes by without shopping and especially when you are on vacation in Indonesia, shopping is a serious activity and a must. Despite the lack of quality, you may have found in Indonesia and despite the lowly educated workforce, we still manage to churn out an amazingly varied range of handicrafts.



With the demand for our products, both domestic and from overseas, creative entrepreneurs are aware of the need for

innovation and high quality. No longer are batik cloths and Balinese woodcarvings the only souvenirs to buy. There is a wide variety of ceramics; silver and (24 karat) gold jewelry; gemstones; batik paintings; traditional Balinese paintings and contemporary oil paintings by Indonesian artists; *batik* and *ikat* fabrics; leather purses; wallets and bags; decorative candles; music; clothes of international brands; shoes and also souvenirs from natural materials such as leaves, rice husk, coconut shells, tree bark, and much more. You will also find affordable Royal Doulton –and it’s genuine. Indonesia’s strong coffees and fragrant teas are available in many local flavors and blends. Outlets of *Teh 63* not only sell tea, but also rather unique decorative tea sets.

Prices for anything you will buy in Indonesia, including international brands, are generally more affordable than overseas, but within the country they vary. As usual, they are most expensive in Jakarta and Bali, in multi star hotels and in the tax-free shops in the airports. Souvenir and handicraft shops in department stores are also more expensive than the street side shops. Brand articles that you see in the markets or in the street are too cheap to be genuine.

If you have time, you might like to trace the handicraft producers in their villages to see how the products are made. Often the prices will be lower there than in the handicraft shops.

Furniture and home decorations like lamps, picture frames, and room dividers are worth exploring. Especially in and around Jogjakarta, Surakarta and in Bali you will find many

shops advertising their teak furniture. A certain category of furniture and decorations is advertised as antique (*antik*), but what this means is that the design is classic, generally 1930's colonial style. *Antik* in Indonesia has usually left the workshop only a few weeks before you entered the shop. Before you decide on a piece of furniture, critically look at the quality of the wood, the joints, the finishing and in general be critical on the quality of the craftsmanship. Wood that has not been allowed to dry sufficiently will soon develop cracks in moderate climates where air humidity is low. All producers or shops of handicrafts of sizeable proportions will be happy to have the items shipped to your home address, either as sea freight or by air.

Essential Indonesian to remember while shopping are: *obral*, which means 'sale' and *diskon* or *korting* (discount). *Cuci gudang* literally means cleaning out the warehouse and it signifies even more dramatic discounts.

Most shops accept credit cards. MasterCard and Visa have almost become household names in Indonesia. But other international cards, including American Express and Diner's are not accepted everywhere. Unfortunately, a word of warning is needed here. Sophisticated international credit card scams are not uncommon in Indonesia and many credit card holders, both from abroad as well as Indonesians fall victim. Before you set out on your overseas trip, check with your card company to make sure that you are insured for these scams.

Shopping is exhausting and it will require a lot of your time. While shopping for souvenirs, you may like to make a side trip to a local market. This is where the action is. To get a good impression of what goes on in a market, get up early and



be there around 6.30 AM. It is perfectly safe to stroll through the stalls if you don't wear jewelry. Of course, there may be an occasional pickpocket, as happens in all locations in the world where there are many people. The big cities have their daily markets. These are often located in multi-level buildings. It's hot inside and full of smells of spices, fish, meat, vegetables, peppers, fruit and much more. The markets have sections for food and for clothes, cheap watches, gadgets, cellphones, and other electronics. If you're interested in bringing home a sample of Indonesian music, follow your ears to shops or *warung* where the music is the loudest and see if there's anything to your musical taste.



Unknown to most travelers, Indonesia has many forms of traditional music perfectly suited for your daily meditation or simply to relax after an exhausting and stressful day at work. To name just a few examples: instrumental *angklung* and *Degung* music, both from West Java, *kulintang* from Central Java, Balinese *gamelan* and *seruling* (bamboo flute), and *Sasando* from West Timor (video on the previous page).



In villages in Java there is usually a weekly market. Weekly here means every other five days, according to the Javanese lunar calendar. These markets are of much smaller scale. What the population requires becomes obvious from what is on offer. In addition to the regular assortment of vegetables, rice, cooking oil and sugar, you may encounter

kerosene, rope, cattle, fowl, outboard propellers, and fishing nets. And always there are cheap plastic sandals or *sandal jepit*, called like that because you must keep them on your feet 'squeezing' them with the first two toes.

In all the markets, you may test your haggling skills. Don't worry about starting with a ridiculously low offer. The vendor probably has raised the price already, simply because you are a wealthy foreigner. If you have acquired a taste for Indonesian cooking, why not stock up on fresh herbs and spices (provided you can bring fresh food products into your country) together with some packages of instant *bumbu*, ingredients? The recipes are on the back of the packages. Alternatively, in bookstores such as Gramedia, and (in many airports) Periplus, you may browse through the bewildering variety of recipe books -also in English. Or just simply browse YouTube.

