

INDONESIA

Sumatra, Java & Bali

14 days

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Day 1 Arrive in Medan

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

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

Overnight in Medan.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Medan - Samosir Island, Lake Toba

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

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

Overnight on Samosir Island or Parapat.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Samosir Island, Lake Toba

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

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

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

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

Overnight on Samosir Island or Parapat.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Samosir Island - Berastagi

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

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

Overnight in Berastagi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

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

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

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

Overnight in Yogyakarta.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Yogyakarta - Prambanan - Yogyakarta: City Tour

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

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

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

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

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

Overnight in Yogyakarta.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 7 Yogyakarta - Borobudur - Yogyakarta

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

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

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

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

Overnight in Yogyakarta.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

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

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

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

On arrival at Denpasar airport, we travel by road through verdant Balinese countryside to the east coast town of Candidasa, a tranquil coastal area nestled between the Lombok Strait to the east and mountains to the west. Candidasa is within close proximity to many historical landmarks of Bali. En route we'll make a stop in Tenganan, a symmetrically laid out Bali Aga village with walled homes and unique crafts. Bali Aga was the original inhabitant of Bali, before the arrival of Hindu Javanese. Tenganan retains its ancient pre-Hindu customs through a strong code of non-fraternization with outsiders, further enforced by the protection of its surrounding walls.

After our sightseeing we'll transfer to our hotel in Candidasa.

Overnight in Candidasa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Candidasa: Eastern Bali Touring

Today we embark on a leisurely exploration, starting with a visit to Taman Ujung, a former royal retreat tucked away in vibrant tropical gardens. This Water Palace, with its detailed Balinese architecture and peaceful ponds, provides a peek into the grand lives of Bali's past rulers. As we meander through the extensive grounds, keep an eye out for the impressive traditional carvings, elegant pavilions, and lovely vistas of the surrounding scenery.

Our journey then takes us to the historical Taman Tirta Gangga, another water palace that once served as a holy bathing area for Balinese royalty. This complex features a series of tiered pools, decorative ponds, and striking statues, creating a calm and picturesque environment. Perhaps you'll feel a bit like royalty yourself as you take in the serene atmosphere.

We'll break for lunch and then head to the unspoiled shores of Virgin Beach. This delightful beach offers clear waters, gentle waves, and a relaxed vibe, ideal for soaking up the sun, taking a dip, or simply unwinding with the sand between your toes.

Overnight in Candidasa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Candidasa - Besakih Temple - Penglipuran - Ubud

Today we'll explore the significant Besakih Temple and, if the clouds allow, catch a glimpse of the majestic Mount Agung. At Besakih, we'll take a moment to don a sarong – provided complimentary at the entrance – before we wander through this important spiritual site. Instead of a bit of a walk, we'll hop on a shuttle to reach the temple, where there are some stairs to navigate as we explore.

After our visit to Besakih, we'll take a short drive to a local restaurant for a lunch break. Our afternoon will take us to Penglipuran village, known for its traditional Balinese entrance gates and unique architecture. We'll also have a chance to wander through its peaceful bamboo forest. Depending on the weather, we might experience a bit of tropical refreshment!

If weather conditions permit, we may be able to stop at Kanto Lampo waterfall (can be slippery in the rain), known for its beauty and its popularity for picture-taking.

Finally, a drive will bring us to our accommodation in Ubud, where we can settle in after a day of culture, scenery, and a touch of Balinese charm.

Overnight in Ubud.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Cooking Class & Ubud Surrounding Tour

Get hands-on and find out the culinary secrets of authentic Balinese cooking. Starting at 7 am, we'll head to Ubud's Traditional Market and barter with the locals to buy our ingredients to make our meal. We proceed to a fully-equipped community kitchen and utilize traditional ingredients and preparation methods to make an authentic local dish under step by-step instruction from a Balinese chef. Afterwards, sit down with your fellow chefs and enjoy your meal!

After our cooking adventure, it's a short drive to Candi Gunung Kawi at Tampaksiring. This temple complex is quite something, carved into the cliffside. Be prepared for a bit of a descent – there are hundreds of steps leading down, and while the temple itself is truly stunning and worth the effort, it can get a little warm, and those steps can feel like a mini workout. Take your time and enjoy the impressive scenery as you make your way down and back up.

Next, we'll visit the holy spring of Tirta Empul. Here, you can witness locals participating in purification rituals and admire the serene atmosphere of this sacred site.

Our final stop for the day is a visit to a local coffee plantation. Here, you'll get to see how coffee, including the rather unique Luwak coffee, is produced. We'll also have a tasting session where you can sample a variety of local coffees and teas. For every two of you, there will be a set of twelve different drinks to try, so you can compare flavours and maybe discover a new favourite.

Finally, it's a short drive back to our hotel, where you can relax and perhaps reflect on the day's delicious discoveries and temple explorations.

Overnight in Ubud.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 12 Barong Dance & Ubud Touring

Our day begins with an enchanting performance of the traditional Barong dance. This mesmerizing spectacle pits good against evil, with the mythical Barong representing the forces of righteousness and the demonic Rangda embodying darkness.

We then venture into the mystical Ubud Monkey Forest. Home to hundreds of playful macaques, this sacred sanctuary offers a unique opportunity to observe these intelligent creatures in their natural habitat. As we wander through the lush forest, we'll encounter ancient temples and serene ponds, creating a truly magical experience.

Afterward, we'll immerse ourselves in the vibrant atmosphere of Ubud Market. Here, we can haggle with local vendors for colorful textiles, intricate carvings, and delicious local delicacies.

The remainder of the day is free to explore Ubud at your own pace. You might choose to wander through the charming art galleries, indulge in a rejuvenating spa treatment, or simply relax by the pool.

Overnight in Ubud.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Ubud - Turtle Center - Padang Padang Beach - Uluwatu Temple - South Bali

Today we'll set off to Serangan Island for a visit to the Turtle Conservation and Education Centre (TCEC). This is a chance to get up close with the important work being done to protect sea turtles. We'll learn about their life cycles, the threats they face, and the dedicated efforts to ensure their survival. You'll have the opportunity to see these fascinating creatures and perhaps even contribute to their well-being with a donation if you feel inclined. It's a truly insightful experience into the world of conservation.

Our next stop is the beautiful Padang-Padang Beach. Tucked away between impressive cliffs, this beach feels like a bit of a hidden gem. With its clear waters and inviting waves, it's an ideal spot for a paddle, a bit of sunbathing, or simply soaking in the peaceful atmosphere. You might recognize it from a movie or two – it's quite the picturesque location.

Later in the day, we'll journey to the remarkable Uluwatu Temple. Situated dramatically on the edge of a cliff, this ancient Hindu temple provides sweeping panoramic views of the vast Indian Ocean, especially stunning as the afternoon light begins to soften. Now, a word of friendly caution: the temple grounds are also home to some rather cheeky monkeys. They are quite adept at relieving visitors of their belongings, so heed your Tour Leader's advice about keeping a close eye on your phones, glasses, earrings, and anything else that might catch their eye. Consider it part of the Uluwatu experience – wildlife with a bit of a mischievous streak!

Finally, we'll transfer to our hotel in South Bali, where you'll have some free time to relax, perhaps take a dip in the pool, or just unwind after a day of turtles, beaches, and temple antics. We'll then gather for dinner and settle in for the night, ready for more Balinese adventures tomorrow.

Overnight in South Bali.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Departure from Denpasar

Departure from Denpasar.

BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast