

17,000 ISLANDS, SIX THAT MATTER MOST

Indonesia

Which island for which trip, what a day really costs, and how to move between them without losing a week to ferries.

- p. 09 Six islands, one table: pick yours before you pick dates
- p. 28 Island-hopping, mapped: every leg by boat and by plane
- p. 37 What a day really costs, printed as a till receipt

51 PAGES

IDR PRICES

30-DAY VISA ON ARRIVAL

EDITION 2026.06

Start here

the shape of an Indonesia trip, what it costs, what to sort first



Indonesia is not one trip, it is a stack of them. The country runs five thousand kilometres along the equator, and every major island reads as its own destination: Bali is temples and surf, Java is volcanoes and old kingdoms, Flores is dragons and dive water, Sumatra is jungle and orangutans. The mistake first-timers make is treating it like one place and burning days on ferries. This guide is built the other way round: pick the island that fits the trip you want, then learn how to chain two or three together. All of it offline, in your pocket.

The shape of a trip

Most people start in Bali because the flights land there, then add one neighbour: the Gilis and Lombok by fast boat, or Flores and Komodo by a short plane hop. Two weeks fits Bali plus one island well. Three weeks reaches Java or the far east.

What a day costs

Backpacking runs about 28 USD a day, mid-range around 62, captured May 2026. Bali sits a notch above the rest of the country. The full receipt, bed to nightcap, is itemised on page 37.

Sort before you fly

Visa on arrival is 35 USD for most passports, an eSIM the moment you land, and a plan for the inter-island legs. Page 36 lists the four bookings that reward going early.



HOW THE LINKS WORK

Some booking links earn Pack Lightly a commission, at no extra cost to you. Full disclosure is on the last page.

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tap a line to jump straight there

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Your trip on one page

14 days · 28 to 130 USD/day · dry season Apr to Oct

If you read nothing else, this is the trip. Land in Bali, give it five or six days, then add one neighbour by fast boat or short flight. Budget from the bars below, not from resort rates. Book the three things at the bottom right before you fly; everything else is cheaper and easier to arrange once you are on the ground. The country sits on the equator, so the only timing rule that matters is dry season against wet.

THE ROUTE

Bali (Ubud + south)

day 1-6

1.5h fast boat

Gili + Lombok

day 7-9

1h15 flight

Komodo + Flores

day 10-13

fly out

Bali (depart)

day 14

BUDGET PER DAY

Backpacker

28 USD

Standard

62 USD

Comfort

130 USD

BOOK FIRST

01

International flights, 6 to 8 weeks out

Aviasales

02

Inter-island flights and fast boats, 2 weeks out

12Go

03

eSIM, install before departure

Sailly

BEST MONTHS

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

Nov

Dec

best: dry season, clear dive water

shoulder: mixed, fewer crowds

wet season, heavy afternoon rain

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pack-lightly.com

Indonesia at a glance

scores 0-100 · pack-lightly country-comparison data

SCORECARD

Nature

90

Budget friendly

85

Food and drinks

80

Culture

80

Tourist infrastructure

70

Safety

65

Budget travel

28 USD/day

Mid-range

62 USD/day

Comfort

130 USD/day

BEACH

NATURE

ADVENTURE

WELLNESS

CULTURE

source: country-comparison tool, 2026-06

SIX FRAMES OF THE TRIP



01

The country

What Indonesia is, how the islands divide up, who goes, and why the archipelago itself is the thing to plan around before you pick dates.

IN THIS CHAPTER

One country, a thousand inhabited islands

07

What Indonesia is

280M people · 17,000 islands · 5,000 km west to east

The largest archipelago on earth: more than seventeen thousand islands strung along the equator between the Indian and Pacific oceans, around six thousand of them inhabited, and 280 million people who make this the fourth most populous country in the world. It is the value pick of the region and the most varied. A single country holds active volcanoes you climb at dawn, the planet's richest coral, the last wild orangutans, and temple complexes older than Angkor. The catch is the geography. The distances are real, each island runs to its own rhythm, and the wet season swaps which half of the country is worth visiting. The trick is to treat the islands as separate trips and chain only the ones that connect cleanly.

CAPITAL Jakarta ~11M people	POPULATION 280M mostly Muslim, Hindu Bali	CURRENCY IDR 1 USD = ~15,900 rupiah	BEST MONTHS Apr-Oct peak Jul-Aug
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THE ISLANDS, BY REGION

BALI Bali and Nusa Tenggara temples, surf, dragons · the core run Bali, the Gilis, Lombok, then east through Komodo and Flores. The most-travelled chain and the easiest to connect by boat and short flight.	 MOUNT BROMO, JAVA Java volcanoes + old kingdoms · most populous Yogyakarta and the Borobudur and Prambanan temples, the Bromo and Ijen volcanoes, and Jakarta. A train network the other islands lack.
 LAKE TOBA, SUMATRA Sumatra and Kalimantan jungle + wildlife · the wild west Orangutans at Bukit Lawang, the vast crater lake of Toba, and the river-cruise apes of Borneo. Long distances, fewer tourists, real rainforest.	 RAJA AMPAT Sulawesi and the far east culture + the best diving · remote The funeral country of Tana Toraja, the reefs off Bunaken, and Raja Ampat in West Papua, the richest marine life on the planet. For second trips.

WHO THIS GUIDE IS WRITTEN FOR

First-time, Bali plus one 14 days, mid-range, Bali with the Gilis or Komodo as the second island.	Long-stay nomad Canggu or Ubud base, visa extensions, 900 to 1,400 USD a month all-in.	Diver or adventurer Komodo, Bunaken or Raja Ampat for the water; Rinjani and Ijen for the volcanoes.	Couple or family Bali for the base, a calm Gili or Sanur beach, Yogyakarta for the temples.
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02

The islands

Six islands worth a page each, plus two highlights. Pick the island before the dates: Bali in August and Sumatra in August are two very different trips.

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Skip this, and the overrated	18

The islands, mapped to what you want

six islands plus two highlights · pick the row, read across

This is the page that replaces a week of forum-reading. Decide what you want most from the trip, find the island that scores it highest, then read the chapter. Bali is the all-rounder and the easy first island; everything east of it trades comfort for water and wildness. The far west and the far east are the prizes for a second trip, when the obvious chain no longer surprises you.

ISLAND	GATEWAY	BEACH	DIVING	VOLCANO	CULTURE	QUIET
Bali	Denpasar	●●○	●●○	●●○	●●●	●○○
Nusa islands	from Bali	●●●	●●●	○○○	●○○	●●○
Java	Yogyakarta	●○○	●○○	●●●	●●●	●●○
Lombok + Gili	Mataram	●●●	●●○	●●●	●○○	●●○
Komodo + Flores	Labuan Bajo	●●○	●●●	●○○	●●○	●●●
Sumatra	Medan	●○○	●●○	●●●	●●○	●●●
Sulawesi	Makassar	●○○	●●●	●○○	●●●	●●●
Raja Ampat	Sorong	●●●	●●●	○○○	●○○	●●●

● filled dots = stronger fit (3 = built for it)

assessment: pack-lightly Indonesia cluster, 2026-06



Two weeks, first trip: Bali plus one neighbour. Three weeks: add Java in the west or Flores in the east. A month buys Sulawesi or Raja Ampat.



The dive window is the planning lock. Komodo, Bunaken and Raja Ampat are clearest in the dry season; the wet months drop the visibility fast.

ON THE WEBSITE The five islands ranked in the [islands rundown](#), the coast in the [beaches ranking](#), and the landscapes in the [best places list](#).

Bali

the easy first island • 5-7 nights • dry Apr-Oct



Bali earns its reputation and its crowds. One small island holds Hindu temples, surf breaks, rice-terrace valleys and volcano sunrises, and the tourism machine to make all of it easy. It is the natural first island and the natural base for the rest of the country. Split your time: Ubud inland for culture, rice fields and the spa scene, then the south coast for the surf and the sunsets at Uluwatu and Canggu.

The honest version is that the south is busy and traffic-clogged. The fix is to base smart and day-trip wide. Ubud for the green and the temples, Canggu or Uluwatu for the surf, and the quiet east coast at Amed or Sidemen when the crowds wear thin. The Mount Batur sunrise hike is the classic dawn, and the water palaces and Besakih on Mount Agung are the cultural anchors.

The south traffic is the real cost of Bali. A 20-kilometre hop can take 90 minutes. Base by what you will do most, not by a single beach.

Temples need a sarong over shoulders and knees, lent free at the gate. Skip Besakih touts by booking a driver who waits, not a "compulsory guide".

Ubud

The cultural base: rice terraces, the Monkey Forest, the Campuhan ridge walk, and the best food inland.