Talking about souvenirs, that is a concept very familiar to Indonesians.

A Day at the Zoo

Browsing through markets and shops, stockpiling souvenirs is a sure indication that the vacation in Indonesia is drawing to an end. Buying souvenirs is something that Indonesians understand very well. When we go somewhere, like a *piknik* to the zoo, it is customary to remember those who stayed at home. We must buy them some *oleh-oleh*. This is how it goes.

The children wanted to go to the zoo to see a real komodo dragon, and real snakes too! But most of all they just wanted to go somewhere and have a good time. It took some time getting ready, changing in their Sunday bests and it was around 10.00 AM when they lined up in front of the gate to buy tickets. It was already crowded this Saturday with large numbers of groups from out of town visiting the zoo as well. Men, women, children from the villages were easy to pick out from the crowd. Their attire and attitude are so much different from city folks. They arrived in minibuses and would visit several sights and landmarks in one or two days before heading home again.

The children's first point of attention were the swings. After some 20 minutes of swinging, running around and teasing each other it was time to go and find some animals. The vastness of the Zoo meant they had to walk long distances. The komodo dragons looked smaller than on TV. Less dangerous

they said, but of course that was only an impression. The nearby crocodiles with their immense jaws made them all shiver. Imagine those big teeth sinking into your leg...! In general, the exhibits were small and not very attractive. Signs explaining something about the animals were missing or the writing had weathered off. So, there was not much learning for the kids, but they still had a lot of fun. None of them had ever seen a giraffe or a camel in real life and they looked up in awe. How tall these animals are!

Suddenly they came face to face with a group of big red orangutans, standing in the middle of the path. They had not escaped from their exhibit, though. The idea was to be photographed with them, the animals putting a long hairy arm around the child's shoulder. A bit further down the path they could have their photos taken with a big python. Only one of the children was brave enough to have the animal draped around his neck. Meanwhile it was getting hotter and hotter. The children wanted ice cream. The ice cream and snack vendors were having a day with a good profit. There was a lot more playing to do, such as riding a camel. Eventually, around lunchtime their attention began to fade. All the while the speakers mounted throughout the zoo had not stopped attracting the attention of the visitors. Groups were instructed to return to the car park, or they were told to assemble at a certain location in the zoo to have lunch. While the children strolled along, they passed more and more groups of visitors sitting together in the grass. Their tour coordinators distributing cardboard lunchboxes. Invariably these included cold steamed rice, a piece of fried chicken, a bit of cucumber

salad, a banana, a plastic glass with mineral water, a plastic spoon and a tissue. After some 10 to 15 minutes the ground was littered with hundreds of empty or half empty boxes that the visitors had conveniently left behind. The zoo's cleanup staff had their hands full.



The children had not brought lunchboxes. They unanimously agreed to have a *bakso* lunch. That meant they had to leave the zoo, because the *warung bakso* inside the zoo would require them to backtrack a long distance and they were already tired. Their *bakso* bowls filled to the brim, they added even more sweet soy sauce, tomato ketchup and chili. They were completely silent when they enjoyed their lunch and soft

drink. All you could hear were their slurping sounds and the loudspeakers of the zoo.

Before heading home, they spent more than half an hour browsing the souvenir stalls in the parking lot. Coming home without *oleh-oleh* would be impossible. Those who had to remain at home would share in the fun through *oleh-oleh*. One of the girls bought some bananas, another one opted for a key ring and others joined forces in buying *salak* (snakeskin fruit). All the Moms, Dads and sibling at home would have something.

The groups from out of town, ready to move on, also began to crowd the parking lot, looking for *oleh-oleh*. The souvenir vendors loudly called the attention of the visitors, bargaining going on in full swing for stuffed birds and snakes, plastic necklaces, Styrofoam toy planes, kites, medicines, cigarettes, toy cars, bamboo flutes, T-shirts, stickers, peanuts, bananas, *salak*, apples, CDs, and cassettes with local music, and much more. Plastic bags, big and small were loaded into the minivans. Some very insistent vendors of cigarettes, sweets, water, and soft drinks even stuck their hands through the open windows of cars and minivans, trying to sell something until the very last second.

Look, three of the children were already asleep in the car before it had even reached the exit of the parking lot, their plastic bags with *oleh-oleh* on their laps.

Places to see, Things to do

This book, focusing on understanding Indonesians has little room left to share about things to do and places to see. A more detailed list is available on <http://indonesia-ok.com/where.htm>. So, without pretending to be complete, here is a short list of the major (and some not so major) locations you must have seen and things you must have done, time permitting.



Batam, Bintan

Batam, Bintan The islands of Batam and Bintan are only a short boat ride away from Singapore. Developed as an industrial area, Batam also offers shopping, recreation, entertainment and a ferry harbor to Singapore.

Bintan is a popular tourist destination for Singaporeans.

