

INDONESIA - Sumatra, Java & Bali**with East Timor Extension****18 days**

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Day 1 Arrive in Medan

Today we arrive in Medan, the main city in northern Sumatra.

North Sumatra is a land of great mountains, waterfalls, lakes, a mixture of cultural groups, plantations of rubber, tobacco, palm oil, and coffee.

Overnight in Medan.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Medan - Samosir Island, Lake Toba

After breakfast we depart for a brief city tour of Medan. We stop to see the Maimoon Palace, recently renovated from its original founding in 1888 by the Sultan of Deli. We will also stop to visit the Grand Mosque, built in the Moroccan style. Before leaving Medan, we'll also visit Tjong a Fie Mansion. Often referred to as a "historical jewel," the 35-room, 2-storey mansion was built in 1895 by the Hakka merchant who came to own much of the land in Medan through his plantations while contributing to the building of the island's railway.

Afterwards we travel southwards by road from Medan to Lake Toba, where we take a ferry across the lake to Samosir Island. At 630 sq km, Samosir is notable as being the largest island within an island, and the fifth largest lake island in the world. This is a full day of travel with stops for rest and points of interest.

Overnight on Samosir Island.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Samosir Island, Lake Toba

The island is the centre of Batak culture, and has several villages of historical interest. Here, traditional houses are made of wood with high roofs; the main posts, walls, and gable ends carry carved decorations of buffalo horns.

We will learn about the animist culture of the Batak people with visits to the cultural centre and some unusual houses, with roofs shaped like boats. The Batak were formerly head-hunters and cannibals, and due to their isolation in the high mountains, they have retained many of the ancient proto-Malay cultural traditions. According to tradition, all Bataks are descendants of Si Raja Batak, a hero-ancestor of super-natural parentage born on a holy mountain adjacent to Lake Toba. Today they maintain a tight-knit and distinctive culture.

Our stops today include a visit to the King Sidabutar Tomb in Tomok, a stop at the 300-year old stone chairs, site of village discussions and decisions, and we explore the museum at Simanindo, converted from a traditional house lived in by Rajah Simalungun, a Batak king. We will enjoy the view from one of the highest points on the island where we can begin to appreciate the massive volcanic explosion that formed both Samosir Island and Lake Toba.

We continue back to our hotel on Samosir Island for the night. We usually have some free time in the afternoon to enjoy our resort and/or swim in the lake.

Overnight on Samosir Island.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Samosir Island - Berastagi

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This morning we take a long, leisurely drive toward Berastagi, starting across the narrow land bridge that connects the "island" to the mainland. This region of North Sumatra is volcanic in nature and many sulfurous hot springs are to be found. At the northern end of Lake Toba we stop to see the impressive 120 m (394 ft) high Si Piso-Piso Waterfalls. From the viewpoint at the top of the falls there is a 360-degree panoramic view over Lake Toba and the surrounding countryside.

The area to the north of Lake Toba is known as Karoland, or the Karo Highlands, as it is where the Karo Batak tribal people live. The five Karo Batak clans and 83 subclans inhabit a high, lush plateau of mountain slopes and rich volcanic valleys in the area between Lake Toba and Medan. There are many volcanoes in the area, some of them still steaming. Gunung Sibayak at 2070 m (6,790 ft) and Gunung Sinabung at 2417 m (7,930 ft) are the highest and can be seen from many locations as we explore the area. We will have the opportunity to stop in Dokan, a Karo Batak village.

Overnight in Berastagi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Berastagi - Medan (Sumatra) - Yogyakarta (Java)

This morning we drive from Berastagi to Medan (2-3 hours with stops) and fly to Yogyakarta, Java's cultural heart. Located at the foot of the volcano Merapi, the fertile plain of Yogyakarta was, in the 16th and 17th century, the seat of the mighty Javanese empire of Mataram.

NOTE: Our flight from Medan to Yogyakarta will likely transit through Jakarta.

Overnight in Yogyakarta.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Yogyakarta - Prambanan - Yogyakarta: City Tour

Today we visit the most extensive Hindu temple site in Indonesia -- Prambanan.

Prambanan is the largest Hindu temple compound in Indonesia, located approximately 18 km east of Yogyakarta. The temple is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is one of the largest Hindu temples in Southeast Asia. It is characterised by its tall and pointed architecture, typical of Hindu temple architecture, and by the 47m (154 ft) high central building inside a large complex of individual temples. It was built around AD 850 by either Rakai Pikatan, king of the second Mataram dynasty, or Balitung Maha Sambu, during the Sanjaya Dynasty. Not long after its construction, the temple was abandoned and began to deteriorate.

After our comprehensive guided tour, we return to Yogyakarta. This afternoon's sightseeing includes the Sultan's palace, the Kraton, a vast complex of courtyards, halls and pavilions in Javanese traditional style. The most important structure is the Golden Pavillion; ornately carved, and heavily gilded, its graceful roof is supported by finely carved wooden beams. Here the Sultan used to receive royal guests and hold balls and banquets.