Uluwatu and Canggu

Surf, cliff temples and sunset beach clubs in the south; Canggu for the nomad scene.

Mount Batur sunrise

A pre-dawn hike up an active volcano for the cloud-sea sunrise; the signature Bali morning.

Amed and Sidemen

The quiet east: black-sand snorkel coves and terraced valleys with a fraction of the south's crowds.

GO DEEPER

Picks in the [Ubud rundown](#), the rice fields in the [Tegalalang page](#), and the cliff temple in the [Uluwatu kecak write-up](#).

The Nusa islands

highlight · Penida, Lembongan, Ceningan · 2-3 nights or a day-trip



Three islands off Bali's southeast coast, reached by a 40-minute fast boat from Sanur. Nusa Penida is the dramatic one: the T-Rex-shaped cliff over Kelingking Beach, the natural infinity pool at Angel's Billabong, and manta rays you can snorkel with year-round at Manta Point. Lembongan and Ceningan, linked by a yellow bridge, are the mellow pair, with surf breaks and a slower pace.

The trap is doing Penida as a rushed day-trip: the island is bigger and rougher than it looks, the roads are steep, and the famous viewpoints get packed by the boat-load by 10am. Stay a night, hire a driver, and shoot the headline spots at the open and close of the day. For divers, the Penida channel is the manta and mola-mola site that makes the trip.



Penida roads are steep and broken. If you are not a confident rider, hire a driver for the day rather than a scooter; the cliffs are unforgiving.



Day-trippers flood Kelingking from 10am. Sleep one night and go at opening, or you photograph a queue, not a cliff.

Kelingking Beach

The cliff that sells the island; the descent to the sand is a steep scramble, not a stroll.

Manta Point

Snorkel or dive with reef mantas off Penida's south coast; reliable year-round.

Devil's Tears, Lembongan

A rocky blowhole where the swell explodes upward; best at the bigger afternoon tides.

Ceningan lagoon

The blue lagoon and a cliff jump, reached over the yellow bridge from Lembongan.

READ ON

The blowhole in the [Devil's Tears page](#), and the wider offshore picks in the [islands rundown](#).

Java

volcanoes and old kingdoms • 4-6 nights • dry May-Sep



Java is the heavyweight: the most populous island on earth and the cultural and volcanic core of the country. Yogyakarta is the base, a university city with batik workshops and the two great temples nearby. Borobudur is the largest Buddhist monument in the world, best at the dawn opening; Prambanan is the soaring Hindu complex across the valley. East of there, the volcanoes take over.

The two that pull travellers are Mount Bromo, for the jeep-and-viewpoint sunrise over a smoking caldera, and Ijen, for the surreal electric-blue flames and the turquoise acid lake reached on a pre-dawn trek. They sit at Java's eastern end, a natural stepping stone toward Bali by ferry. Jakarta, the capital, is for the old town and the transit, not the holiday.



Java has real trains. The Yogyakarta to Surabaya and Jakarta lines are comfortable and cheap; book on the Access by KAI app, not at the counter.



Ijen is a 2am start and a sulphur-gas crater. Bring a mask the guide provides, and treat the blue-flame descent as optional if the fumes are heavy.

Borobudur

The world's largest Buddhist temple; the sunrise slot from a nearby viewpoint beats the gate crowds.

Prambanan

The tall Hindu temple complex across the valley; the evening Ramayana ballet runs in the dry season.

Mount Bromo

A jeep to the viewpoint for sunrise over the smoking caldera; the most photographed volcano in the country.

Ijen blue fire

A pre-dawn trek to electric-blue sulphur flames and a turquoise crater lake at Java's east end.

GO DEEPER

The dawn temple in the [Borobudur page](#), the caldera in the [Bromo jeep write-up](#), and the flames in the [Ijen crater trek](#).

Lombok and the Gili islands

surf, snorkel and Rinjani • 3-5 nights • dry May-Sep



GILI TRAWANGAN

Bali's quieter neighbour, a 1.5-hour fast boat east. The three Gili islands off the northwest coast are car-free sandbars: Trawangan for the party and the dive schools, Air for the balance of social and calm, Meno for the near-silent honeymoon pace. All three snorkel straight off the beach, with turtles on the house reef. Bring cash; there are no banks worth the name.

Lombok itself is the bigger, rawer island. The south coast at Kuta Lombok is a surf and beach scene without Bali's density, with empty white-sand bays like Selong Belanak. The north is dominated by Mount Rinjani, the country's second-highest volcano, a hard two or three-day summit trek to a crater lake. Time it for the dry season; the trek closes in the wet.



The Gilis run on cash and have no motor traffic; you walk or take a cidomo pony cart. Draw rupiah on Lombok or Bali before the boat.



Fast boats from Bali cancel in big swell and the safety record is mixed. Book a reputable operator, check the weather, and wear the life jacket.

Gili Trawangan

The biggest Gili: dive schools, sunset bars, and a turtle-rich house reef off the west side.

Gili Air and Meno

The calm pair: Air for a social-but-quiet base, Meno for near-empty honeymoon sand.

Kuta Lombok

South-coast surf town with empty white bays like Selong Belanak; mellower than Bali's south.

Mount Rinjani

A hard 2-3 day volcano trek to a crater lake; dry season only, guided and permit-controlled.

MORE ON THE SITE

The turtle reef in the [Gili Trawangan page](#), the surf in the [Selong Belanak write-up](#), and the climb in the [Rinjani summit guide](#).

Komodo and Flores

dragons, dive water and three-colour lakes • 4-6 nights



Labuan Bajo, on the western tip of Flores, is the gateway to the Komodo National Park: a short flight from Bali. The park is the only place on earth to see Komodo dragons in the wild, but the marine life is the equal draw. A liveaboard or day speedboat runs the loop of Padar Island's three-bay viewpoint, the Pink Beach, and the manta channel at Manta Point. The diving here is world-class and the snorkelling is nearly as good.

Flores itself rewards the overland push east. The road climbs through volcano country to Kelimutu, where three crater lakes sit side by side in different colours that shift over the years. It is one of the genuinely odd sights in the country, best at sunrise. Beyond it, the island stays rural and traditional, a slow contrast to the speedboat scene back west.



A shared speedboat day-tour is the value pick for Komodo; a liveaboard is the splurge for divers. Both leave Labuan Bajo at dawn for the empty viewpoints.



Dragons are wild animals, not a petting zoo. Stay with the ranger, keep your distance, and skip the visit if you are bleeding or unsteady.

Padar Island

The three-bay viewpoint that is the postcard of the park; a short steep climb at dawn.

Komodo dragons

Wild monitor lizards on Komodo and Rinca, walked with a park ranger; the only place on earth.

Pink Beach and Manta Point

Coral-pink sand and a reliable manta channel; the snorkel and dive half of the day-trip.

Kelimutu, Flores

Three crater lakes in shifting colours, an overland push east; sunrise is the slot.

KEEP READING

The viewpoint in the [Padar Island page](#), the coral sand in the [Pink Beach write-up](#), and the lakes in the [Kelimutu page](#).

Sumatra

jungle, orangutans and a crater lake • 5-8 nights



The wild west of the country, and the island for travellers who want jungle over beach. Bukit Lawang, a few hours from Medan, is the base for trekking into Gunung Leuser, one of the last places to see wild Sumatran orangutans. A one or two-day guided trek through the rainforest, sleeping at a riverside camp, is the headline experience and worth the journey on its own.

The other anchor is Lake Toba, the largest volcanic lake on earth, formed by a super-eruption. The island of Samosir in its centre is a cool, slow, Batak-culture retreat that rewards a few unhurried days. Sumatra is big and the roads are slow, so pick one or two regions rather than trying to cross it. The reward for the effort is real rainforest and almost no crowds.



Never feed or touch the orangutans, however close they come. Habituation and disease transfer are the real threats to the population. A good guide keeps the distance.



Distances are long and the roads slow. Fly between regions where you can; the Medan to Lake Toba drive alone eats most of a day.

Bukit Lawang

The jungle base for wild orangutan treks into Gunung Leuser; riverside camps and tubing.

Lake Toba and Samosir

The vast crater lake and its central island; cool air, Batak culture, and a slow few days.

Berastagi volcanoes

A highland town for the Sibayak sunrise hike; an easy active day on the way to Toba.

Sipiso-Piso falls

A 120-metre waterfall plunging into the Toba caldera; the viewpoint is the easy stop.

ON THE WEBSITE The apes in the [Bukit Lawang trek page](#), the falls in the [Sipiso-Piso write-up](#), and the wildlife list in the [animals rundown](#).