Sumatra

Medan	Point of departure for overland trips to Prapat, Lake Toba
Gunung Leuser	The Gunung Leuser National Park is world-renowned. Visit the orangutan sanctuary
Prapat	See Lake Toba and Samosir island
Nias	The small island of Nias lies off the coast of West Sumatra. It is quiet and has simple accommodation. The main attraction of the island is the surf which resembles that of Hawaii.
Bukittinggi	Visit Sianok Canyon, Lake Singkarak.
Mentawai islands	Not a spot for mass tourism, the Mentawai islands' inhabitants still live in relative isolation from mainstream Indonesia. Mentawai is a favorite among the world's surfers.

- Padang Get away from it all: 40 Km from Padang there is a little-known island called Cubadak. It's a great spot for diving and snorkeling. The island can be reached by boat directly from Padang. Stay at Paradiso Village (Italian management).
- Palembang Sights include Ampera Bridge spanning the Musi River. See the busy boating scene, floating restaurants, and shops. Wind down at Punti Kayu Park.

Java

West Java

- Ujung Kulon National Park, boat trips to rather active Anak Krakatau volcano (if the volcano's condition is safe enough to do so) in Strait Sunda.
- Banten Beach hotels, ferry harbor with crossings to Sumatra.
Banten is also the home of the Baduy, an ethnic group that isolates itself from the rest of Indonesia.

Pelabuhan Ratu

Considered off the beaten track, most foreign travelers forego Pelabuhan Ratu and Ujung Kulon National Park. Yet, both destinations are easily accessible from Jakarta, Bogor and Bandung,

Pelabuhan Ratu not only offers beaches and a view of the Indian Ocean, but also tropical forests. There are simple cottages and one hotel of international standard (Samudra Beach Hotel).



[Click to watch](#)

Jakarta	<p>Taman Mini Indonesia (Indonesia in miniature), Sea World at Ancol and Ancol Dream Land, National Monument (Monas), cultural performances at Taman Ismail Marzuki, and Wayang Museum. The National Museum (Museum Fatahillah) was Batavia's city hall during the colonial era. The historical downtown area is being preserved and renovated. Double-decker tourist buses make it easy to see the most important sights. Furthermore, you can see the bird market (<i>Pasar Burung</i>), Istiqlal Mosque. Savor great meals at the many international restaurants, see <i>Kelapa Sunda</i> harbor with its many traditional <i>pinisi</i> sailing cargo ships from Sulawesi.</p> <p>Shop until you drop in the many shopping malls. <i>Pulau Seribu</i> (Thousand Islands) north of Jakarta in the Java Sea is a popular weekend destination. There are cottages for rent and attractions include snorkeling, diving, and fishing.</p>
Bogor	Visit the Botanical Gardens, the Presidential palace, and the nearby safari park.
Puncak	Situated halfway between Bogor and Bandung, cool Puncak offers weekend cottages, hotels, tea estates.

Bandung	Climb Tangkuban Perahu volcano, enjoy the hot springs at Ciater, shop along Braga street and see remaining colonial architecture, get a taste for traditional West Javanese <i>angklung</i> music, such as at <i>Aung Oedjo's angklung</i> school.
Jatiluhur	Jatiluhur dam and its lake are not only used to generate electricity, but also for irrigation. A tourist park with cottages is part of the complex.
Pangandaran	Although not easy to reach by public transportation, Pangandaran is the location of choice for nature lovers and hikers. Accommodation is modest.
Central Java	
Semarang	Visit ancient Chinese temple <i>Watu Gong</i> , and the railway museum at Ambarawa. The nearby town of Jepara is famous for its woodworking.
Dieng Plateau	The cool plateau lies at an altitude of almost 2,000 meters and offers volcanic activity, a nature park, and a series of small temples.

- Baturraden** Enjoy natural beauty and hot springs in Baturraden's National Park. It can be reached easily from Pangandaran, Semarang, Magelang and Yogyakarta.
- Karimunjawa** Karimunjawa island is 125 Km north from Semarang in the Java Sea, and accessible mainly by fast ferry and flights by Nam Air, Susi Air and Wings Air. It's a haven for snorkeling and scuba diving.
- Magelang** The ancient Borobudur temple, one of the wonders of the world, is just outside the town of Magelang. Nearby you will also find smaller temples, such as Candi Mendut and Candi Pawon. White water rafting is widely popular.



- Salatiga Just an hour's drive from Semarang or Yogyakarta, Salatiga is as small relatively quiet town. You will find it a pleasant place to stay for a few days, enjoying the fresh air and the view of Mount Merbabu. Boasting three universities, Salatiga is also known as a town of science and learning.
- Ambarawa Approximately 10 Km. west of Salatiga, Ambarawa is known for the Ambarawa Steam Railway Museum. It is in the former Willem I railway station. The collection is limited.
- Klaten The town of Klaten, just east of Prambanan is home to the Sugar Museum (Museum Gula), housed in the former sugar mill with its well-preserved colonial architecture.
- Solo (Surakarta) Visit the two Sultan palaces of Kasunanan and Mangkunegaran, Tawangmangu park and shop for bargains along Jalan Selamat Riyadi. If you like batik, don't miss Kelewer market. Near Singaran village, the fossilized remains of 'Java Man' were discovered (*Pithecanthropus erectus*) in 1891.

