

ABOUT INDONESIA

The world's fourth most populated country with approximately 250 million people is a huge archipelago of 17,508 islands that runs along the equator for 5,000km. Lying across a region of immense volcanic activity, Indonesia has some 400 volcanoes, with at least 70 that are still active. The country shares land borders with Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, East Timor and Papua New Guinea, and maritime borders with Singapore, the Philippines and Australia. It is a land of so many cultures, ethnic groups, customs, fauna and flora that it is like 100 separate countries united under one flag. The main islands are Java, Sumatra, Bali, Lombok, Kalimantan (Borneo), Sulawesi (Celebes), Papua, Flores, Timor and Seram. The capital city of Jakarta lies in the lowlands of West Java – the most populated island in the archipelago. The tropical paradise of Bali is arguably the jewel in Indonesia's crown. This is home to the only large-scale Hindu society in South East Asia and the island has attracted tourists, artists, and adventurers for generations. The island of Lombok lies close by and its untouched charm often earns the description: "Like Bali 20 years ago". Other popular tourism destinations include the island of Komodo, famous for the Komodo Dragon, the largest species of lizard on the planet, and Borobudur, the site of the world's largest Buddhist monument which is located on a remote hilltop in central Java. Adventure-seekers often head for Kalimantan's remote jungle interior to visit the world's foremost orang-utan research and conservation centres, or explore Sumatra, with its teeming wildlife and abundance of tribal groups.

FAST FACTS

AIRPORTS

The main international gateways are Jakarta's Soekarno-Hatta International Airport; Bali's Ngurah Rai International Airport; Juanda Airport in East Java; and the new Kuala Namu International Airport in Medan, Sumatra. As the country is an archipelago spread over a vast area, air travel is the best option for visiting the main tourism destinations.

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As of 2015, airport tax for all airline passengers, including those for children, diplomats, and officials, is now included in the tickets (both domestic and international).

All the above information may change without prior notice. It remains the traveler's responsibility to check visa requirements before traveling.

ARRIVAL / DEPARTURE INFORMATION

More visitors to Indonesia are now exempted to enter the country without the requirement of a visa. Under these regulations, many countries can stay in the country for a maximum of 30 days which cannot be extended. A complete overview of these countries can be found on the Indonesian tourism office website. <http://www.imigrasi.go.id/index.php/en/>. For any further inquiry about the visa on arrival procedures and countries that fall under the visa exemption scheme, please contact Asian Trails Indonesia or the Indonesian embassy in the country of origin. Passports should be at least 6 months valid from planned entrance

These regulations are only effective at certain entry and exit points. One peculiarity to note is that visa-free and Visa-on-Arrival visitors must enter Indonesia via specific ports of entry. Entry via certain ports of entry will require a visa regardless of whether you are visa-free or Visa-on-Arrival or otherwise. It should also be noted that the days a visa holder is within Indonesia are counted from the day of entry (this being day one, not day zero!). Details about the entry and exit points can be found on the earlier-mentioned website.

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BUSINESS HOURS

Private offices are usually open from Monday to Friday, from 9-am until 5-pm, and often close for lunch between 12-2-pm. Government office hours are Monday to Thursday between 7-am and 4-pm and Friday from 7-am to 1-pm. Shops open early and close any time between 6-pm and 9-pm although this is a guideline. Local shops commonly do not have fixed opening times. Department stores in Indonesia are open 7 days a week between 9.30-am until 10-pm.

BANKS

Banks open from 8-am to 3-pm on weekdays. They are closed on Saturdays but exchange places are open longer, often until the early evening. Banks in larger towns and tourist destinations have ATMs. Cash or traveller's checks can be changed in most tourist centres at a competitive rate, although acceptance of this is becoming less and less. Credit cards are widely accepted throughout the main cities and towns.