We also visit the nearby Taman Sari (Water Castle), the ruins, pools, arches and underground passages of the former pleasure gardens. It was built in 1758 by Sultan Hamengkubuwono I as a rest house and pleasure park for the Royal Family.

At some point during our stay in Yogyakarta we hope to attend a performance of the Ramayana ballet, a dance based on ancient Hindu folklore.

Overnight in Yogyakarta.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 7 Yogyakarta - Borobudur - Yogyakarta

From Yogyakarta we drive north to the largest stupa-style Buddhist monument in the world -- Borobudur. This incredible monument, built

and decorated before AD 800, should be on anybody's list of the ten greatest art-complexes in the world for its size, quality, sophistication and excellent state of preservation.

Borobudur was built in three tiers: a pyramidal base with five concentric square terraces, the trunk of a cone with three circular platforms and, at the top, a monumental stupa. The walls and balustrades are decorated with fine low reliefs, covering a total surface area of 2500 sq m. Around the circular platforms are 72 openwork stupas, each containing a statue of the Buddha. The monument was restored with UNESCO's help in the 1970s.

After a guided site tour, we return to Yogyakarta. Your afternoon is free. Wandering in the narrow streets of the markets you will see many beautiful crafts for sale, including the famous wayang wooden and leather puppets, but especially the batik. Yogyakarta is famous for its batik.

Overnight in Yogyakarta.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Yogyakarta (Java) - Denpasar (Bali) - Candidasa

Today we fly from Yogyakarta to Denpasar (possibly via another connecting point) on the island of Bali and transfer to our hotel at Candidasa.

Bali is home to the vast majority of Indonesia's small Hindu minority. 93.18% of Bali's population adheres to Balinese Hinduism, while most of the remainder follow Islam. It is also the largest tourist destination in the country and is renowned for its highly developed arts, including dance, sculpture, painting, leather, metalworking and music.

On arrival at Denpasar airport, we travel by road through verdant Balinese countryside to the east coast town of Candidasa, a tranquil coastal area nestled between the Lombok Strait to the east and mountains to the west. Candidasa is within close proximity to many historical landmarks of Bali.

Overnight in Candidasa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Candidasa: Eastern Bali & Besakih Temple

Today we explore the highlands and the east coast area of Bali where elegant Balinese Hindu temples sprout amid lush green rice terraces.

We will also visit the native village of Tenganan, a symmetrically laid out Bali Aga village with walled homes and unique crafts. Bali Aga was the original inhabitant of Bali, before the arrival of Hindu Javanese. Tenganan retains its ancient pre-Hindu customs through a strong code of non-fraternization with outsiders, further enforced by the protection of its surrounding walls.

We continue to the ancient law courts at Klung Kung. Klung Kung was the oldest Kingdom on the island, and its "raja" was the most exalted. At the walled-in "Court of Justice", which dates from the 18th century, a mural portrays punishment in hell and the rewards of heaven.

Our final stop is Bali's most important temple, Besakih, and sacred Mount Agung. This volcano is to the Balinese what Mount Olympus was to the ancient Greeks. Steps over 1,000 years old ascend through split gates to the main courtyard where there are many shrines. This temple was built on a site where animist rites, ceremonies and feasts once took place. The structure incorporates the holy triad of temples venerating the Hindu trinity. Every district of the island maintains its own temple within the complex.

Overnight in Candidasa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Candidasa - Penglipuran - Lovina

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Today we journey from Candidasa to Lovina.

En route we will stop at Penglipuran village, well known for its tidy row of traditional Balinese entrance gates and its unique architectural traditions. The village has also succeeded in preserving its 75-hectare bamboo forest located in the northern part of the village.

We also stop at Kintamani, famous for its view of Mt. Batur and Lake Batur. The whole area around Kintamani is known for its orange groves. After a lunch break here, we continue to Beji Temple (Pura Beji), an excellent example of the colourful architectural style of northern Bali. The temple is famous for its Barong architecture and virtuoso relief carvings.

Our destination is Lovina, a coastal area on the northeastern side of the island containing the small villages of Temukus, Kalibukbuk and Anturan. It is becoming more popular with tourists but remains far quieter than the tourist hotspots of the island's south side. At night the whole fishing fleet is working, their lanterns glowing yellow along the ocean front.

Overnight in Lovina.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Lovina Area

This morning we check out the spices and fruits at Lake Bratan market. Making our way back toward Lovina we visit the Buddhist monastery of Brahma Arama Vihara. It is a spectacular looking place, and a bit out of place in Hindu Bali. It is the most important Buddhist monastery in Bali and is complete with golden Buddha statues and a pristine natural setting. Strictly speaking the monastery is not a tourist site but accepts respectful visitors.

