



Visiting Indonesia

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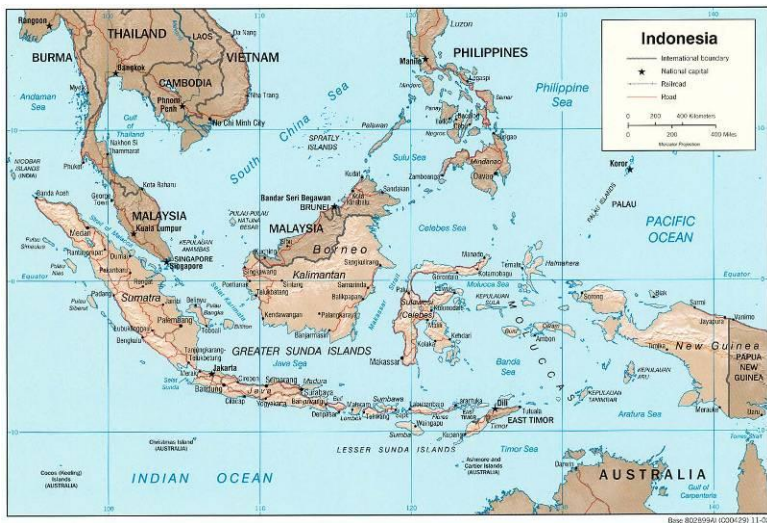
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Geography



Indonesia is the world's largest archipelago of more than 18,000 islands, stretching along the Equator in Southeast Asia. Most of the islands are not inhabited. The major islands, in terms of population, are Java, Sumatra, and Bali. Java alone is home to almost 50 percent of the total population of over 270 million Indonesians.

Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world, after China, India and the USA. It has three time zones and could easily span the Atlantic Ocean from Nova Scotia to the coast of Portugal or from Ireland to Greece.

Climature

Temperatures at sea level range from 24 to 36 degrees Celsius all year round. Humidity is high.

At higher altitudes the temperature drops accordingly.

Those who like to scale mountains (and there are quite a

few mountains to scale in Indonesia) need to bring warm clothes for the nights -and plenty of water to avoid dehydration.

Never, ever go hiking and climbing without a professional guide.



Indonesia has only two seasons: the rainy and the dry season. South from the equator the rainy season generally lasts from November to April. North from the Equator it is from May to October.

However, climate change is causing a more erratic seasonal pattern. Rainy seasons may last longer or shorter. Increasingly they come with heavy rainstorms, often causing flooding and landslides.

Dress Code

Indonesians dress modestly. Although you may see some men wearing only shorts, the norm is to wear a shirt and pants or jeans.

Women will most likely wear pants, jeans or long skirts. They almost always wear long sleeves. Many Muslim women can be seen wearing head scarves.

When visiting villages, it is best to adjust to the local dress code at least to some extent. For women that implies avoiding sleeveless tops, cleavage, and shorts. For men, wear long trousers and short sleeved shirts.

Nudity on beaches is strictly forbidden.



Security, Passport, Visas

Indonesia is a safe and attractive destination for holiday makers, businesspeople, and expatriates.

Areas to avoid include certain locations in Papua. If in doubt, contact the Foreign Ministry in your country or the nearest Indonesian embassy.

You will find that most Indonesians are very friendly and helpful. It is not necessary to be more cautious than you would be in any other city of any other country.

To enter Indonesia, visitors need a passport valid for at least another six months from the day of arrival.

Nationals of several countries need to apply for a visa through the nearest Indonesian Embassy.

Visa-free arrival is granted to nationals of Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor Leste, and Viet Nam. The Free Visa is valid for 30 days and cannot be extended.

Nationals of [87 countries](#) are allowed to apply and pay for an e-visa through one of these sites:

- [Directorate of Immigration](#) (Jakarta),
- [Indonesia Visitor Visa](#)

For all other countries two types of visas are available:

- The **On Arrival Visa** (VOA) is valid for 30 days and can be extended once for another 30 days at Immigration Offices.

- **The Tourism Visa**, valid for 60 days.

Other e-visas are available for students, businessmen and for social/cultural purposes for arrival in Jakarta. Full details at [Indonesia evisa](#).



Furthermore, travelers must submit an [online Customs Declaration](#), 48 hours before arrival in Indonesia (one for your entire party).

The immigration process usually is simple and quick. Customs officials work quickly too. They require all checked baggage or carry-on bags to be scanned before you can take it outside the airport.



Beware: Indonesia has capital punishment for people attempting to bring illicit drugs into the country, even the smallest amounts.

Dozens of foreigners are awaiting their fate on death row. Customs officials foil drug smuggling attempts almost daily.

Health Precautions

Ask your physician for advice on vaccinations and preventive treatment, such as for typhoid, cholera, and hepatitis. If you arrive from a country where Yellow Fever is endemic, a Yellow Fever vaccination is mandatory.



Malaria occurs in most parts of the country with the exception of West and East Java.

Tuberculosis is endemic, especially in the eastern provinces (the islands east from Bali). During the rainy season (October through May) **Dengue Fever** occurs. If diagnosed in its early stages, treatment is simple. Symptoms include a general feeling of being tired, continuing fever, nausea and vomiting, no taste for food, and small red spots that appear on the arms after three of four days.

Additional information on health risks for travelers is available for example through the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

Mosquito bites are a nuisance and some mosquitoes transfer malaria or Dengue Fever.



To keep mosquitoes away, use a good mosquito repellent (tropical formula), available in any supermarket, pharmacy or drugstore.

Don't drink tap water anywhere. Bottled mineral water is available in all cities, towns and even in the smallest hamlets throughout the country. Drink plenty of water

during the day; dehydration occurs very quickly.

Travelers who like to get a tan need to be very careful. Sunburn may occur as quickly as in 15 minutes, despite protective sun blocks.

If you are a non-smoker, you need to know that Indonesians smoke all the time and everywhere and (often) in no smoking areas. Yet, a no smoking ban is in force in all public places.

After arrival it is best to take it easy for at least the first two or three days. Allow your body to adjust to the time difference and the climate and to overcome the effects of jetlag.

In case you need medical help ask for an international hospital or a private clinic. Hospitals of international standard include [Brawijaya Hospital](#) in Jakarta, and the [Mitra Keluarga Group](#) in Jakarta and Surabaya. In Yogyakarta there is the [Happy Land Medical Centre](#). In Bali you will find [SOS Medika](#).

Currency

Indonesia's currency is the Rupiah (Rp or IDR). The exchange rate fluctuates around Rp 15,000 for the US\$ and Rp 16,000 for the Euro.

Get the latest currency rates at [IMQ](#), [Bloomberg](#), [Yahoo](#) or [Bank Indonesia](#).



ATMs are ubiquitous. You will find them in shopping centers, hotels, banks and in the airports and along major streets. The ATMs with the Cirrus and Plus logo accept foreign credit cards.

Money changers are also widely available. However, travelers often report they have been cheated. Therefore, it is recommended to change your cash with a bank.

When changing cash, you should know that banks and money changers refuse US\$ notes that are not in pristine condition. Banks and money changers will also refuse US\$ bills printed in certain years and bills with certain serial numbers.

Foreign coins cannot be changed at all.

Most major credit cards, such as Visa, Master Card (and far less common) American Express can be used to pay for tickets, hotels, and tours. Generally only Visa and Master Card will be accepted shops and supermarkets (usually a minimum amount is applicable such as Rp 50,000).

Be careful when you use your card: always keep it in sight. Unfortunately, sophisticated international credit card fraud rings also operate in Indonesia and other Asian countries.

Heading into Town

All airports in Indonesia, including the domestic ones have **taxi** services. In most airports you have the option to pre-pay a taxi from a booth.

It is available either inside the baggage claim area or in the arrival lounge. Prices are fixed and may include a surcharge and toll fees as applicable.

The second option is to hail a taxi 'curb side' such as in Jakarta's international airport. These taxis have meters. In Jakarta and other cities, the [Blue Bird taxi group](#) has an excellent reputation. You may find the Bluebird App a handy tool for your trips in Jakarta.



Uber operates in Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, and Bali. Most Indonesians use the trusted [Gojek-app](#) to hail transportation, to order food, and to make payments.

Hotels: There is an overwhelming choice, ranging from 5-star hotels to guesthouses, comfortable or modest home stays to hostels where you need to bring your own towels and soap.