Sulawesi

funeral country and reef walls • 6-9 nights • for second trips



The orchid-shaped island is two strong trips in one. In the central highlands, Tana Toraja is the country's most distinctive culture: elaborate boat-roofed houses, cliff-face graves, and multi-day funeral ceremonies that are the centre of local life. It is a confronting, fascinating place, reached by a long but scenic drive up from Makassar. Go with respect and a local guide; these are real funerals, not a show.

In the far north, Bunaken Marine Park off Manado is one of the great wall dives of Asia, a vertical reef dropping into the blue with extraordinary coral cover. Sulawesi is remote and the internal distances are long, so it suits a second trip with time to spare. The payoff is culture and diving few other travellers reach.



Toraja funerals are sacred events you may be invited to. Bring a small gift, dress modestly, follow your guide's lead, and ask before photographing people.



Bunaken is a wall dive with current; it suits divers with some experience. The visibility is best in the dry months, April to November.

Tana Toraja

Boat-roofed houses, cliff graves, and living funeral rites in the central highlands.

Bunaken, Manado

A vertical reef wall off the north coast; one of the best dive sites in the country.

Makassar

The southern gateway city: Fort Rotterdam, seafood, and the launch point for Toraja.

Togean and Wakatobi

Remote island groups for divers with time; some of the least-touched reefs in Asia.

READ ON

The burial sites in the [Tana Toraja page](#), the wall dive in the [Bunaken write-up](#), and the remote reefs in the [Wakatobi page](#).

Raja Ampat and the far east

highlight · the richest reef on earth · 7+ nights, plan ahead



RAJA AMPAT KARST ISLANDS

In the far east, off the West Papuan coast, Raja Ampat holds the highest marine biodiversity recorded anywhere on the planet. Jade lagoons, mushroom-shaped karst islands, and reefs so dense the water feels crowded with fish. It is the dream destination for divers and snorkellers, reached by a flight to Sorong and a boat onward. There is little here but the water and a few homestays and dive resorts, which is the point.

This is a trip to plan, not improvise. Flights are long and a few legs a week, accommodation books out, and the marine-park fee is mandatory. The reward is a stretch of ocean with no real equal. On land, the Piaynemo viewpoint over the lagoon and a trek to spot wild birds of paradise round out the days between dives. Treat it as the prize at the end of several Indonesia trips.



Book flights, boats and homestays months ahead; capacity is small and seats sell out. The marine-park entry fee is paid on arrival and funds conservation.



A local homestay puts your money straight into the village economy and is the authentic way to stay; resorts are the comfort option.

Piaynemo viewpoint

The classic climb over the jade lagoon and its scatter of karst islets.

The reefs

The richest coral and fish life on earth, snorkelled straight off many homestay jetties.

Birds of paradise

A dawn jungle trek to spot the famous display birds the islands are named for.

THE FULL PICTURE

Picks and logistics in the [Raja Ampat rundown](#), the dawn trek in the [birds of paradise page](#), and the dive sites ranked in the [diving write-up](#).

Skip this, and the overrated

where the photo lies • what to do instead

No affiliate-funded guide tells you what to skip, so here it is. None of these are bad; they are over-promised relative to the queue, the price, or the detour. In each case there is a better use of the same day, usually a short distance away.

02

OVERRATED

The Bali "gates of heaven" queue

Lempuyang's mirror-reflection photo is a paid two-hour queue and a man with a piece of glass under a phone. Do Besakih or Tirta Gangga instead.

OVERRATED

Kuta Bali as a base

The original party strip is traffic, hawkers and a mediocre beach. Base in Canggu, Uluwatu or Ubud and visit Kuta only if you must.

SKIP IF RUSHED

Nusa Penida as a day-trip

The island is big and rough, and the day-trip is mostly boat and minibus. Stay a night or save it for a calmer trip.

DON'T DO IF

Wet-season Komodo or Bunaken

If your dates fall in January or February, the dive visibility drops and the boats cancel. Swap the water islands for Java's volcanoes.

OVERRATED

The Bali jungle swings

The "Bali swing" parks are a paid photo queue over a planted valley. A free Campuhan ridge walk or a real rice-terrace path gives you the view without the line.

SKIP IF RUSHED

Three islands in ten days

Each island change burns the better part of a travel day. Two islands in two weeks beats three in a blur; depth reads better than a checklist.



Anywhere with a "compulsory" guide fee at the gate that was not in the official price is a negotiation, not a rule. Decline and walk.



Contrarian rule: the more a spot trends on social, the earlier you go and the shorter you stay. Sunrise beats the tour fleet by two hours.

WORTH A READ The under-the-radar alternatives in the [off the beaten path rundown](#), and the landscapes that earn the trip in the [best places list](#).

03

What to do

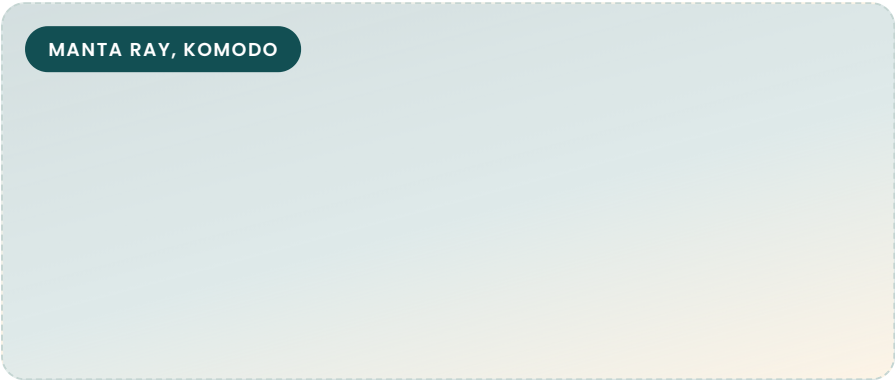
The two things Indonesia does better than almost anywhere: get under the water, and climb a volcano at dawn. Plus temples, beaches, food, and where to sleep.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Diving and snorkelling	20
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Temples and culture	22
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Food, the calibration dishes	24
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Diving and snorkelling

the world's richest reef • clearest Apr-Nov



This is the country's signature. Indonesia sits in the Coral Triangle, the centre of the planet's marine biodiversity, and the water is the reason many travellers come back. The tiers run from snorkel-off-the-beach easy to expedition-grade. Komodo gives you mantas and big fish on a strong current; Bunaken off Sulawesi is a vertical wall dive; Raja Ampat in the far east is the richest of all and the hardest to reach.

You do not need a licence to see the best of it. The Gili islands, Amed and Pemuteran on Bali, and the Nusa Penida channel all snorkel beautifully off the boat, with turtles and reef fish on easy reefs. If you want to learn, the Gilis and Amed are cheap, calm places to take an Open Water course. Whatever the level, no flying for 18 to 24 hours after your last dive, and check your insurance covers it.

No flying for 18 to 24 hours after your last dive. Plan the dive days before an inter-island flight, never the morning of one.

Komodo and Nusa Penida run real current. Pick an operator that briefs properly and matches the site to your experience, not the cheapest boat.

Komodo

Mantas, sharks and big-fish drift dives on current; the headline dive of the core route.

The Gili islands

Easy turtle snorkelling off the beach and cheap, calm dive courses for beginners.

Bunaken, Sulawesi

A coral wall dropping into the blue off Manado; the great wall dive of the north.

Raja Ampat

The richest reef on the planet, far east and trip-of-a-lifetime grade; plan ahead.

THE LONG VERSION

Twelve dive sites by level in the [diving write-up](#), the easy spots in the [snorkeling rundown](#), and the offshore picks in the [islands page](#).

Volcanoes and hiking

130 active volcanoes • the dawn is the point



Indonesia sits on the Ring of Fire with around 130 active volcanoes, and several of them are among the best dawn hikes in Asia. The common thread is the pre-dawn start: you climb in the dark to catch the sunrise from the rim, before the cloud builds and the heat arrives. They range from a one-hour scramble to a multi-day expedition, so pick by fitness, not by photo.

The easy headline is Mount Batur on Bali, a short guided sunrise hike anyone reasonably fit can do. Java holds the two showstoppers: Bromo, reached by jeep to a viewpoint over a smoking caldera, and Ijen, with its electric-blue sulphur flames and acid lake. The serious one is Rinjani on Lombok, a hard two or three-day trek for experienced hikers only, and dry-season only.

Volcanic activity status changes. Check the official PVMBG alert level before any climb, and treat a guide's "it's fine" as a starting point, not the last word.

Pre-dawn starts are cold at altitude even on the equator. A warm layer, a head torch and real shoes turn a miserable climb into a good one.

Mount Batur, Bali

The easy sunrise hike: about two hours up an active cone for the cloud-sea dawn.

Mount Bromo, Java

A jeep to the viewpoint, then a short walk to the smoking crater rim; the postcard volcano.

Ijen, Java

A 2am trek to blue sulphur flames and a turquoise acid lake; bring the gas mask.

Mount Rinjani, Lombok

The hard one: a 2-3 day summit and crater-lake trek for fit, experienced hikers.

MORE DETAIL Ten peaks ranked in the [mountains and volcanoes page](#), the caldera in the [Bromo write-up](#), and the parks list in the [national parks rundown](#).

Temples and culture

Buddhist, Hindu and animist, layered across the islands



Indonesia's culture changes with the island, and the contrast is part of the trip. Java holds the two ancient giants: Borobudur, the largest Buddhist monument on earth, and the Hindu spires of Prambanan, both near Yogyakarta. Bali runs a living Hindu tradition you see every day in the offerings on the pavement, the cliff temple at Uluwatu, and the lake temple at Bratan.

Beyond the headline sites, the deeper culture is in the rituals: a Balinese temple festival, the fire-dance kecak at sunset, the funeral rites of Tana Toraja on Sulawesi. The rule everywhere is the same. Cover shoulders and knees, wear the sarong where it is offered, step around the offerings rather than over them, and never put yourself above a person at prayer or a shrine.



Carry a light sarong. Most temples lend one, but having your own means you are never refused entry or pushed into a rental queue.



Menstruating visitors are traditionally asked not to enter Balinese temple inner courtyards. It is a genuine local rule, posted at the gate, not a scam.

Borobudur and Prambanan

The Buddhist and Hindu giants of Java, near Yogyakarta; dawn and the evening ballet.

Bali's temples

Uluwatu on the cliff, Tanah Lot on the rock, Bratan on the lake, Besakih on the volcano.

The kecak fire dance

A chanting circle and a fire ritual at sunset, most famously on the Uluwatu cliff.

Tana Toraja rites

The animist funeral culture of highland Sulawesi; the most distinctive tradition in the country.

WORTH A READ

Fourteen landmarks with visiting notes in the [religious landmarks page](#), the cliff ritual in the [Uluwatu kecak write-up](#), and the traditions in the [culture rundown](#).

Beaches and surf, by what you want from the day

four moods • the coast is the whole country



With a coastline this long, the question is not where the beach is but what you want from it. Indonesia is one of the world's great surf countries, but it also has glass-calm snorkel coves, party strips, and quiet family sand. One pick per mood below, with the alternative where the islands differ. The Indian Ocean swell that feeds the surf also means real currents, so read the water before you wade in.

FOR SURF

Uluwatu and Canggu, Bali

World-class reef breaks at Uluwatu, mellower beach breaks at Canggu for learners. Alternative: Kuta Lombok for emptier line-ups.

FOR SNORKEL

Amed and the Gilis

Calm reefs straight off the sand, with turtles. Alternative: Pemuteran on Bali's quiet northwest coast.

FOR THE SCENE

Seminyak and Canggu beach clubs

Sunset loungers, music and cocktails on the south Bali sand. Alternative: Gili Trawangan for the island-party version.

FOR FAMILY

Sanur and Gili Meno

Calm shallow water and a low-key promenade at Sanur; near-silent sand on Meno. Alternative: Nusa Dua's resort beaches.



Rip currents are real on the south Bali and Lombok coasts. Swim where locals swim, watch for flags, and never turn your back on a big set.



Beginners should learn at Canggu or Kuta Lombok, not Uluwatu. The famous reef breaks are over sharp coral and not the place for a first lesson.

SEE ALSO Twelve rated beaches in the [beaches write-up](#), the breaks in the [surf spots rundown](#), and the lesson in the [Canggu surf page](#).

Food: the four calibration dishes

warung economy • 1 to 4 USD a plate

Indonesian food is built on rice, a deep larder of spice pastes, and the chilli-and-shrimp punch of sambal on the side. It shifts island to island, from the coconut-rich curries of Sumatra to the suckling pig of Hindu Bali. The tourist mistake is eating in places with laminated menus and sea views. Locals eat at the warung, the small family kitchen with a few plastic tables, where the turnover keeps it fresh and the bill is a couple of dollars. Order these four early; they are your bar for the rest of the trip.



NASI GORENG

Nasi goreng nasi goreng

USD 1-2 • everywhere

The national plate: fried rice with sweet soy, garlic and chilli, topped with a fried egg and a few crackers. The default cheap meal, and a fair test of any kitchen. The street cart version beats the cafe one.



SATE

Sate sate

USD 1-3 • everywhere

Skewered, charcoal-grilled chicken or goat with a peanut or sweet-soy sauce. Sold from smoking carts at dusk. Sate ayam is the chicken everyday version; ask for it where you smell the grill.



RENDANG

Rendang rendang

USD 2-4 • Sumatra, Padang

Beef slow-cooked in coconut and a wall of spice until it is almost dry and intensely savoury. The pride of Sumatran Padang cooking, served at the point-and-pick nasi Padang halls. Often voted the best dish in the world.



GADO-GADO

Gado-gado gado-gado

USD 1-3 • everywhere

Blanched vegetables, tofu, tempeh and egg under a thick peanut sauce. The vegetarian anchor of the country and proof that meat-free eating here is easy. Ask for it pedas if you want the chilli kick.



Coffee is a culture here: kopi tubruk grounds-in-the-glass by day, a Bali pour-over in Ubud, and the famous Toraja and Gayo beans by region.



A busy warung is a safe warung: high turnover is the food-safety system. Sambal is fierce, so add it a little at a time until you know the kitchen.

ON THE WEBSITE

The ten dishes and drinks in the [food and drinks rundown](#), and what a plate costs street versus restaurant in the [budget breakdown](#).

Where to stay: Bali and the Nusa islands

prices per night, double room • base by what you will do most

Two rules for Bali. First, base by activity, not by a single beach photo: the south traffic punishes anyone trying to do Ubud green and Uluwatu surf from one bed. Second, book your first nights ahead in peak season (July, August, New Year), then move freely. Ubud for culture and rice fields, Canggu or Uluwatu for surf and sunsets, and a night on Nusa Penida if you want the cliffs at dawn.

Ubud (culture base)

hostel 9 USD mid 30 USD comfort 85 USD

Stay among the rice fields north of the centre for the green, or in town for walkable food and the Monkey Forest. [See what a room costs around Ubud](#) before you commit; backpackers run the dorm scene on [Hostelworld](#).

Canggu (surf and nomads)

hostel 10 USD mid 35 USD comfort 95 USD

The south coast base for beach breaks, cafes and coworking; Uluwatu is the quieter clifftop alternative. [Pull up live Canggu prices](#), or find a social bed through [Hostelworld](#).

Mid-range and up across Bali, with free cancellation while your island plan is still moving.

Find Stays on Booking.com

TOURS WORTH PAYING FOR

Mount Batur sunrise jeep tour, all-inclusive

from 22 USD

5.0 (91 reviews)

8 hours

Ubud volcano, lake and natural hot spring tour

from 35 USD

5.0 (105 reviews)

10 hours

Nusa Penida one-day island tour

from 45 USD

5.0 (16 reviews)

12 hours

Live Viator tours, prices captured June 2026, ratings from verified bookings. Tap a card to book.

Where to stay: Java, Lombok and Flores

prices per night, double room • gateway towns for the big sights

Off Bali, base in the gateway towns and let the sights come to you. Yogyakarta is the walkable base for the Java temples and a train ride from the volcanoes. On Lombok, the Gilis and Kuta sit at opposite ends, so pick by whether you want car-free island calm or surf. Labuan Bajo on Flores is small and all about the boat departures; one or two nights either side of a Komodo trip is plenty.

Yogyakarta (Java temples)

hostel **8 USD** mid **26 USD** comfort **70 USD**

Base near Malioboro or the quieter Prawirotaman cafe strip; both are an easy transfer to Borobudur and the station. [Check live Yogyakarta prices](#), or the dorm scene on [Hostelworld](#).

Labuan Bajo (Komodo gateway)

hostel **11 USD** mid **35 USD** comfort **100 USD**

A small harbour town built around the boat departures, with hillside sunset bars. Book a night either side of your Komodo trip. [See what Labuan Bajo is charging](#); budget beds on [Hostelworld](#).

Guesthouses and resorts across Java, Lombok and Flores, cancellable until a few days before check-in.

Find Stays on Booking.com

TOURS WORTH PAYING FOR

Borobudur, Merapi jeep and Prambanan day tour

from 71 USD

5.0 (33 reviews)

10 hours

Komodo National Park shared speedboat day tour

from 129 USD

5.0 (309 reviews)

11 hours

Lombok Indonesian cooking class

from 30 USD

5.0 (281 reviews)

3 hours

Live Viator tours, prices captured June 2026, ratings from verified bookings. Tap a card to book.