We return to Lovina in the afternoon.

Overnight in Lovina.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Lovina - Tanah Lot - Ubud

Today we depart Lovina and travel past spectacular rice terraces to the artists' village of Ubud.

Along the way we visit the spectacular rice terraces at Pupuan. We proceed from there to Tanah Lot, an ocean temple built atop a huge rock surrounded by the sea at high tide by one of the last priests to come to Bali from Java in the 16th century. Its rituals include the paying of homage to the guardian spirits of the sea. Sea snakes found at the base are believed to guard the temple from evil spirits and intruders.

We continue to Ubud, a remarkable town located in the middle of the island. For more than a century, it has been the island's preeminent centre for fine arts, dance and music. While it once was a haven for scruffy backpackers, cosmic seekers, artists and bohemians, Ubud is now a hot spot for literati, glitterati, art collectors and connoisseurs.

Overnight in Ubud.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Ubud: Area Tour

Today we a full day exploring the Ubud area. In the morning we attend a Barong traditional dance performance. The Barong play represent an eternal fighting between good and evil spirit. A Barong (a mythological animal) represent good spirit and Rangda (a mythological monster) represent the evil one. Bali is known for its fine arts, and it is in this village that most of the best batik painters, mask carvers, dancers, weavers, and musicians live. This is an excellent place to buy authentic Balinese handicrafts.

Overnight in Ubud.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Denpasar, Indonesia - Dili, Timor-Leste

Today transfer to the airport for our flight to Dili. Welcome to Timor-Leste! (East Timor)

East Timor, officially the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, is a country in Maritime Southeast Asia. It comprises the eastern half of the island of Timor, the nearby islands of Atauro and Jaco, and Oecusse, an exclave on the northwestern side of the island, within Indonesian West Timor. Timor-Leste was colonised by Portugal in the 16th century, and was known as Portuguese Timor until Portugal's decolonisation of the country. In late 1975, Timor-Leste declared its independence, but later that year was invaded and occupied by Indonesia and declared Indonesia's 27th province the following year. In 1999, following the United Nations-sponsored act of self-determination, Indonesia relinquished control of the territory, and Timor-Leste became the first new sovereign state of the 21st century on May 20, 2002.

After a break to freshen up (and flight timing-permitting), we an introductory tour of Dili, Timor-Leste's largest town with only 150,000 people. It is beautifully-situated along a crescent beach at the base of steep hills. One end of the bay is dominated by a 27m statue of Christ and the other by a centuries old lighthouse. From the peculiar coloured Portuguese colonial buildings, the local shopping areas, and a history of trade with China, India, and Arabia.

Our tour includes the Chega Exhibition, Santa Cruz Cemetery, statue of John Paul II, and the statue of Cristo Rei.

Overnight in Dili.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Dili: WWII Memorial - Aileu - Maubisse - Village Visit

Today we drive up the backdrop hills of Dili en route to Maubisse. This drives gives you a bird's eye view of the capital city, Dili Bay, and the Island of Atauro set 32km across to the North of Dili.

We stop at the Dare Australian WWII Memorial before continuing the drive to the historic town of Aileu in the central ranges, where we stop for a coffee break at a popular restaurant. After a break we resume the drive to Maubisse, a once favoured town by the Portuguese for the cool climate. Maubisse is a town set in the central mountain ranges, where farming is the main activity, and the abundance of locally-grown vegetables supplies the capital city's demand.

The cone shaped thatched homes, built with bamboo or mud that can be spotted throughout the drive, are the traditional house typical of this region. After lunch we visit one of the many local traditional villages set on top of a hill and get an insight of how people in the rural areas live and learn about some Timorese traditions.

Overnight in Dili.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 16 Dili: Aipelu - Liquica - Maubara Fort

This morning we depart Dili once again and follow the West Coast Road along the ocean to the town of Aipelu where we visit the crumbling ruins of the Ai Pelo Prison, which stare hauntingly out to sea on the windswept coast. This stone-walled and weather-beaten prison is a colonial stain on the landscape, a place built by the Portuguese to house dissidents and criminals, the dark memories of which are still fervently avoided by the locals today.

We continue to Liquiça, where most of the inhabitants speak Todedede, a Malayo-Polynesian language spoken by only about 39,000 people. We pass some historic sites including the Liquiça Church, site of a notorious massacre during which most of the city's buildings were destroyed in the period before the 1999 independence referendum.

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Our next stop is the town of Maubara to visit the 16th Century Dutch-built fort. Maubara is situated on the coastline of Liquiça Municipality; the beaches that border this region are particularly beautiful.

We'll have some refreshments here and stop by the basket weaving huts along the beach front before transferring back to Dili.

Overnight in Dili.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 17 Departure

Departure from Dili.

SAFE TRAVELS!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast