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INDONESIA GUIDE

wordtravels



Indonesia is the world's largest archipelago, comprising of five main islands and a multitude of smaller island chains, with about 17,000 islands strung across the equator altogether.

A rich history of warring kingdoms, conquests, colonialism, trade and natural disasters has bequeathed Indonesia with an exhilarating kaleidoscope of cultures and traditions, languages and religions, aspirations and problems, and the dramatic scenery of volatile landscapes.

Unfortunately it is this very diversity of ethnic groups and religions that has put a country of such exotic natural resources to the test. Racial divides and fierce religious hostility, government corruption, uprisings, economic negligence and, more recently, terrorist attacks have been frequent blights on the fabric of Indonesian society. However, for the traveller, this diversity and overdose of traditions and religions is fascinating; for decades the country has been a magnet drawing thousands of people to its shores despite its turbulent nature. Its position along the Pacific 'ring of fire' contributes to its status as a destination for the adventurous: Indonesia is prone to frequent earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Having said that, in addition to the adventurous thrill-seekers and nature-lovers, Indonesia attracts many tourists wanting nothing more than a peaceful beach holiday, and the country offers many renowned resorts.

A holiday in Indonesia offers something for everyone: Sumatra is an almost untouched wilderness with a diversity of wildlife, highland tribes, unique architecture, wonderful resort-lined lakes, and quaint hilltop towns; Java features steaming volcanoes, astonishing historical monuments, a sprawling capital city and traditional dance, music and art; the image of paradise is epitomised in Bali, an island of artistic people and elegant temples, resplendent scenery, palm groves, beach resorts and fabulous diving sites; and further east, Komodo is the home to the world's largest lizard, the Komodo dragon.

Indonesia is a land of vigorous colour, of tensions and upheaval, but also of festivals and dancing, golden sunsets and friendly white-toothy smiles.

THE BASICS

TIME

Indonesia spans three time zones. GMT +7 (West, including Java and Sumatra), GMT +8 (Central, including Bali, Sulawesi and Lombok), GMT +9 (East, including Irian Jaya).

ELECTRICITY

Electrical current is 230 volts, 50Hz. A variety of plugs are in use, including the European two-pin.

LANGUAGE

Bahasa Indonesia is the official language, but many dialects are spoken. English is widely understood in Jakarta and tourist resorts.

TRAVEL HEALTH

There are a number of health risks associated with travel to Indonesia and medical advice should be taken at least three weeks before departing. Yellow fever vaccinations are required for those coming from yellow fever areas. Vaccinations for hepatitis A and hepatitis B are recommended, and a typhoid vaccination may be recommended for those spending time in rural areas. Malaria is a year-round risk in much of Indonesia, but not in Jakarta or the tourist resorts of Java and Bali. The dengue fever mosquito is found throughout Indonesia and visitors should be aware of a significant increase in reported cases of dengue fever throughout the country during the rainy season. Outbreaks of chikungunya fever, also from mosquitoes, have occurred regularly in Indonesia in recent years. It is recommended that pregnant women, or women planning on becoming pregnant, should postpone their trip wherever possible, as Indonesia has recently been classed as a moderate risk zone for the Zika virus.

Travellers' diarrhoea is a major risk; visitors should only drink sealed bottled water and avoid dairy products, uncooked meat, salads and unpeeled fruit. Poor sanitation and eating contaminated food can increase the risk of cholera, typhoid and other diseases. The standard of local medical care is poor and very expensive. It is essential to take out comprehensive medical and travel insurance.

TIPPING

Major hotels add a 10 percent service charge to bills in Indonesia and, where it is not included, a tip of between five to 10 percent of the bill is appreciated. Airport porters usually receive around IDR 2,000 per small bag. Tipping taxi and rental car drivers is not mandatory but if you do choose to tip IDR 1,000 is sufficient for taxi drivers and a little more for rental car drivers.

SAFETY INFORMATION

Following the infamous bombings in Bali back in October 2005, there remains a risk of terrorism directed against foreigners throughout the country. It is recommended that visitors contact their foreign office for the latest travel advice before travelling to Indonesia. The security situation remains unsettled in central Sulawesi and foreigners are advised to avoid parts of Maluku, particularly Ambon. Visitors are also advised to be cautious if travelling to Aceh. Religious violence and unstable politics are an ongoing problem in Indonesia and travellers should keep an eye on current affairs.

Indonesia has a high crime rate and theft and petty crime is common in tourist areas and on public transport. Credit card fraud is on the increase. Flooding and landslides occur frequently during the rainy season between December and March. The country is also located on the volatile seismic strip named the "Ring of Fire", and as a result is often subject to earthquakes, volcano eruptions and occasionally tsunamis. Not all Indonesian airlines are considered safe and travellers should do some research into reputable airlines before booking.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Indonesian people are generally friendly and polite and while they understand that Western culture is different to their own, it will be appreciated if their customs are respected. Religious customs should also be respected, particularly during the holy month of Ramadan when eating, drinking and smoking during daylight hours should be discreet, in accordance with the Muslim culture. Visitors should always be polite and avoid public displays of affection. It is considered impolite to use the left hand for passing or accepting things. Appropriate dress is important in places of worship and women should dress conservatively, covering the shoulders and legs. The concept of 'saving face' is very important and public displays of anger, ridicule and blame are considered extremely vulgar and bad mannered. In Jakarta a law bans people from giving money to beggars, buskers and unofficial traffic guides in an attempt to 'bring order' to the city. Offenders could face imprisonment and fines. Gambling is illegal. Furthermore, the Indonesian government adopts a zero tolerance approach to those engaged in illegal activities, such as dealing or consuming drugs whilst in the country, or the killing or illegal trading of endangered animals. Offenders have been faced with lengthy prison sentences, and have even been sentenced to death.