CLOTHING

As with other regional tropical countries, lightweight cotton clothing is the most comfortable form of clothing in Indonesia. A lightweight raincoat is a good idea in the rainy season. It is advisable to cover arms and legs in the evenings outside to protect against mosquito bites. An umbrella is also a good idea in both the hot and rainy seasons as it will offer protective shade from both the strong sun and the tropical downpours in the respective seasons. Visitors should not wear shorts, short skirts, singlets, or vest tops, or similar clothing when visiting religious sites, and shoes should always be removed before entering a religious building or a private home. With the exception of the beach, always dress modestly in a manner that is respectful to citizens of a conservative society. Topless bathing is not acceptable.

CURRENCY

The unit of currency in Indonesia is the rupiah (abbreviated to Rp or IDR). When taking US dollars in cash, make sure the bills are new and crisp as banks in Indonesia can be selective about which bills they accept. It is worth making sure that you have a stock of smaller notes and coins as it can be hard to break larger bills and get change when paying for small items, using taxis etc.

Currency exchange offices and banks commonly have better exchange rates for larger bills, so we do recommend bringing larger bills with you.

Since 2017, the Indonesian government has included new IDR bills and will slowly transition the old bills out of rotation. Customers can expect different bills, holding the same value during their stay.

CUSTOM ALLOWANCES

Indonesian customs authorities strictly regulate the import and export of items such as prescription medicines and foreign language materials or CDs. You should contact the Embassy of Indonesia in your home country for more specific information about customs requirements. The following goods may be imported into Indonesia without incurring a customs duty:

- One liter of alcohol;
- 200 cigarettes, or 50 cigars, or 100 gm of tobacco products;
- A reasonable quantity of perfume.

Please note: Money in excess of 100 million Rupiah (or in other currencies) must be declared upon arrival or departure.

INDONESIA (Do's and Don'ts)

Do's in Indonesia

- When meeting someone – be it for the first time or just the first time that day – it is common to shake hands, but in Indonesia this is just a light touching of the palms, often followed by bringing the hand to the chest.
- Meetings often start and end with everybody shaking hands. However, men should not try to shake hands with a Muslim woman unless she offers her hand first.
- It is respectful to bend slightly (not a complete bow) when greeting someone older, or someone in a position of authority.
- Dress conservatively. Never wear shorts, dresses or skirts, or tops with low-neck lines and bare shoulders in temples or mosques.
- Avoid public displays of affection. Anything beyond holding hands may be frowned upon in a conservative society.
- Polite forms of address for people you don't know are Bapak (father) for men and Ibu (mother) for women. If you know the name of the person you're talking to, you can address them respectfully as Pak followed by their name (for men) or Bu followed by their name (for women). The Javanese terms mas (older brother) and mbak (older sister) are also heard, but these are best reserved for equals and not superiors.
- Take your shoes off at the entrance to an Indonesian home.
- When venturing out from your hotel, make sure you take a hotel business card with you. This will make your return in a taxi much easier.
- If you are invited to someone's home, it is customary to take a gift. This is not opened until after the visitor has left.

Don'ts in Indonesia

- Do not show off; keep a low profile and a cool head, remain polite. Losing your temper in Indonesia means a "loss of face".
- Using the left hand for anything is considered very rude. This is especially true when you are shaking hands or handing something to someone.
- Avoid behaviour that causes embarrassment to another party.
- Do not take a photo of somebody without asking for their permission. Do not take pictures of anything related to the military, which is considered a breach of national security.
- Do not stand or sit with your arms crossed or on your hips. This is a sign of anger or hostility.
- Do not touch an Indonesian person's head. Indonesians consider the head is regarded as the most sacred part of the body. This includes children

ELECTRICITY

Voltage in Indonesia is 220 volts, so a transformer will be needed to operate 100-volt appliances. Electrical appliances will require an adapter that can change the shape of the plug prongs, so be sure to bring a universal plug adaptor. Rural areas may only be serviced with 110 volts.