Daerah
Istimewa
Yogyakarta
Jogjakarta

Sultan's Palace (Kraton), Water Palace, bird market, silver works at Kotagede, visit Borobudur (near the town of Magelang) and Prambanan and Kalasan temples, Kaliurang mountain resort for hiking and rafting. Climb Merapi volcano, watch Ramayana ballet performances (the one at the Prambanan temple is the most impressive).

Go to the beach at Parangtritis. Other beaches with stunning views and caves are now accessible, such as Baron, Ngobaran, Drini, Indrayanti, Ngrenehan and several others.

The best museums are Sono Budoyo, the Royal Carriages Museum (both located along Alun Alun Utara) and Ulen Sentalu (in Sleman).

Shop along Malioboro street and see Beringharjo market, one of the biggest indoor traditional markets in Indonesia. Take cooking or batik courses. In the town of Imogiri you will find the royal cemetery, which is open to the public. Full traditional Javanese dress is required and can be rented on the spot.

East Java

Surabaya

Surabaya is fast becoming Indonesia's culinary capital. Shop and eat at Tunjungan Plaza or Pasar Atom, see the old buildings in the Arab quarter. Eat out at one of the many stalls at Kembang Jepun. Make a day trip to the island of Madura crossing Suramadu Bridge.

Malang

Have pastries or a full meal at Toko Oen, still equipped with some of its original colonial furniture. See the last remains of the Singosari temple complex. Jodipan neighborhood is renowned for its colorful houses.



Tretes and Batu	Cool mountain resorts with fruit market and Kakek Bodo park with waterfall (steep climbs), Safari Park in Tretes. Batu is famous for its orchards and gardens. Cottages can be rented for weekend stays.
Bromo	Climb famous Bromo volcano to see the sunrise (tours start from Surabaya or Malang). The climb begins around 03.00 AM. Bring a warm jacket against the cold! Horses can be rented to make the climb easier.
Pasir Putih	Relax one or two days in a simple cottage on the beach. Snorkeling, sailing in a traditional boat, see the coral reefs and underwater flora and fauna through the glass bottom.

Bali

Denpasar	Traditional dances and music performances in many villages and at hotels, visit the Bali Museum in front of Puputan square.
Gilimanuk	Ferry harbor on the western tip of the island (ferry to Ketapang in East Java) and entry point to visit the West Bali National Park (hiking, climbing).
Sanur	Sailing in a Balinese (former) fishing boat, parasailing, shopping.

Kuta

What the *Costas* are in Spain is Kuta in Bali: surfing, shopping, discos, have a massage on the beach. Kuta is seriously overstocked with hotels, eateries, and all, and has very little resemblance left with the 'real' Bali.



Tanah Lot

A very popular destination for tourists, Tanah Lot is a temple built on a rock in the sea.

Nusa Dua

Recently developed as a quiet location for high-end hotels and resorts.

Kintamani

Visit the village where the original Balinese (*Aga Bali*) live.

Celuk	Silver and gold jewelry with Balinese motifs.
Mas	Center of traditional and modern woodcarving.
Ubud	Traditional Balinese paintings
Gianyar	Visit <i>Taman Burung</i> , Bali Bird Park
Bekasih	The holiest of all Hindu temples, the Mother Temple can be visited daily. It offers a spectacular view of Gunung Agung, the active volcano on the east of the island.
Benoa (harbor)	Departure point for day and evening cruises and diving trips on motorboats and sailing yachts. White water rafting.
Badung	GWK Cultural Park features the world's third tallest statue representing Garuda Wisnu Kencana. Visit the best elephant safari park in Southeast Asia.
Taro	

Toko Oen (easybromotour.com)



West Nusa Tenggara

- Lombok Island** Enjoy empty beaches along the shores of west and south Lombok, stay over at one of the Gili Islands, see Balinese temples. Climb 2,100 meters tall Rinjani volcano (don't venture there without an experienced guide).
Waterfalls at Benang Stokel and Benang Kalambu.
Inside Rinjani's caldera is Lake Segara Anak.
Take a ferry to Sumbawa from Labuhan Lombok.
Lombok is famous for its high quality *ikat* textiles.

Sumbawa Island Surfing at Hu'u beach near the town of Dompu. Climb Mount Tambora with its two-colored lakes and see Mount Rinjani on the island of Lombok in the distance. In 1816 Mount Tambora erupted in the world's largest volcanic eruption in recorded history, causing the 'year without summer' and famines as far away as northern Europe.

East Nusa Tenggara

Kupang West Timor is the place to look for Sasando music, *ikat* cloth of high quality. From Kupang you can rent a small motorboat to one of the small islands to enjoy a brief stay in a bungalow in your tropical paradise. Snorkeling and diving are the preferred activities there.

Flores Island Kelimutu: three mountain lakes with different watercolors. Diving in the Bay of Maumere.