BUSINESS

Due to the hot and tropical climate, formal business attire in a light, cool material is the best option. Indonesia is largely Muslim so dress should be conservative, especially for women. Business cards are often exchanged and it is customary to shake hands with a slight bow when greeting and departing. Some Indonesian names can be long and hard to pronounce and making an effort to get it right when greeting someone will be appreciated. It is best to use formal titles such as Doctor, or 'Bapak' for Mr and 'Ibu' for Madam. Business hours vary; government offices are usually open from 7am to 3pm and small businesses from 8am or 9am to 4pm or 5pm.

COMMUNICATIONS

The international access code for Indonesia is +62. The outgoing code is 00 followed by the relevant country code (e.g. 0044 for the UK). The area code for Jakarta is 21. Buying a local SIM card is a good option as international roaming fees can be expensive. Free wifi is available in most cafes, restaurants and hotels in main cities, towns and tourist areas. Internet cafes are available in the main towns and resorts.

DUTY FREE

Travellers to Indonesia over 18 years do not have to pay duty on 25 cigars or 200 cigarettes or 100g tobacco; alcohol up to 1 litre; perfume for personal use; and personal goods to the value of US\$250 per passenger or US\$1,000 per family. Travellers not entering on a tourist visa will have to pay duties for photo and film cameras unless these have been registered in their passport by Indonesian Customs. Electronic equipment may not be imported to the country. Prohibited items include Chinese medicines and prints, narcotics, firearms and ammunition, pornography, cordless telephones, fresh fruit or goods to be used for commercial gain.

CLIMATE

The Indonesian climate is almost entirely tropical. The warm waters of the ocean surrounding the archipelago ensure fairly uniform temperatures on land and there is little seasonal variation. There is also little difference in daylight hours from season to season. Indonesia experiences hot, humid weather throughout the year, especially in coastal areas. The inland highlands are somewhat cooler. The climate of Indonesia is dominated by heavy monsoon rains, which occur between November and March, or to be extra safe between October and April, often causing damage and making local travel difficult (the rainy season is also the worst time for some mosquito-borne diseases). The best time to travel to Indonesia is therefore during the dry season, between May and September. The rainy season varies in impact from island to island and although some areas experience extreme conditions and flooding others are less dire and can safely be visited during the rainy season.

The busiest and therefore most expensive times to visit Indonesia are in the holiday periods: at the end of Ramadan, when domestic tourists fill resorts and prices escalate; at Christmas; and mid-June to mid-July, when graduating high-school students arrive in hordes, mainly in Java and Bali.

PASSPORT/VISA

Passengers to Indonesia of most nationalities can obtain a 30-day visa on arrival, provided that: (i) they arrive at a major Indonesian airport; (ii) their passport contains at least one unused visa page for the visa-on-arrival sticker; (iii) they are holding return/onward tickets, and the necessary travel documentation for their next destination; and (iv) they can show proof of sufficient funds to cover their stay in Indonesia (at least USD 1,000 or a valid credit card). The cost of a 30 day visa as of December 2016 is USD 35. Those nationalities not permitted to purchase a visa on arrival must obtain a visa prior to their arrival in the country.

One visa extension, of a further 30 days, is possible, via an application made to the Immigration Office. Note that the day of arrival in Indonesia is counted as the first day of stay, and that fines will be levied against tourists who exceed their permitted period of stay.

Visitors wishing to travel to the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya must obtain a special permit ("Surat Jalan") after arrival in Indonesia from the Dinas Intel Pam Pol MABAK in Jakarta, or other regional police headquarters in Biak or Jayapura. It normally takes about two days to obtain this permit. Upon arrival in Irian Jaya, visitors must report to the local police office.

Note that a yellow fever vaccination certificate is required, if arriving in Indonesia within six days of leaving or transiting through an infected area.

NOTE: It is highly recommended that your passport has at least six months validity remaining after your intended date of departure from your travel destination. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources.

MONEY

The Indonesian currency is the Rupiah (IDR). Foreign currency can easily be exchanged at banks, hotels and money changers in major tourist destinations; the US dollar is the most accepted currency. Ensure that foreign bills are in good condition, as creased and torn notes may be refused. The best exchange rates in Indonesia are generally found in major centres like Jakarta and Bali. Visa and Mastercard are accepted at more expensive hotels and restaurants, however smaller businesses may not have card facilities (especially in more remote areas). ATMs are available in main centres. Small change is often unavailable so keep small denomination notes and coins for items like bus fares, temple donations and soft drinks.

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