ENTERTAINMENT AND NIGHTLIFE

Nightclubs, especially in Jakarta and Bali, sometimes feature international singers and bands. Jakarta also has many cinemas, and English-language and subtitled films are shown. Dancing is considered an art form in Indonesia and the most popular dance forms are based on ancient legends and stories from religious epics. Dances include the Legong, a slow, graceful dance of divine nymphs; the Baris, a fast moving, noisy performance; and the Jauk, a riveting solo offering by a masked and richly costumed demon. Larger hotels, particularly in Bali, put on dance shows accompanied by the uniquely Indonesian gamelan orchestra. For Western-style bars, clubs and pubs, Bali is at the forefront of this type of entertainment. The different regions of Indonesia have varying levels of nightlife, or none at all, depending on local sensitivities and cultures.

FOOD

Rice is the staple food in most parts of Indonesia though some variation is found in some of the islands in eastern Indonesia where the staple ranges from corn, sago and cassava to sweet potatoes. The most famous dish is Nasi Goreng (fried rice with assorted accompaniments); Mie Goreng (fried noodles); and Gado-Gado (vegetables topped with peanut sauce and a sliced boiled egg). For those who cannot decide what to eat in a local restaurant, the standard meal is simply Nasi Campur, which is translated as "mixed rice". This dish comprises of a mound of rice with all sorts of delicious additions on the side which can range from corn fritters, vegetable salad, tofu, beef rendang, chicken curry and grilled sate. The Indonesian cuisine is less fiery than other regional cuisines so it may be more suitable for those uncomfortable with hot and spicy food. As Indonesia is an archipelago, fish and seafood is one of the favorite food staples and various types of fish feature prominently in the diet. Coconut is also widely available and apart from being used as cooking oil, the nut's milk and pulp is used as an ingredient in many dishes. Beef and chicken are widely available but pork is only found in Chinese restaurants. For those who want Western food, many popular fast food chains have established their presence in the major cities – and tourism hot spots like Bali feature all of the world's major cuisines.

HEALTH

Generally no vaccinations are required except for yellow fever if traveling from an area where the disease is present. However visitors should be inoculated against typhoid, cholera, hepatitis A and B, tetanus and polio. Malaria and Dengue Fever are present and it is advisable to take precautions especially if traveling off the established tourist trail. If you plan to take anti-malarial tablets, you usually need to start the course of tablets one week before arrival. Prior to travel we recommend seeking a qualified medical practitioner's advice about vaccinations and up-to-date precautionary medicine. All travellers should take out comprehensive travel insurance prior to travel that will cover any overseas medical costs, including medical evacuation. If you require a particular medication, ensure that you take an adequate supply, as it may not be available locally. Care should be taken to only drink alcohol in reputable venues and local "home brewed" drinks such as Arak (rice wine) and Tuak (palm wine) should be avoided. Ensure drinks are prepared in your sight and do not leave your drink unattended.

HOTELS

The standards of accommodation are excellent with categories to fit all budgets. The larger hotels offer a wide variety of restaurants, bars, swimming pools and other recreational facilities. Most of the staff at key positions (front office, reception, restaurants etc.) speak excellent English but please be patient and show patience if you do not get what you want right away. During check-in you will be asked to complete a registration card. The hotel will also ask for an imprint of your credit card as a guarantee for extra services such as meals, drinks, etc. Ask the cashier to return this slip upon checkout. Please check that you receive meal coupons (where applicable) when given the room key. General check-in is from 2pm and check out time is 12-noon. If you require a late check-out (extra costs may apply) check with reception beforehand.

INSURANCE

It is advisable to take out a medical insurance policy before traveling as treatment will not be administered without proof of payment, or evidence of a comprehensive travel insurance policy. Do be careful if you hire a car or a motorbike and make sure the rental is covered by the appropriate motor insurance. Health insurance to include emergency repatriation cover is strongly advised. Adequate routine medical care is available in all major cities, but emergency services are generally inadequate outside major cities. Clinics catering specifically to foreigners can be found in most capital cities. Although medical costs are relatively cheap, drugs can be expensive.