Alor Island Even further east from Flores is the small island of Alor, rarely visited by foreign tourists. Alor can be reached by air from Kupang by Trans Nusa and offers pristine coral reefs. Fisherman traditionally hunt whale sharks.

Komodo Island See the komodo dragons (be careful, these are not pets, their bite is lethal)

Kalimantan

Pontianak	Equator monument, floating market.
Palangkarya	White water rafting near Kualakapuas. Traditional gold panning.
Balikpapan	Derawan island offers a rare collection of tortoises, reefs, and iguanas.
Banjarmasin	Floating market in the Barito River, traditional diamond mining, and white-water rafting at Loksado. Take a speedboat for a long trip upriver, visiting traditional Dayak settlements. Overnight in a longhouse.



[Click to watch](#)

North**Sulawesi****Manado**

The city and its surroundings offer many opportunities to visit nearby islands, and to go diving. The beach at Tasik Ria is well equipped. Visit the caves near Tara-tara, used by the Japanese army in WW II.

Bunaken

In Manado Bay, less than 20 Km. northeast of Manado town is Bunaken Island with its Bunaken National Park and Bunaken Marine Park. The marine park is a 'must see' location for snorkeling and diving to enjoy the largely pristine under-water flora and fauna. Bunaken can be reached by boat only.

South Sulawesi**Makasar**

See Fort Rotterdam. The boulevard is famous for its food vendors, but these have now been relocated to a causeway, south from the boulevard.

Makasar (also known by its former name Ujung Pandang) is the departure point for overland trips to Tana Toraja.

Bira Starting point for sport fishing and diving trips. There are several simple hotels for backpackers. Bira is a ferry harbor with a daily service to the island of Selayar. Public buses from Makasar to Selayar stop in Bira before boarding the ferry.

Selayar Island Excellent, largely unexplored diving opportunities, only two simple hotels are available on the island

Tana Toraja and Rantepao Traditional burial sites in the rocks

Southeast Sulawesi

Kendari Well known for its handicrafts and silver.

Wakatobi Bau-bau is the 'launch pad' for a visit to Wakatobi National Marine Park. Bau-bau can be reached by air from Jakarta, Surabaya or Denpasar. Then a short flight on Express Air to Wakatobi

Maluku

Ambon	The religious and ethnic conflict in the Maluku islands that erupted in the late 1990s will take a long time to heal. Visits to these islands should be made only after consulting the authorities. Otherwise, the Maluku islands are the center of the spice trade. Ambon has ruins of Portuguese and Dutch forts and sea gardens to enjoy.
Halmahera	The island has a 360 year old clove tree, believed to be the 'mother of all clove trees'. Morotai island was a military base in WW II.
Banda	Banda island has beautiful tropical vegetation but has also seen some of the bloodiest battles in the history of Maluku caused by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) while it established its clove monopoly, 300 years ago.
Seram	Nature, nature, and nature.

Papua (Irian Jaya)

Jayapura	Papua is Indonesia's largest province by far. It is also largely inaccessible and anything but a popular tourist destination. Those who travel to Papua will be rewarded with fascinating sights and traditional Papua cultures. Capital of the province of Papua, Jayapura has preserved the house of General McArthur. Lake Sentani is nearby.
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- Biak** The island of Biak was one of the fiercely contested islands in the Pacific during World War II. The Japanese Cave (Goa Jepang) shows a collection of WWII war relics. Visit the bird park and Museum Cendrawasih.
- Asmat** Asmat woodcarvings are widely copied throughout Indonesia.
- Raja Ampat** Raja Ampat is yet another fabulous location for sailing, snorkeling, and diving and can be accessed by boat from the town of Sorong and by air from Jakarta, Makasar and Bali. To protect sharks and mantas the local government has established the Shark and Manta Marine Sanctuary.



[Click to watch](#)

Going home

There is no escaping; sooner or later it is time to go home. Going home usually is the best part of a trip, but this time you may have mixed feelings. It's great to go back to your loved ones, to sleep in your own bed again and to have coffee from your own cup. You may look forward to all the mail awaiting you at home. Yet, on the other hand, while packing your bags you may feel sad and as if you are about to leave something behind. Something that has become a part of you and that is somehow important. What it is exactly, you may not be able to tell. It's more like something that is 'in the air'. During the weeks in Indonesia, you have touched on a different way of life, a different way of looking at life, a way of life that has some very good points. You will certainly miss the smiles, the warmth of the people. The sensation may be so strong that at home you feel lost. The mail you find on the doormat may not be so interesting after all. Your loved ones may behave in a way that you recognize, but that may not seem very relevant. The streets may seem too neat, the sidewalks too straight, and the supermarket overstuffed. The evening news may present problems that make you think: "so, is that all?" As we discussed before, these are the symptoms of reversed culture shock or re-entry shock. It may last a few days, a few weeks or several months.