Adventurous travelers who haven't made room reservations will always find a roof over their heads, even in the busiest season (from June to September).

Shopping

Most shops open seven days a week from 09:00 AM to 09:00 PM and they don't close for lunch.



Indonesia is truly a shoppers' paradise. There are vast shopping malls in the major urban centers that can easily compete with any shopping mall abroad. Jakarta even holds the world record for the highest number of malls per capita.

But there are also numerous surviving traditional markets, neighborhood shops, supermarkets, boutiques, souvenir shops and 'antique' shops.

On the latter; *antik* in Indonesia does not necessarily mean antique. It is more inclined to classic. Indonesian *antik* is usually only a few days or weeks old when you buy it and you should certainly buy it when you appreciate the (classic) design, the craftsmanship or the value for money.

Souvenirs and handicrafts are of good quality, varied and innovative. Above all, they are cheap, unless they are high quality wood carvings (with high quality wood and high



quality of craftsmanship).

Bali remains the best spot to search for good wood carvings. Genuine and classic batik is also worth its price.

In the tax-free section of Jakarta's and Bali's international airport there is a large souvenir shop with surprisingly high quality souvenirs.

Indonesia is well known for its 24-karat gold and silver jewelry and gem stones. If you don't find the design you like, you may order it and it will be ready in days rather than weeks.

There is a growing export trade in wood furniture and in several cities or towns you can find furniture producers who will be happy to take your order and ship it right to your doorstep.



Even in the most up-town shopping malls clothing and shoes are generally cheaper than at home.

Well-known international brands are genuine, unless they are too cheap to be so.

Internet access

Indonesia is quickly improving online access. Especially in the major cities it is easy to find free wireless hot spots. All malls, most coffee shops, and airports provide the service. Download and upload speeds vary.

Telecom providers offer USB mobile hotspots with reliable and relatively fast internet access.

If all else fails, there are still numerous Warnet (*Warung Internet* or internet shops) with cheap wired or wireless access. Many of these Warnet are of low standard and struggle on with ageing desktop PCs.

Domestic Travel

Flights

Indonesia boasts many domestic airlines. The best known is state owned Garuda Indonesia. The others are private airlines, such as Lion Air, Wings Air, Batik Air, Jatayu Air, Pelita Air, Indonesia AirAsia and several others.

They operate frequent flights, especially from Jakarta to major destinations in Indonesia such as Medan, Palembang, Bandung, Semarang, Jogjakarta, Surakarta, Surabaya, Denpasar (capital of the island of Bali), Mataram on the island of Lombok, Kupang, Makassar, Balikpapan, Banjarmasin, Ambon, Manado, Biak and Jayapura.



Between the two major cities in Indonesia, Jakarta and Surabaya alone there are dozens of return flights each day. Most domestic airlines post schedules on their websites.

The combined fleets of all the domestic airlines show many Boeing 737 aircraft, ATR and Airbus.

Reservations for most domestic flights can be made through travel agents and airlines abroad. However, it is more reliable, and a lot cheaper to do so after you have arrived in Indonesia.

A growing number of domestic airlines offer online bookings facilities and international credit card payments.

In all airports there are warnings not to use *calo* (illegal middlemen) and to purchase tickets directly at the airlines' sales counters.

Trains

In the island of Java and in parts of Sumatra and South Sulawesi traveling by train is a good alternative to cover long distances in relative comfort and for very little money. There are three kinds of services available: economy (*ekonomi*), business (*bisnis*) and executive (*eksekutif*). All classes have air conditioning.

Usually there is also an onboard catering service. At all stations vendors are blocked from entering the platforms and trains to offer their products.

The economy service has assigned but very narrow seats. Business class sports better seats.

The best service is *eksekutif*. It has reclining seats and more varied catering. Jakarta to Surabaya, almost 1,000 kilometers all across the island, will set you back less than US\$ 30 (for the most expensive overnight express).

Reservations for all train classes can be made online, at the stations (for same day departures only) or at IndoMaret and Alfa Maret outlets.

During national holidays, such as *Idul Fitri* and for Christmas it may be next to impossible to obtain train or bus tickets at all. Prices for public transportation during major holidays will surge.

The latest development is [WHOOSH](#), the highspeed train between Jakarta and Bandung.

Smoking is prohibited at railway stations and on the trains.