04

Island-hopping and routes

How the islands actually connect by boat and by plane, the eight paths to pick from, and two routes drawn day by day.

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Getting between the islands	28
Pick your trip, 8 paths	29
14 days, Bali and the east	30
21 days, Java to Flores	31

Getting between the islands

fly the long legs, boat the short ones · the map is the plan

This is the page that separates Indonesia from its mainland neighbours: the distances are oceanic, so the logistics are the trip. The rule is simple. Fast boats for the short hops near Bali, the Gilis and Lombok, where a 1.5-hour crossing saves a flight. Planes for everything longer: Bali to Komodo, Java, Sulawesi or Papua, where a domestic flight that costs 40 to 90 USD saves you days on a ferry. Slow Pelni ferries exist and are cheap, but they eat the calendar. Book the legs through 12Go, which bundles boats, flights and the transfers between them.



A Bali to Labuan Bajo flight is about 75 minutes against two days on a boat. On a two-week trip, fly every leg longer than the Gili crossing.



Fast boats to the Gilis cancel in big swell and have a mixed safety record. Pick a reputable operator, check the forecast, and keep a spare day.

PLAN THE LEGS

Compare boats and internal flights and book combined tickets through [12Go](#); the cheap-flight playbook is in the [domestic flights write-up](#) and the road realities in the [traffic page](#).

Pick your trip

three dimensions, eight paths · find yours, then read the route

Who you travel with, how long you have, and what you spend per night decide which islands you can chain before any list of sights does. The country is wide, so almost every path uses at least one internal flight. Find your row below; the two routes on the next pages cover the most popular paths in full.

SOLO · 9D · BACKPACKER

Bali and the Gilis

USD 420 · hostels + fast boat

- Ubud 3n + Canggu 2n
- Fast boat to Gili Air 3n
- Snorkel, dive course, sunsets

SOLO · 14D · BACKPACKER

Bali, Lombok, Komodo

USD 750 · 1 internal flight

- Bali 5 · Gili + Lombok 4
- Fly to Labuan Bajo 4
- Komodo speedboat day

COUPLE · 14D · MID

Bali, Nusa Penida, Flores

USD 2,200 for 2 · 3-star

- Ubud 3 + south Bali 3
- Nusa Penida 2
- Fly Komodo + Flores 5

COUPLE · 18D · COMFORT

Bali and a Gili, 4-star

USD 2,600 for 2 · resorts

- Ubud villa 4 · Uluwatu 3
- Fast boat to Gili Meno 3
- Spa, reef trips, sunsets

FAMILY · 14D · MID

Bali, Yogyakarta, Sanur

USD 4,200 · family of 4

- Ubud 4 + Sanur calm beach 4
- Fly Yogyakarta 3: temples
- Easy days, short transfers

DIVER · 12D · MID

Komodo liveaboard plus Bali

USD 2,400 · boat + dives

- Fly Labuan Bajo, liveaboard 5
- Nusa Penida manta dives 3
- Bali surface days either side

NOMAD · 30D · MID

Canggu base plus island hops

USD 1,200 a month all-in

- Canggu 22: surf + coworking
- Ubud weekend · Nusa weekend
- Visa extension mid-stay

ADVENTURER · 21D · BACKPACKER

Java volcanoes to Flores

USD 1,200 · trains + flights

- Yogyakarta 4 · Bromo + Ijen 3
- Ferry to Bali 4
- Fly Komodo + Flores 6

WORTH A READ

Full day-by-day versions online: the [7-day route](#), the [14-day route](#), the [21-day route](#), and the [28-day route](#).

14 days, Bali and the east

Bali, the Gilis, Komodo and Flores • one internal flight

The most popular two-week trip, refined. Bali to settle in, the Gilis for the calm, then a short flight east to the dragons and dive water of Komodo. Book the Bali to Labuan Bajo flight and the fast boat through [12Go](#) a couple of weeks ahead; the rest can be decided on the day.

1 Arrive Bali, Ubud

DPS • transfer

Land, transfer to Ubud. Settle in, a first warung dinner, an early night to beat the jet lag.

2-3 Ubud and the rice fields

culture base

Tegalalang terraces and the Campuhan ridge, the Monkey Forest, a cooking class. A Mount Batur sunrise hike on day three.

4-5 South Bali

Uluwatu / Canggu

Move south for the surf and the cliff temples. Sunset and the kecak fire dance at Uluwatu, a beach-club afternoon at Canggu.

6-8 Gili Islands

1.5h fast boat

Fast boat to Gili Air or Trawangan. Three slow days: snorkel the turtle reef, a dive or a course, sunsets with no traffic.

9 Fly to Labuan Bajo

via Bali • LBJ

Boat back to Bali and fly east to Flores. Settle into Labuan Bajo, a hillside sunset bar, brief the Komodo trip.

10-12 Komodo and Flores

speedboat + overland

A speedboat day to Padar, the dragons, Pink Beach and Manta Point. A second day diving, or overland toward Kelimutu.

13-14 Fly out via Bali

DPS depart

Fly back to Bali for the international connection. A last beach afternoon in the south before the night flight home.



Almost all domestic flights route through Bali or Jakarta. Build the connection time in; a missed link strands you a day on the wrong island.



Short on time? Drop Flores and add a third Gili day. The Komodo speedboat from Labuan Bajo still fits a single packed day.

21 days, Java to Flores

temples, volcanoes, Bali and the dragons • the full sweep

The three-week version starts in the west with Java's temples and volcanoes, crosses to Bali by ferry, and finishes east in Komodo. It is the trip for travellers who want the full range and do not mind moving. Trains on Java, a ferry to Bali, and one flight east tie it together.

1-4 Yogyakarta and the temples

JOG • Java

Borobudur at the dawn opening, Prambanan across the valley, a batik workshop and the city's food. Two great temples and a walkable base.

5-7 Bromo and Ijen

train east

Train east toward the volcanoes. A jeep sunrise at Bromo, then the 2am Ijen blue-flame trek at Java's far end.

8 Ferry to Bali

Ketapang crossing

The short ferry from Java to Bali, then on to Ubud. A slow evening after the volcano push.

9-13 Bali, both sides

Ubud + south

Ubud for culture and rice fields, then the south for surf and sunsets. A Nusa Penida day-trip or overnight in the middle.

14-16 Gili Islands

fast boat

A fast boat east to the Gilis for the slow island days, the turtle reef and a dive.

17-20 Komodo and Flores

fly LBJ

Fly to Labuan Bajo. The Komodo speedboat loop, a dive day, and the overland run to the Kelimutu lakes.

21 Fly out via Bali

DPS depart

The connection back through Bali for the flight home, three islands and a continent of contrast behind you.



Java's trains are the comfortable, cheap way to link Yogyakarta and the volcano towns. Book a few days ahead on the Access by KAI app.



This route runs west to east, against the usual Bali start. It works just as well reversed if your flights land in Bali first.

pack lightly

05

When to go

One rule on the equator: dry season against wet. When the dive water is clear, where the crowds and prices spike, and the festivals worth planning around.

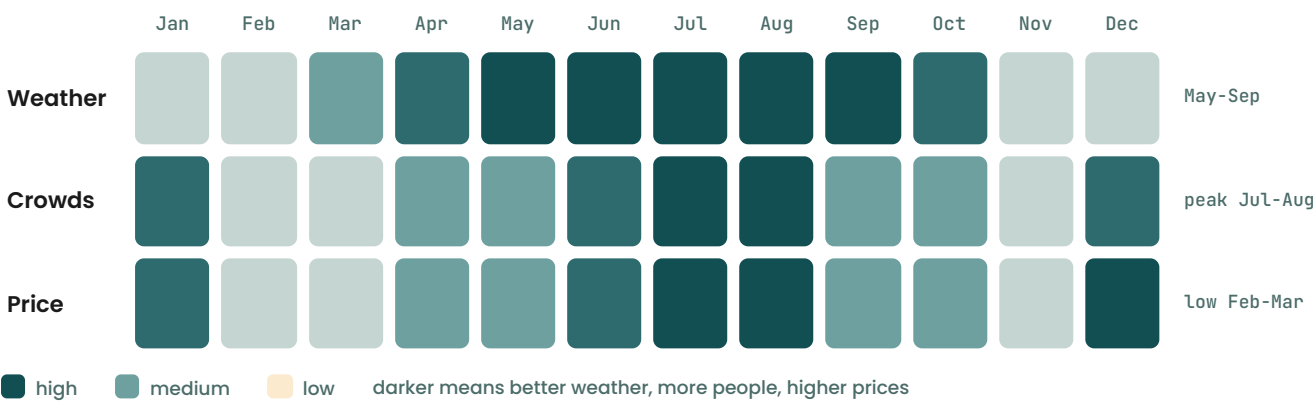
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Festivals worth planning around	34