INTERNET

Major hotels throughout the country offer both Wi-Fi access and business centres with timed computer use. Cyber cafes are getting less and less and you better can buy pre-paid international phone cards to make international calls. Although Internet standards are improving year-on-year, internet may still be considered slow.

LANGUAGE

The inhabitants of the Indonesian archipelago constitute a rich array of hundreds of distinct cultures, each with their own individual language or dialect. However, virtually all Indonesians are united by the common national language; Bahasa Indonesia which is written in Roman script. English is widely spoken in the major tourism destinations. There are about 583 languages and dialects spoken in the Indonesia. They normally belong to the different ethnic groups of the population. Some of the distinctly different local languages are: Acehnese, Batak, Sundanese, Javanese, Sasak, Tetum of Timor, Dayak, Minahasa, Toraja, Buginese, Halmahera, Ambonese, Ceramese, and several Irianese languages. To make the picture even more complex and colourful, these languages are also spoken in different dialects.

PEOPLE

With a population of approximately 250 million – the fourth most populated country on earth – Indonesia also has the largest population of Muslims within its borders. Indonesians are renowned for being courteous and welcoming and foreigners are often given the benefit of the doubt when norms are transgressed. Many Indonesians may see themselves first by their ethnic and cultural group and secondly as an Indonesian. Besides the unity of the national language, Pancasila is the national philosophy which stresses the doctrine of unity and universal justice for all Indonesians.

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Closure of tourist sites can occur at short notice on public holidays and our Asian Trails guides will give guests advice about this situation. The dates of national holidays may change every year. It is very common that Indonesians travel inside their own country during public holidays, so expect some busy times during these days.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Cars can be hired with a driver. Asian Trails supplies modern vehicles with trained drivers to take the strain and make travel across the archipelago seamless. Motorbike hire is available at many beach resorts and increasingly in other towns. It is illegal to ride without a helmet and many machines are poorly maintained so be sure to check brakes and lights before proceeding. Taxis are metered in the major cities and all registered taxis, minibuses and rental cars have yellow number plates.

Forms of local transport include; Bajaj: These are small three-wheeled motor scooters similar to the Thai tuk-tuk. They are probably the cheapest form of taxi after the becak, but are only available in the big cities. Becaks: These are like bicycle rickshaws and one of the cheapest, and most important forms of short-distance transport. They are now illegal in central Jakarta and often officially barred from main thoroughfares in other large cities. Bargain hard and agree a price before boarding. Bemos: These are small buses or adapted pickups operating on fixed routes. They usually run fixed routes for fixed fares but can also be chartered by the hour or day. Ojeks: These are motorcycle taxis.

Ojek riders often wear colored jackets, congregate at junctions and take pillion passengers. Agree a price beforehand. Oplets: These are larger versions of bemos and carry 10-12 passengers. They have a bewildering number of other names such as daihatsu in Semarang; angkuta in Solo; and microlets in Malang and Jakarta. In rural areas they tend to be called colts. In larger cities, bemos/colts often follow fixed routes. They are sometimes color-coded; sometimes numbered; and sometimes have their destinations marked on the front. In the countryside, routes can vary. Oplets can be chartered by the hour or day. Asian Trails provides efficient airport transfers and transport with local guides to get around the major tourism destinations.

Online transportation services such as Uber and Grab have entered Indonesia as well as an Indonesian version of these international brands, called Go-Jek.

RELIGION

More than 80 per cent of Indonesians are followers of the Islamic faith, with the others being Hindus, Christians and Buddhists. Religious freedom is one of the principal features of Indonesian society.