In railway stations there will be warnings not to use the services of *calo* (middlemen) but to buy tickets directly at the ticket sales counters.



Buses

If you have time enough, an interesting way to see the sights and to experience the sounds and smells of Indonesia is to take the bus. Buses are by far the most popular means of transportation. It is possible to take a

bus from Medan in North Sumatra all the way to Solo (Surakarta) in Central Java, or to go island hopping from Surabaya (East Java) to Kupang (West Timor). Bus fares are cheap, and the buses are air conditioned.

However, the seats may be too narrow, even for not so tall westerners. In the bus terminals and on the buses, be aware of pickpockets and people who offer unsolicited services. Try to find a seat in the front and keep your baggage in sight.



Car Rental

Car rental has become more common and more affordable. Bali without a doubt has the most car rental companies, including Avis and Hertz.

Bring your passport and show your international driver's

license and you will be on your way quickly. Several local car rental companies send you on the road with an almost empty fuel tank. Don't be upset, that's the norm. You're not supposed to return the car with a full tank either. A half day rental counts 12 hours of usage. A full day may keep you on the road for 24 hours if you wish.

Although there are traffic rules in Indonesia most drivers seem to ignore them.



Bikers, *becak*, and cyclists are notorious for using the wrong side of the road, especially at night.

Be aware that *becak* and cyclists never have lights. The best rule for foreign drivers is to take it very easy and to go with the flow.

An alternative to adventurous driving is to rent a car with a driver. This facility is known as *borongan* (literally: borrowing a car or minibus and its driver). You are free to travel anywhere and for any number of days. Indonesian drivers are used to drive for hours on end.

They may make a 1,000 kilometers' trip from Surabaya to Jakarta in 12 or 15 hours, take a few hours' rest and then drive all the way back again. However, for reasons of safety and humanitarianism allow the driver to drive for 8 hours per day only. The daily rates for a car and driver amount to around approximately Rp 600,000 (plus fuel).

A far cheaper way of transportation is to share the minibus with other passengers. This form of transportation is known as 'travel'. 'Travel' has become another form of public transportation and there are many companies with services between major cities. A ticket for a scheduled ride from Jakarta to Jogjakarta will come at approximately Rp 150,000 per person.

Tickets are available through hotels, travel agents and specialized agents.

Pedicabs and Ojek

Indonesia has some exotic forms of transportation, which include pedicabs (*becak*) and *ojek*. The latter are motorbike owners who operate their bikes as taxis. You tell your destination, hop on the buddy seat and that's all there is to it. Although the fares are cheap by any standard, haggling is highly acceptable.

The same system applies to pedicabs. Pedicab drivers paddle their *becak* in the still of the night, in the heat of the day and through but the heaviest of thunderstorms.

The fares are low, but they are economical only on short distances.



As mentioned earlier most Indonesians use the [Gojek-app](#) to summon a motorbike taxi.

The cultural cities of Jogjakarta and Surakarta (Solo) are by far the best for a drive in a *becak*, but *becak* can be found in many other cities and towns such as Medan, some parts of Jakarta, Bandung, Semarang, Surabaya, Makassar, and Bali.

Indonesian Food

Indonesian cuisine is as varied as its people, their cultures and where they live. For most Indonesians, rice is the staple food for breakfast, lunch and dinner. In the more arid eastern provinces maize and tubers, such as cassava replace rice. Maize and tubers are slowly put into the corner of poor-men's food.



With rice, either steamed or fried, Indonesians like to eat one or more side dishes of vegetables, meat or fish. The variety of side dishes is limitless, and most tourists soon acquire a taste for Indonesian food with or without one of the equally varied chili varieties.

There are local tastes and smells, but in general the food is mildly to very spicy.

A good way to get accustomed to Indonesian food is at one

of the many Padang restaurants. The waiter or waitress will put an astonishing number of dishes on the table. You are charged only for what you eat.



Those with a taste for burgers and pizza should not despair. Many of the internationally known fast food chains are present in Indonesia. Also, all hotels serve western fare.

If you are used to a breakfast of bacon and eggs, no hotel or restaurant will have a problem with the eggs, but bacon in a Muslim country like Indonesia may be hard to come by.