Weather, crowds, price

12-month calendar · one dry window, April to October

On the equator there is no winter, only dry and wet. The dry season runs April to October and is the time to come: clear dive water, reliable volcano sunrises, and easier boat crossings. The wet season, November to March, brings heavy afternoon downpours, lower visibility underwater, and more cancelled fast boats. The catch is that dry season is also peak: July and August fill Bali and push prices up. The shoulder months of April, May and September are the sweet spot. The heatmap averages the main islands; Sumatra and the far east run slightly different rhythms.



source: best-travel-time dataset · captured 2026-05-17

WHAT THINGS COST: QUOTED VS PAID

SAMPLE DATA

Airport ride, Denpasar to Canggu		18 USD airport counter
		7 USD via Grab/Gojek
Nasi goreng, one plate		5 USD beach-club cafe
		1.40 USD at a warung
Scooter, one day		9 USD tourist desk
		4 USD local rental
Komodo park day-trip		250 USD private speedboat
		90 USD shared group boat

Festivals worth planning around

three to chase, three to plan around

Festivals here run in both directions: the top row is worth building a trip around, the bottom row mostly shuts the shops or fills the planes. Many move every year on the lunar or Balinese calendar, so check the exact dates for your travel year before you book.

EVERY 210 DAYS

Galungan and Kuningan, Bali

The island's biggest Hindu celebration: tall bamboo penjor poles line every street and the temples fill with offerings. The most photogenic time to be on Bali.

JUN TO JUL

Bali Arts Festival

A month of dance, gamelan and craft in Denpasar, the deepest dive into Balinese culture and timed neatly with the start of the dry season.

JUL TO AUG

Toraja funeral season, Sulawesi

The dry months are when highland Sulawesi holds its elaborate multi-day funeral rites. A profound thing to witness with a local guide and an invitation.

~MARCH

Nyepi, Bali's day of silence

For 24 hours the whole island stops: no flights, no traffic, no lights, no leaving your hotel. The airport closes. Arrive before or after, not on the day.

END OF RAMADAN

Idul Fitri (Lebaran)

The end of the fasting month sends the whole Muslim majority travelling home. Transport books out for a week and many shops shut; the dates shift yearly.

LATE DEC TO EARLY JAN

Christmas and New Year

Domestic and regional holiday peak on Bali in the middle of the wet season: high prices, full beaches, and rain. The worst value window of the year.



Nyepi is the one date to plan around hard. The Bali airport shuts completely for 24 hours; book your flights to fall clear of it.



Idul Fitri and Balinese festival dates move every year. Verify them against this year's calendar before locking hotels and ferries.

DIG IN Exact dates per year in the [public holidays calendar](#), and the monthly weather logic in the [best time to visit breakdown](#).

06

Practical

What to book first and what to leave, what a day really costs, how to move around an island, and the short health list that is mostly reassurance.

IN THIS CHAPTER

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What a day really costs	37
Money and getting around	38
Bed, bag, signal	39
Health basics	40

Book in this order

four things before you fly • everything else on the ground

Indonesia rewards travelling light on bookings: most hotels, scooters and tours are cheaper and easier arranged on the spot. Only four things genuinely pay to lock in early, and they have a natural order. The visa is a five-minute check for most passports, since visa on arrival is granted to almost everyone.

8 wk
before

International flights

Fares to Bali or Jakarta bottom out six to eight weeks ahead for the dry season. Flying into Bali and out of another island can save a backtrack.

Compare fares
on Aviasales

4 wk
before

Insurance + visa check

Buy travel insurance with strong medical and evacuation cover, and scooter riding and diving included if you plan to do either. Most passports get visa on arrival for 35 USD, or pre-buy the e-VOA online to skip the airport queue. Check your nationality before you fly.

Check entry
rules per
passport

2 wk
before

First nights + island legs

Book your first two nights, the inter-island flights, and the fast boats. In peak July and August, book the popular Gili and Komodo legs earlier still.

Book the legs on
12Go

1 wk
before

eSIM

Install before departure, activate on landing. Coverage is strong on the main islands and patchy on the remote ones. 10 to 15 GB covers two weeks of maps and uploads.

Set up a Saily
eSIM



Passport rule: six months validity beyond arrival, and a couple of blank pages. Check it now; renewals run slow in peak season.



Tell your bank the dates or bring a second card, and always choose to be charged in rupiah, not your home currency, at the ATM.

What a day really costs

itemised, bed to nightcap • Bali sits a notch above the rest

Three days, three budgets, every line itemised so you can see where the money goes. These are Bali numbers, the most expensive island; Java, Sumatra and the smaller islands run cheaper, often 15 to 25 percent below. The single biggest lever is where you sleep and eat: a warung lunch and a guesthouse hold the backpacker line; a beach club and a villa push you to comfort fast.

A DAY IN INDONESIA	A DAY IN INDONESIA	A DAY IN INDONESIA
* backpacker *	* standard *	* comfort *
hostel dorm9.00	guesthouse double, half15.00	4-star or villa, half70.00
warung breakfast1.50	cafe breakfast5.00	hotel breakfastincl.
nasi goreng lunch1.50	restaurant lunch6.00	restaurant lunch12.00
warung dinner3.00	dinner with drinks12.00	dinner, good table22.00
scooter + petrol5.00	Grab rides + scooter7.00	private driver, half day18.00
temple or site entry3.00	group day-tour, split12.00	spa or private tourincl. above
large Bintang x23.50	coffee + a cocktail5.00	beach-club cocktails x216.00
kopi + water1.50		
TOTAL / DAY~28 USD	TOTAL / DAY~62 USD	TOTAL / DAY~130 USD
budget-calculator data • 2026-05-17	budget-calculator data • 2026-05-17	budget-calculator data • 2026-05-17

\$

The single biggest saving is the bed and the kitchen: a guesthouse and two warung meals hold the backpacker line; a villa and a beach club push you to comfort by lunch.

₹

Carry small rupiah notes for warungs, parking and temple donations. Cards work in malls and resorts, but the street economy runs on cash.

ON THE WEBSITE The full cost model by category in the [budget breakdown](#), and the exchange traps in the [currency rundown](#).

Money and getting around

cash-heavy · scooter, app-taxi, ferry, short flight

Cash runs most of the country; cards work at hotels, malls and bigger restaurants. The rupiah has a lot of zeros, so count carefully and keep small notes for warungs and parking. Use bank ATMs (BCA, Mandiri, BNI), always pick IDR over your home currency, and watch the per-withdrawal fees, which are high, so draw larger amounts less often.

ITEM	BACKPACKER	MID	COMFORT
Bed (dorm / guesthouse / villa)	USD 9	USD 30	USD 90
Warung meal / restaurant	USD 1.50	USD 8	USD 25
Large Bintang beer	USD 1.80	USD 3.50	USD 7
Scooter, per day	USD 4	USD 6	driver USD 35
Grab / Gojek across town	USD 1.50	USD 3	USD 6

verified 2026-05-14 · per-category numbers in the budget guide

GETTING AROUND: WHAT BEATS WHAT

Inside a city or a beach area, the Gojek and Grab apps settle everything: cars, scooters on demand, even food delivery, all metered so there is nothing to haggle. On Java, the trains are comfortable and cheap, booked on the Access by KAI app. Between islands, fly the long legs and take the fast boat for the short Bali-to-Gili hop, booked through [12Go](#). The scooter is the freedom machine for getting around an island, but it is also the single biggest cause of traveller injury here. Rent only with real experience and an international driving permit, photograph the bike at pickup, and never leave your passport as deposit.



Always pay in rupiah when a card terminal offers "your" currency; the dynamic-conversion rate quietly costs 4 to 7 percent.



Gojek and Grab are banned from some Bali tourist zones by local driver groups. Walk a block out of the no-pickup area and the app works fine.

THE FULL PICTURE

The notes and exchange traps in the [currency rundown](#), the road and IDP rules in the [traffic page](#), and cheap legs in the [domestic flights write-up](#).

Bed, bag, signal

hotels · packing · eSIM, the three solved problems

BED

For mid-range and above, [Booking.com](#) wins on free-cancellation depth and inventory. For dorms and social hostels in Canggu, the Gilis or Ubud, [Hostelworld](#) has the deeper review pool. For family guesthouses and homestays on Flores, the Gilis or in Raja Ampat, message the host directly; small places often pass back a saving on a direct booking and the cash stays local.