SAFETY

Serious or violent crimes against foreigners in Indonesia are rare but travelers should remain vigilant for petty theft, especially in larger cities and when travelling by bus or train. As a global rule, never leave belongings unattended and always maintain a firm grip on cameras and shoulder bags. In some tourist sites you may encounter insistent souvenir sellers. A polite "No, thank you" usually will suffice. Leave your expensive valuables at home and always use hotel safety deposits boxes or in-room safes for valuables. Crime can be a problem in some major metropolitan areas in the country. If you are in Jakarta and Surabaya, hire a taxi either at a major hotel or shopping center queue, or by calling a reputable taxi company. If you are arriving at Soekarno-Hatta International Airport in Jakarta, use only taxis at designated taxi queues or clearly marked taxi stands. Politely decline all offers of help from touts or anyone who approaches you.

SHOPPING

Indonesia offers a wealth of distinctive handicrafts and other products. Best buys include textiles such as batik, silverwork, woodcarvings, puppets, handmade kites, paintings and ceramics. Bali has the greatest choice of handicrafts. It is not necessarily the case that you will find the best buys in the area where a particular product is made; the larger cities, especially Jakarta, sell a wide range of handicrafts and antiques from across the archipelago at competitive prices. Early morning sales may well be cheaper, as traders often believe the first sale augurs well for the rest of the day. Except in the larger fixed-price stores, bargaining (with good humor) is expected; start at 60 per cent lower than the asking price and work your way up.

STREET STALLS

Most towns and cities have one or more markets and these are always worth visiting for a cultural retail experience. Some bargaining is essential in most tourist transactions. Remember that in Asia "saving face" is important, so bargaining should be good-natured. In some cases you will be able to get a 50 per cent discount or more.

TELEPHONE

Most hotels have IDD phones but for a more inexpensive option connect to one of the many Wi-Fi spots for cheaper phone rates and the sale of pre-paid international calling cards.

TIME ZONE

Indonesia is spread over three time zones: Western Indonesia Standard Time, which covers the islands of Sumatra, Java and Madura, West and Central Kalimantan is seven hours ahead of GMT; Central Indonesia Standard Time covers East and South Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Bali and Nusa Tenggara (Lombok, Komodo and Flores), and is eight hours ahead of GMT; and Eastern Indonesia Standard Time, which covers Maluku, and West Papua (former Irian Jaya), is nine hours ahead of GMT.

TIPPING

Tipping for good service is not expected but is always appreciated. Tipping the guide and driver on your transfers and tours should depend on how satisfied you are with the excursion. Hotel porters should be tipped for carrying bags to the room. In other cases, it is totally up to the individual when and how much to tip. For tipping in restaurants, most of the bills show that a Service Charge is included which is between 5% - 10%. Warungs (small, family-owned restaurants) commonly do not have this service charge included and tipping up to 10% is greatly appreciated.

WATER

It is not advisable to drink tap water but bottled mineral water is safe and available everywhere. All hotels provide a complimentary bottle of local mineral water, per person, in the room. Ice is generally okay in good standard hotels and restaurants but it is best to avoid them at street stalls or in upcountry areas. Some minor stomach problems are always possible when travelling in Indonesia so bring a supply of your usual anti-diarrhea medicine. Bottled water should also be used for cleaning teeth and cooking. Factory bottled soft drinks, and juices and milk sold in sealed containers are safe.

WEATHER

Indonesia is a tropical country with a fairly even climate all year round and the weather pattern is divided into two distinct seasons; "wet" and "dry". The East Monsoon – from June to September – brings generally dry weather while the West Monsoon – from December to March – brings abundant rain. The transitional period between these two seasons alternates between sunny days, with occasional thunderstorms. Even in the midst of the wet season temperatures range from 21 degrees (70°F) to 33 degrees Celsius (90°F), except at higher altitudes where it can get much cooler. The heaviest rainfalls are usually recorded in December and January. Average humidity is generally between 70-90 per cent.

EMERGENCY CONTACT NUMBERS

Police dial 110; Emergency Medical Services dial 118; Fire service dial 113; Search and Rescue team 115.

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