With bags full of souvenirs, a head full of new impressions, and an almost empty wallet and maybe with

some samples of our instant noodles, or ready-made *sambal* you must make your way to the airport, checking in two hours before the scheduled time of departure. At the door of the check-in area a uniformed officer will ask to see your ticket and passport, before you are admitted. Your baggage will be scanned per the usual procedure and from there it is only a few steps to the check-in counters.



Sunrise at Borobudur,
Magelang, Central Java

Jakarta's Soekarno-Hatta airport and Bali's Ngurah Rai airport have the widest selection of tax-free (but not ridiculously cheap) articles. Nevertheless, if you forgot to buy *oleh-oleh*, this is your last opportunity. Until of course you come back for another visit to *Tanah Air Kita*, our land and our water, our home country.

Have a safe trip, *sampai jumpa lagi*; until we meet again! Come back soon! We hope you will never forget Indonesia, which we are sure you have found very much OK!!



Glossary of Indonesian Words

A

Adik	Younger sibling
Aduh	Oh, wow, ouch (exclamation)
Air	Water
Alergi	Allergy, allergic
Allahu'akbar	God is great (Islam)
Alun-alun	Open field
Anda	You (polite form)
Andong	Horse drawn carriage (Java)
Angin	Wind
Angker	Haunted
Angklung	(West Javanese) bamboo musical instrument
Angkot	Public transportation
Antik	Classic
Arisan	Traditional lottery
Asap	Smoke
Assalamu Allaikum	Muslim greeting
Ayam	Chicken
Ayo	Come on

B

Bahasa	Language
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Bajaj	Three wheeled public means of transportation (Jakarta)
Bang	Older brother (Jakarta)
Bangsa	People
Bakso	Meatball soup
Banyak	Many, much
Bapak	Father, Mr.
Basa-basi	Small talk
Becak	Pedicab
Benhur	Horse drawn cart (Lombok)
Beras	Rice, ready to be cooked
Berguna	Useful
Berdarah	With blood, blooded
Bicara	(to) Speak
Bisnis	Business
Bistek	Beef steak
Borongan	Renting a vehicle with driver
Botol	Bottle
Bubur	Porridge
Buka	(to) Open
Bumbu	Herbs

C

Cabe	Chili
Campur	To mix, mixed
Cicak	Small insect eating lizard
Cidomo	Horse drawn cart (Sumbawa)
Coto	Soup (Makasar)
Cukup	Enough

D

Daerah	Region
Daging	Meat
Dalam	Inside
Dalang	Puppeteer
Dan	And
Darah	Blood
Daster	Duster
Demam	Fever
Dangdut	Popular music genre
Departemen	Department
Desa	Village, municipality
Dingin	Cold
Diskon	Discount
Dokar	Horse drawn carriage (East Java)
Dukun	Healer
Durian	Fruit with distinctive smell
Dusun	Sub-village

E

Enak	Nice, delicious
Ekonomi	Economy
Eksekutif	Executive
Es	Ice
Es krim	Ice cream

G

Gabah	Rice (harvested)
Gado-gado	Vegetable salad
Gamelan	Traditional Javanese or Balinese Orchestra
Garam	Salt
Garpu	Fork
Gayung	Scoop
Gelas	Glass
Goreng	To fry, fried
Gudang	Shed, storage
Gula	Sugar
Guling	Long, round pillow

H

Halus	Refined
Hanya	Only
Hijau	Green

I

Ibu	Mother, Mrs.
Ibu Pertiwi	Indonesia, fatherland
Idulfetri	Celebration of the end of the Fasting
Ikan	Fish
Ikan lele	Catfish
Ikat	Weaving art from eastern Indonesia

J

Jagung bakar	Roasted corn on the cob
Janda	Widow(er) or divorced person
Jenderal	General (military rank)
Jeruk	Orange (fruit)
Jumpa	To meet
Juru	Expert

K

Kabaya	Traditional blouse for women
Kabupaten	District
Kacang	Peanut, bean
Kain	Traditional wrap-around skirt
Kaki lima	Vendor's cart
Kambing	Goat
Kami	We (excluding the person addressed)
Kampung	Neighborhood
Kangkung	Water spinach
Ke	To
Kecamatan	Sub-district
Kelapa	Coconut
Keluarga	Family
Kerang	Shell(fish)
Keris	Traditional ceremonial dagger
Kernek	Assistant
Kerok	To rub
Kesehatan	Health
Ketupat	Sticky rice wrapped in a woven palm leaf basket

Kita	We (including the person addressed)
Kopi	Coffee
Kopi tubruk	Coffee (lit: crashed coffee -ground coffee, sugar and hot water, ready to drink)
Kopiah	Traditional cap
Korting	Discount
Kosong	Empty
Kota	City
Kotak	Box
Kraton	Palace
Krim	Cream
Kripik	Chips
Krupuk	(Shrimp) crackers
Kulo Nuwun	May I [enter] (Javanese)