More and more vegetarian restaurants pop up, so vegetarians find it increasingly easy to locate suitable

restaurants. In the countryside, look for any of these dishes: *gado-gado*, *pecel*, *ketroprak*, *karedok*, *siamay*, *tempe goreng*. If you don't mind 'fish around the meat' ask for *sayur lodeh* or *sayur asem*.



It's hard to keep up with the culinary innovations. So, go on a feast for your taste buds.

Eating out and Tipping

At times it is as if Indonesians eat and drink all day and most of the night. Indeed, the number of restaurants, roadside food stalls and food peddlers is astonishing. Especially in urban centers it is easy to find food stalls open at any time of the day or night.

If you invite Indonesians for dinner, you should know that

many are not accustomed to having lengthy meals with equally long conversations. One is used to enter a restaurant, to order, to enjoy the meal quickly, pay and leave.

If your guests begin to show signs of restlessness, it's not because they don't enjoy your hospitality. Instead, they feel they are exhausting your hospitality.

Tipping in Indonesia is easy. Any amount will be appreciated, but if you don't it is usually not a problem either. Waiters, except for those in 4- or 5-star hotels, don't expect tips at all. However, tourist guides and porters must be tipped as their base salary (if they have one at all) is not sufficient to sustain them.

Off the beaten Track

Many tourists follow the traditional route from West to East across Sumatra and Java to Bali. Yet, Indonesia has an overwhelming and largely undiscovered potential to entertain international travelers.



The small islands of Nias and Sibolga in Sumatra are only one example. You will find special golf resorts. There are exquisite opportunities for diving or snorkeling in the remote island of Selayar in the province of South Sulawesi, in Maluku province and in North Sulawesi.

You may go hiking in the island of Flores, or in the island of Komodo, looking for the Komodo dragons.

In the island of Lombok, the next island east from Bali you

will find Indonesia's highest volcano. Climbing it is not without risks and should never be attempted without an experienced guide.

In Sulawesi you may board a cruise on a traditional sailing schooner known as *pinisi*.



In the island of Kalimantan, you could make a cruise along the river and visit traditional Dayak communities.

Traveling with Kids

Bringing children on a long and faraway trip to Indonesia may seem daunting. Yet, with a bit of preparation children will enjoy the trip and find many opportunities to have fun and to be surprised.



On board the plane most babies are happy passengers, sleeping for many hours, waking up only to be fed or have their diapers changed.

On land they are just as happy, coping with the warm climate as if nothing much has changed.

Should you bring a suitcase full of baby food and diapers? Probably not, as your favorite brand of diapers will be available through most supermarkets.

Baby formula and baby food in Indonesia are a little

different from what you are used to, but tasty and healthy. It usually comes in freeze-dried packs. Just add warm water or milk and stir.

Popular brand names include Promina, Sun, SGM and others.



Still about food, older children will not be disappointed to find their favorite burgers, pizza, fried chicken, hot apple pie, French fries and the like in Indonesia, especially in the major cities.

Before setting out on the trip it is good to prepare them about what to expect.

Tell them about the different traditions, language, the climate and how adventurous it will be to discover it all. Indonesia offers many kinds of entertainment for children, such as theme parks in Jakarta, safari parks (outside

Bogor, West Java and Tretes, East Java), an elephant park in Bali, boat rides, swimming opportunities, game parlors and much more.



Nevertheless the travel pace of adults may be too demanding on children.

Adjust your travel schedule, visiting fewer places and staying in one place a little longer than you would have done without kids.

If possible, don't spend most of the day on the road traveling from one place to the next.

Children experience the world from a different perspective; they absorb many more impressions and need time to process it all.

Indonesians adore children and will not miss a chance to say 'hi' to touch them and to pass a sweet. Children with blond hair and blue eyes are especially attractive, which at times can become rather overwhelming for the child. Anticipating crowded conditions carry your small child on your back so that the touching is reduced.



Going Home

What can we say? Your stay has probably been too short. The days went by too quickly. Most likely it has been overwhelming.



Therefore: see you again soon!

Need to know more? Check the [Travel Tips](#), [Sights](#) and the many [Links](#) on Indonesia-ok.com.



Photos: Chris Soebroto, Sri Hadiyah, Robin Soebroto, Yudhis Soebroto, Marco Voorneveld, Garuda Indonesia, JAL.

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