BAG: THE TWO-WEEK CARRY-ON LIST

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Two quick-dry tops, one long-sleeve (temples + cool volcano dawns) | ☐ Starter med-kit: loperamide, paracetamol, electrolytes, plasters |
| ☐ A light sarong (temple entry, beach, towel) | ☐ Type C/F plug adapter, 20,000 mAh power bank |
| ☐ A warm layer for the Bromo, Ijen and Batur sunrises | ☐ Two payment cards in separate pockets, plus cash |
| ☐ Reef-safe sunscreen and 30% DEET repellent | ☐ Passport copies in three places: phone, print, email |
| ☐ Sandals plus one closed shoe for the volcano hikes | ☐ A dry bag for boat days and a snorkel mask if you have space |

Signal. Buy the eSIM the day before you fly and activate it on landing. A 5 GB plan covers a week (from ~3 USD); 10 to 15 GB covers two working weeks. Coverage is strong on Bali and Java, patchy on the remote eastern islands. Stays over a month are cheaper on a local Telkomsel SIM, sold with your passport at the airport.

[Set up a Saily eSIM](#)

GO DEEPER

The full season-by-season list in the [packing list](#), what to wear where in the [dress code page](#), and data plans compared in the [eSIM write-up](#).

Health basics

six weeks out • most of this list is reassurance

For the main tourist islands this is a low-drama health destination, with the wrinkle that the good hospitals cluster on Bali and Java and the remote islands have little. Pharmacies are widespread and competent. The list below is everything that actually needs doing, in order, with the things worth packing for the gaps in coverage.

THE SIX-STEP LIST

- ☐ **Six weeks before:** travel-clinic visit. Confirm routine vaccines (MMR, DPT, tetanus) are current.
- ☐ **Recommended:** Hepatitis A and typhoid for street-food and rural trips. Hep A is a two-shot series; start early.
- ☐ **Risk-based:** rabies pre-exposure if you will be near animals (the macaques at Ubud bite); Japanese Encephalitis for long rural stays.
- ☐ **Malaria:** none on Bali, Java or the Gilis. Pills only for rural eastern islands, Papua and parts of Sumatra. Check your exact route.
- ☐ **Pack:** the med-kit from page 39, plus reef-safe sun cream and strong DEET. Pharmacies restock most of it.
- ☐ **Insurance:** strong medical cover with evacuation (key for the remote islands), scooter riding and diving included.

IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG

The good private hospitals are on Bali (BIMC, Siloam) and in Jakarta; from the remote islands, serious cases are evacuated to them, which is why the insurance line matters. For small things, any apotek pharmacy handles stomach upsets, infected coral cuts and minor wounds over the counter. The single national emergency number is 112; it connects to police, ambulance and fire. Coral cuts and "Bali belly" are the two most common traveller complaints, both manageable.



Tap water is not safe to drink. Bottled or filtered only; ice in busy places is commercially made and fine, which is what locals drink.



Dengue is present year-round, more in the wet season. Daytime DEET is the whole protocol; there is no pill, so cover up at dawn and dusk.

READ ON The shot-by-shot schedule in the [vaccinations breakdown](#), hospital picks in the [hospitals page](#), and cover compared in the [travel insurance rundown](#).

07

Safe and smart

The two real dangers, the scams worth knowing, the etiquette that is load-bearing, and the niche notes for solo, nomad, LGBTQ+ and vegan travellers.

IN THIS CHAPTER

The scams and the two dangers	42
Etiquette: the short list	43
Emergency numbers and phrases	44
Solo, nomad, LGBTQ+, vegan	45

The scams, and the two real dangers

the dangers can hurt you • the scams only cost money

Indonesia is a safe country for travellers, with low violent crime. The things that actually go wrong split into two real physical dangers and a handful of money scams. Know the first two cold; the rest just cost you a few dollars and some patience.

DANGER 01

The scooter, the real risk

Far more travellers are hurt on a rented scooter than by any crime. Loose gravel, no helmet, no experience and unfamiliar roads are the recipe.

The fix: ride only if you genuinely can, with a proper helmet and an international permit. If you cannot, hire a driver. Cover your skin; "Bali tattoo" road rash is a daily clinic visit.

DANGER 02

The ocean and the volcano

Rip currents on the south coasts drown swimmers every year, and active volcanoes vent gas and occasionally close at no notice. Both are underestimated.

The fix: swim only at patrolled beaches between the flags; never on an empty stretch. Check the official PVMBG volcano alert before any climb and obey a guide who turns back.

SCAM 03

The scooter damage shakedown

On return the rental "finds" pre-existing scratches and demands cash. They hold your passport as deposit, which is the whole leverage.

The fix: video every panel at pickup with the operator in frame. Never leave the original passport; offer a photocopy plus a cash deposit, or use another shop.

SCAM 04

The money-changer and the ATM

Back-street changers with great rates short-count the stack with sleight of hand, and skimmers sit on quiet ATMs. The rupiah's many zeros make it easy.

The fix: change only at an authorised counter (look for the PVA Berizin sign), count the cash yourself before handing yours over, and draw from ATMs attached to a bank branch.

READ ON The full risk picture by region in the [safety rundown](#), and the road and licence rules in the [traffic page](#).

Etiquette: the short list

first four are load-bearing • last four save you face

Eight things that matter in a country that is mostly Muslim, with a Hindu island at its heart and animist cultures beyond. The first four cause real offense or real trouble if you ignore them; the last four mostly cost you face or money. Everything else is atmosphere.

DO NOT

Touch drugs, at all

Indonesia carries the death penalty for trafficking and long sentences for possession. There is no "small amount". Treat any offer as a trap.

DO

Cover shoulders and knees at temples and mosques

A sarong and a scarf cover it; many sites lend a sarong at the gate. Dress modestly away from the beach, especially outside Bali.

DO

Use your right hand

Eat, give and receive with the right hand; the left is considered unclean. Two hands for something formal reads as extra respect.

DO NOT

Step on or over the offerings

The little canang sari baskets on Bali's pavements are daily prayers. Walk around them, never through, and never kick one aside.

DO NOT

Touch anyone's head

The head is the most sacred part of the body. Ruffling a child's hair is a genuine faux pas, however friendly the intent.

DO

Respect Ramadan away from Bali

In the Muslim-majority islands, eat and drink discreetly in daylight during the fasting month, and dress a little more covered than usual.

DO

Bargain at markets, not at warungs

Market stalls and souvenir shops expect a friendly haggle; food warungs and fixed-price cafes do not. Smile, and start around half.

DO NOT

Lose your temper to win

Raising your voice loses the room across Indonesia. Calm and smiling gets you a better price and a faster fix every time.



A smile and a few words of Bahasa open doors. "Terima kasih" (thank you) and a calm manner are worth more than any tip here.



Tipping is not expected outside upscale spots; rounding up or leaving small change for a guide or driver reads as warm, not required.

KEEP READING

Religion, traditions and the full etiquette context in the [culture write-up](#), and what to wear where in the [dress code page](#).

Emergency numbers and eight phrases

save the numbers now • the phrases change how locals respond

ALL EMERGENCIES

112

single national line

POLICE

110

nationwide

AMBULANCE

118 / 119

medical

SEARCH AND RESCUE

115

water, mountains

TOURIST POLICE, BALI

Bali + cities

ask hotel for local line

US EMBASSY JAKARTA

+62 21 5083 1000

citizen services

EIGHT PHRASES THAT CHANGE HOW LOCALS RESPOND		
ENGLISH	BAHASA INDONESIA (PHONETIC)	NOTES
Hello / good day	selamat siang (se-la-mat see-ang)	"halo" works any time
Thank you	terima kasih (te-ree-ma ka-see)	the one to learn first
Yes / No	ya / tidak	"tidak" is the universal no
How much?	berapa harganya? (be-ra-pa)	essential for markets and bikes
No meat / vegetarian	tanpa daging / vegetarian	add "tanpa telur" for no egg
Where is the toilet?	di mana kamar kecil?	point and ask
Sorry / excuse me	maaf / permisi	"permisi" to pass by
Help!	tolong! (to-long)	emergencies only



Save 112 and your hotel's name and address in Indonesian in your phone before the first night out, plus your insurer's evacuation line.



These same phrases print as a wallet card on page 48; cut it out and keep it with your room key.

Solo, nomad, LGBTQ+, vegan

the four overlays that change the trip

FOR SOLO TRAVELERS

Solo, especially female-solo

A comfortable and popular solo trip, with the scooter the main daily hazard.

- Bali, the Gilis and Ubud are easy, social and well-trodden for first-time solo travel.
- Dress more covered away from Bali's beaches, especially in the Muslim-majority islands.
- Skip the scooter at night, and avoid walking empty beaches alone after dark.

FOR NOMADS

Digital nomads and long-stay

Canggu and Ubud are among the world's busiest nomad bases; the cost of living is the draw.

- Reckon on 900 to 1,400 USD a month all-in for a comfortable Bali base with coworking.
- The B211A or the newer remote-work visa cover longer legal stays; check the current rules.
- Fibre is strong in Canggu and Ubud, patchy elsewhere; carry the eSIM as a backup line.

FOR LGBTQ+ TRAVELERS

LGBTQ+

Bali is relaxed and welcoming; the rest of the country is conservative and discretion is wise.

- Same-sex activity is legal nationally except in Aceh, which applies sharia law.
- Bali, especially Seminyak, has an open scene; elsewhere, public affection draws attention.
- Bookings are easier as "a couple, one bed" in tourist hotels than in rural guesthouses.

FOR VEGANS

Vegan and vegetarian

One of the easiest countries in Asia to eat plant-based, with tempeh and tofu everywhere.

- Gado-gado, tempeh, tahu and sayur dishes are everyday warung staples, not special requests.
- Say "tanpa daging" (no meat) and "tanpa telur" (no egg); watch for shrimp paste in sambal.
- Ubud and Canggu have a deep dedicated vegan scene; the remote islands lean fish-heavy.

MORE DETAIL The full safety picture in the [safety rundown](#), the visa routes in the [visa page](#), and the food in the [food and drinks guide](#).

08

Tools and reference

The live tools this guide was built from, the cut-out cards for your wallet, and the sources behind every number.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Take the live tools with you	47
Print cards: cut, fold, take	48
Sources and methodology	49
A note on the links	50

Take the live tools with you

scan to open · data updates after this PDF was printed

This guide is a snapshot; the tools behind it keep updating. Scan a code or type the short URL. Each one is preloaded with the same Indonesia data this guide was built from.



Trip Budget Calculator

Indonesia: 28 USD/day backpacker, 130 USD/day comfort.

[pack-lightly.com/
tool/budget-calculator/](https://pack-lightly.com/tool/budget-calculator/)



Country Map

Indonesia spots mapped, from Sumatra to Raja Ampat.

[pack-lightly.com/
tool/country-map/](https://pack-lightly.com/tool/country-map/)



Best Time to Travel

Best: April to October. Month by month for 140+ countries.

[pack-lightly.com/
tool/best-travel-time-worldmap/](https://pack-lightly.com/tool/best-travel-time-worldmap/)



Mobile Data and eSIM Calculator

Which eSIM and how much data for your island route.

[pack-lightly.com/
tool/mobile-data-calculator/](https://pack-lightly.com/tool/mobile-data-calculator/)



What to Eat and Drink

Nasi goreng from 1 USD, plus the rest of the menu with prices.

[pack-lightly.com/
tool/local-food-and-drinks/](https://pack-lightly.com/tool/local-food-and-drinks/)

Print cards: cut, fold, take

print at 100% scale • credit-card size, 85 x 54 mm

Print this page on A4 or US Letter at 100 percent (no fit-to-page), cut along the dashed lines, and the two cards live in your wallet for the trip. The form fields are interactive in Acrobat and iOS Preview if you would rather type than write.

BAHASA INDONESIA • ESSENTIALS	
Hello	halo / selamat siang
Thank you	terima kasih
Yes / No	ya / tidak
How much?	berapa harganya?
No meat	tanpa daging
Where is toilet?	di mana kamar kecil?
Help!	tolong!
Sorry	maaf

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EMERGENCY • INDONESIA	
All emergencies	112
Police	110
Ambulance	118 / 119
Search and rescue	115
US Embassy (Jakarta)	+62 21 5083 1000
My hotel:	_____
Address:	_____
Insurance #:	_____

Left card front, right card back: print double-sided on the short edge and they fold into one.

Lost the guide, kept the card? The QR opens the live Indonesia hub with every page this guide links to, plus updates published after this edition went to print.

pack-lightly.com/indonesia/



Photograph both cards before you cut. A phone copy of the emergency card still works when the wallet is back at the hotel.



Ask reception to write your hotel name and address in Indonesian on the back. Grab and taxi drivers read it in one glance.

Sources and methodology

every number traces to a dated source



WRITTEN BY

Wouter van Kemenade

Founder of Pack Lightly. Twenty-plus countries on the ground, with time spent across the Indonesian islands from Bali and the Gilis east to Komodo and Flores. Performance-marketing background, data-led travel writing. Every number in this guide is verified against a source listed below; if a price moves more than 15 percent, the next edition flags it.

SOURCES USED IN THIS EDITION

1. Hostel and hotel pricing: Booking and Hostelworld snapshot 2026-05-14, across Bali, the Gilis and Yogyakarta.
2. Currency rates: ECB reference rates, 2026-05-25.
3. Visa policy: Indonesia's official e-VOA portal (evisa.imigrasi.go.id), retrieved 2026-05-15.
4. Community pricing checks: archived [r/indonesia](#) and [r/bali](#) threads, 2026-Q1.
5. Travel advisories: FCDO and US State Department, last update 2026-04-30.
6. Climate: Open-Meteo 10-year averages across the main islands, captured 2026-05-17.
7. Pack Lightly Indonesia cluster pages, retrieved 2026-06-10: [visa](#) · [budget](#) · [safety](#) · [best travel time](#) · [eSIM](#)

Methodology. Pack Lightly's country scores aggregate eleven dimensions into the 0-100 scorecard on page 5, re-scored every six months; the last full re-score ran February 2026. Budget figures come from the live budget-calculator dataset, climate verdicts from the best-travel-time dataset, both stamped with their capture date where they appear.

What changed in edition 2026.06: first Indonesia release on the v2 design standard, built island by island around the archipelago rather than a single route. Next planned update: December 2026. Not covered in depth here: a standalone diving guide (it has its own [page](#)), Kalimantan and the Maluku islands.

Photo credits. Every photograph is sourced from Wikimedia Commons under a Creative Commons or public-domain license. The full per-image list, with each photographer and license, is on the next page. Tour data and prices come from the Viator Partner API, captured June 2026.

Image credits

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2. [Bromo-Semeru-Batok-Widodaren.jpg](#). Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY 2.0.

3. [Gado_gado_jakarta.jpg](#). Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY-SA 4.0.

4. [Gili Trawangan.jpg](#). Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY-SA 3.0.

5. [Ke'te' Kesu' 1.jpg](#). Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY 2.0.

6. [Lake_Toba_and_the_surrounding_hills.jpg](#). Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY-SA 4.0.

7. [Nasi Goreng Kampung .jpg](#). Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY 2.0.

8. [Orang-utan bukit lawang 2006.jpg](#). Wikimedia Commons contributor, Public Domain.

9. [Pantai Kelingking, Nusa Penida.jpg](#). Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY-SA 4.0.

10. [Piaynemo Island, Raja Ampat, West Papua](#). Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY-SA 4.0.

11. [Pradaksina.jpg](#). Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY-SA 4.0.

12. [Prambanan_Temple_Yogyakarta_Indonesia.jpg](#). Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY-SA 4.0.

13. [Pulau_Padar_1.jpg](#). Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY-SA 4.0.

14. [Pura Luhur Uluwatu 2017-08-17 .jpg](#). Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY-SA 4.0.

15. [Rendang_daging_sapi_asli_Padang.JPG](#). Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY 3.0.

16. [Sate_Udang.JPG](#). Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY-SA 4.0.

17. [Sulfur_mining_in_Kawah_Ijen_-_Indonesia_-_20110608.jpg](#). Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY-SA 4.0.

18. [Tegallalang Rice Terraces Bali 1.jpg](#). Wikimedia Commons contributor, CC BY 4.0.

Tour data and prices: Viator Partner API, captured June 2026. Author portrait and brand marks: Pack Lightly.

A note on the links in this guide

disclosure · why this guide is free

This guide is free because some of the booking links inside it are affiliate links. When a reader books a stay, a transport leg, or an eSIM through one of those links, the merchant pays Pack Lightly. The reader pays the same price either way.

The pick comes before the partner. An island, a stay area or a transport platform is chosen for the trip it makes, and where a partner link exists for it that link is used; where none does, the plain link still points there. An overrated sight is still called overrated, and a cheaper option that beats the famous one keeps the slot. The commission funds the guide, it does not choose for it.

Questions, corrections, or a place you tested that belongs in the next edition: write to hello@pack-lightly.com.

Partners linked in this edition: **Aviasales · Booking.com · 12Go Asia · Saily · Hostelworld · Stay22 · Viator · via Travelepayouts**



Links can outlive a print run. If one stops working, the live version of every page in this guide sits under pack-lightly.com/indonesia.



This file is versioned; the edition is on the cover. The next planned update lands December 2026 and replaces this file at the same download.