L

Lagi	Again
Lalu lintas	Traffic
Lebaran	Celebration of the end of the fasting
Lele (ikan --)	Catfish
Lesehan	Sitting on the ground (Javanese)
Lima	Five
Lontong	Sticky rice

M

Ma'af	Forgive me, sorry, excuse me
Maghrib	First evening prayer, around 530-0600 PM

Main	(to) Play
Manggis	Mangosteen: fruit with hard purple skin
Martabak	Giant omelet with meat and vegetables
Mas	Elder brother
Masuk	(to) Enter
Mayor	Major (military rank)
Mbak	Elder sister
Merasa	To feel
Merepotkan	Imposing on someone
Mie (Mi)	Noodles
Mobil	Car
Muda	Young

N

Nasi	Steamed rice, ready to eat
Nasi Rames	Rice with dishes laid out on a plate
Nasi Campur	Rice with dishes on a plate (East Java)
Nusa	Country

O

Obral	Sale
Ojek	Motorbike taxi
Oleh-oleh	Souvenirs
Om	Uncle
Opor	Dish with tahu, chicken or meat

P

Padi	Rice (growing in the field)
Pamit	Permission (to leave: Javanese)
Panca	Five (Sanskrit)
Panas	Warm, hot
Pasar	Market
Pecel	Vegetable salad
Pecis	Traditional cap
Pejabat	Civil servant
Penjual	Vendor
Peraturan	Rule
Peredaran	Circulation, Flow
Permisi	Permission (to leave), excuse me
Pertiwi	Earth
Peyek	Chips (generally with peanuts)
Pijat	Massage
Piknik	Picnic, tour, excursion
Pisang	Banana
Pisau	Knife
Podeng	Pudding
Polisi	Police
Pos	Post, mail
Pos kamling	Neighborhood security post
Propinsi	Province
Puasa	Fasting
Puncak	(Mountain) Top
Puyuh (Burung --)	Quail

R

Ramadan	The 9th (Holy) month of the Muslim year, the fasting month
Rambut	Hair
Rayap	Termite(s)
Ruang	Room
Rujak	Spicy fruit salad
Rumah	House, home
Rupiah (Rp.)	Indonesian currency
RT	Sub-neighborhood
RW	Neighborhood

S

Sahur	First early morning meal during the fasting month of Ramadan
Saja	Only
Salak	Snake skin fruit
Sambal	Chili
Sampai	Until
Sandal jepit	Sandal/flip-flop (usually plastic)
Sapu lidi	Broom, brush
Sarung	Traditional skirt worn by male
Sawah	Irrigated rice field
Seadanya	Whatever is available
Sedikit	(a) Little
Sekretaris	Secretary
Sendok	Spoon
Setik	Steak
Sholat	(Muslim) prayer
Sila	Virtue, value

Slendang	Cloth, tight behind the neck, used to carry a baby
Sombong	Arrogant
Soto	Soup with coriander
Srikaya	Fruit
Subuh	Sunrise

T

Tahu	(1) Soybean curd, pronunciation <i>tah-hu</i> (2) to know, pronunciation <i>tau</i>
Takbiran	Evening parade prior to a major Muslim holiday
Taman	Field, garden
Tamu	Guest
Tanah	Land, soil
Tanpa	Without
Teh	Tea
Telekomunikasi	Telecommunications
Telur	Egg
Tempe	Fermented soybean cake
Tidak	No
Tokek	Gecko
Tolong	Please, Help
Tukang	Craftsman, handyman
Tutup	(to) Close, closed

W

Wanita	Woman, female
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Warung
Wayang
Wilayah

Small shop or stall
(Javanese) shadow puppet play
Region, area



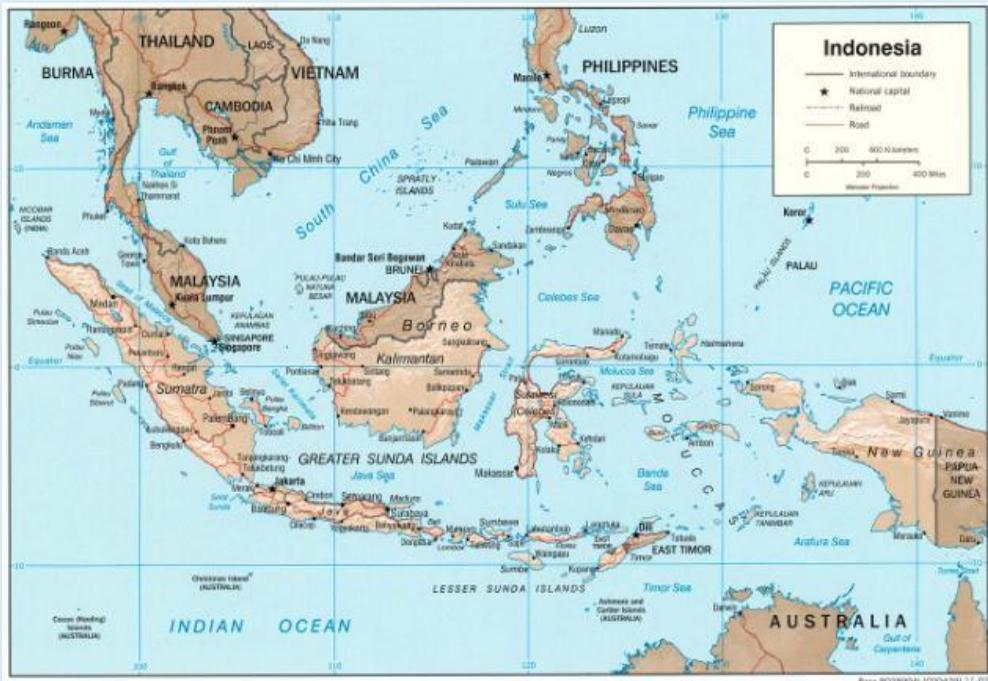
Indonesia Fact Sheet²

Political system	Democracy
Head of State:	President
Government:	DPR (House of Representatives) and MPR (People's Consultative Assembly -Senate)
Political parties:	9 (national), 11 (regional)
Capital:	DKI Jakarta
Population	279 million (2023 estimate)
Growth rate	0.6% (2022 estimate)
Urban population	58% (2022 estimate)
Unemployment:	5.3% (2023)
Poverty	2.47 percent (2022)
Infant Mortality Rate	19 per 1,000 (2021)
Maternal Mortality Rate	173 per 100,000 (2020)
Life expectancy	73 years (2021)
Literacy rate:	96% (2020)
Human Development Index	0.7 (2020). Ranking: 107 out of 189 countries; the higher the index, the worse
Corruption Perception Index	Score 34 (2022), rank 110 out of 180
Economy	
GDP/Capita PPP	US\$ 14,653 (2022)
Govt. spending for education	20% of public spending (2021)
Currency:	IDR or Rp. (Rupiah -approx. Rp. 15,000 to the US\$, Rp. 16,800 to the Euro 2023)

² Sources of sections on Population and Economy: Human Development Report, UNDP, Asia Development Bank, World Bank, The World Factbook, Transparency Intl.

Size	Archipelago, 1.9 million square kilometers, 18,108 islands, 108,920 km ² (68,075 sq. miles) coastline. Distance from northernmost tip of Sumatra to easternmost tip of Papua is equivalent of Nova Scotia across the Atlantic Ocean to Gibraltar or from Ireland to Iran. The total landmass equals three times the size of the state of Texas, USA.
Topography	Mountainous tropical rainforests and low coastal areas. 300 active and sleeping volcanoes, snow-capped mountain range in Papua, arid grasslands in Eastern Indonesia
Time zones	GMT +7: Sumatra and Java, (Western Indonesian Time), GMT +8: Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Bali, Maluku, West Nusa Tenggara, East Nusa Tenggara (Central Indonesian Time), GMT +9: Papua (East Indonesian Time)
Climate	Humid, tropical monsoon (dry and rainy), daytime temperatures varying from 24 ^o C to 35 ^o C at sea level.
Language	Indonesian (<i>Bahasa Indonesia</i>). More than 300 local languages. Hundreds of dialects.

Ethnicity	712 ethnic groups. Javanese and Sundanese are the most numerous ethnic groups (42% and 15% respectively). Others include Ambonese, Banten, Batak, Badui, Balinese, Bugis, Chinese, Dayak, Madurese, Malay, Minangkabau, Papua, Sasak, Sumba, Sumbawa, Sundanese, Tenggerese, Timorese, Toraja,
Religion	85% Muslim, with minorities of Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, and animists.
Industries	Natural gas, coal, crude oil, palm oil, rubber, coffee, tea, processed food, spices, timber, plywood, furniture, handicrafts, textiles, clothing, shoes, cement, fertilizer, minerals, vehicle and aircraft assembly, plastics, tourism
Environment	2.6 tons CO ₂ emission/capita (USA 14.9 t -2022)
Voltage	220 Volts, West European two pins and three pin (grounded) sockets, some hotels also have US two and three pin flat sockets





Chris Soebroto was born in East Java, Indonesia in 1947, but received his education in Europe. He has written volumes of in-company communications on cross-cultural learning after following a seemingly inconsistent study and career path, which included tour operating, yacht design and cultural anthropology. Most of his professional career was in the field of grassroots development, working for an international NGO in The Netherlands, Indonesia, and Colombia.

The many years in Europe and his education in cultural anthropology allowed him to develop an understanding for the thinking patterns of both Indonesians and westerners. This unique double perspective is reflected in *Enjoying Indonesia*, the author's second publication in 2004 through [Indonesia-ok](#).

'Jetlag' the author's debut was published in 2004. It provides a simple recipe to prevent jetlag on long international flights without medication or costly gadgets.

A third publication is titled *Matrozensoep* (Sailor's Soup), a collection of short stories in Dutch and English. Another Dutch publication is '*Rust, Ruimte, Natuurschoon*'.

The author now has a focus on writing on climate change and sustainability issues.