

INDONESIA



In Brief:

Indonesia is the largest archipelago in the world with the total number of 17.508 islands according to the Indonesian Naval Hydro Oceanographic office. The archipelago is spread over on a crossroads between two oceans. The Pacific and the Indian Ocean bridges two continents Asia and Australian, the Asian continent in the north and the Australian continent in the south. This strategic position has always influenced the cultural, social, political and economic life of the country.

The territory of the Republic of Indonesia stretches from 6° 08' north latitude to 11 ° 15' south latitude and from 94 ° 45' to 141° 05' east longitude. The Indonesian sea area is four times greater than its land area, which is about 1.9 million sq. km. The sea area is about 7.9 million sq. km (including an exclusive economic zone) and constitutes about 81% of the total area of the country.

The archipelago is divided into three groups. The islands of **Java**, **Sumatra** and **Kalimantan**, and the small islands in between, lie on the **Sunda Shelf** which begin on the coast of Malaysia and Indo China, where the sea depth does not exceed 700 feet. **Irian Jaya** which is part of the island of New Guinea, and the **Aru Island** lie on the **Sahul Shelf**, which stretches northwards from the Australian coast. Here the sea depth is similar to that of the **Sunda Shelf**.

Sumatra, which is about 473.606 sq. km, in size; the most fertile and densely populates island, **Java/Madura**, 132,127 sq. km; **Kalimantan**, which comprises two-third of the island of **Borneo** and measures 539.460 sq. km; **Sulawesi**, 189,216 sq. km; and **Irian Jaya**, 421,981 sq. km, which is part of the world's second largest island, New Guinea, are the country's bigger islands in size. Indonesia's other islands are smaller in size.

Indonesia is formed from the past as the "Ring of Fire" that girds the Pacific Ocean. Volcanoes have not only brought earthquake and disasters, but also fertility to the ground and abundant supply of mineral deposits.

The most famous Indonesian volcano is the **Krakatau**, situated in the Sunda Straits between Sumatra and Java. Its huge explosion in 1883 had a wide impact on other islands, and its smoke was blown far away to Europe. **Mount Agung** in Bali exploded in 1963, but later brought more fertility to the island. The Balinese venerate the mountain as the abode of the gods, and mother – temple of Bali at **Besakih** nestles on its slopes.

Mount Merapi in Central Java is active. Its crater-lake is a potential danger every time when the volcano becomes active and its waters boil. During lulls, the cooled down lava flows can be followed almost to the top.

Mount Rinjani on the island of Lombok is another favourite destination for climbers. And **Mount Kelimutu** in Flores hides lakes with three different colours, marine blue,

aqua marine green and coca-cola brown red, reflecting the colour of their various silt deposits.

Although located in the tropics, the **Jaya Wijaya** in Irian Jaya is an all year – round Snowclad Mountain. Treks across wild Irian Jaya are a favourite with German and French visitors, where rivers have cut the foothills into the gorgeously created the beautifully picturesque **Ngarai Sianok** canyon on the edge of the town of **Bukittinggi**.

Lake Maninjau in West Sumatra offers a majestic scene of clear blue waters and looming mountain sides. Watch out for hairpin bends that wind down all the way to the lake's shores. West Sumatra, with its beautiful landscapes and distinct Minangkabau cultures is ideal for mountain biking.

Further north, the extinct volcanoes of **North Sumatra** are a pleasure to see and to trek. Where, volcanoes have formed lakes, deep and powerful waterfalls and long rivers. **Lake Toba** is the dramatic centrepiece of the sea, nestled in the **Bukit Barisan** ranges with 100 km long, as the largest lake in Southeast Asia and one of the deepest and highest in the world.

The island of **Samosir**, situated in central the lake, is equal in size to the island of Singapore where is the heart of Batak culture, the ethnic group that inhabits this stunning highland of hills and waterfalls. On the island there are megalithic monuments, artefacts and traditional Batak villages, which can be visited on scenic boat trip.

The longest river in Indonesia is **Kapuas River** located in West Kalimantan around 1.143 km. The other rivers are **Musi River** in Palembang, South Sumatra, **Batanghari River** in Jambi Province, **Asahan River** in North Sumatra, **Bengawan Solo River** and **Berantas River** in Central and East Java and **Memberamo** in West Papua.

Volcanoes, with year round sunshine cooling rains and warm weather have made these Indonesian islands fertile grounds for plants and animal life.

THE PEOPLE

Four main ethnic or racial groups can be distinguished: the Melanesian, the proto-Austronesian, the Polynesian and the Micronesian.

Members of the Melanesian race constitute by far the biggest majority of the population and include such major groups as the Minangkabau, the Bataks, the Malays and the peoples of Aceh, Palembang and Lampung, all on the island of Sumatra; the Sundanese and Javanese of Java; the Balinese; the Dayak people of Kalimantan, and the Minahasa, the Bugis and the Toraja of Sulawesi.

Representing the Polynesian and proto-Austronesian elements are the peoples of Maluku and Irian Jaya.

LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS

More than 200 different ethnic groups live here, speaking of more than 300 different local languages. Girding the equator like a string of emeralds – the Indonesia islands comprises an ethnic kaleidoscope like no other on earth. In such diversity there is unity; called “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika” many are one, unity in diversity.

There 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, Cermese, and several Irianese languages. To make the picture even more colourful, these languages are also spoken in different dialects.

The national language of Indonesia is “Bahasa Indonesia”. Originally it was the Malay language mainly spoken in the Riau Island. Although Bahasa Indonesia has become the lingua franca, local languages and dialects continue to be spoken and will not be abolished.

CLIMATE

Indonesia has a tropical monsoon-type climate, characterized by slight changes of season and temperature, low winds, high degree of humidity and periodical heavy rainfall.

It has two monsoons. The East Monsoons or dry season runs from May to September and is influenced by the Australian continental air masses. The west monsoon or rainy season runs from December to March and is influenced by the Asian continental and Pacific Ocean air masses.

Average temperatures area is classified as follows: Coastal plains: 28° C; inland and mountain areas: 26° C; higher mountain areas: 23° C, varying with the altitude.

Indonesia has an average relative humidity between 70% and 90% with a minimum of 73% and a maximum of 87%.

FLORA AND FAUNA

The rich flora of Indonesia includes many unique varieties of tropical plant life in various forms. Rafflesia Arnoldi, which is found mainly in Bengkulu Province of Sumatra, is the largest flower in the world. This parasite plant grows on certain lianas but does not produce leaves. From the same area in Sumatra comes another giant, Amorphophallus Titanum, the largest inflorescence of its kind.

The insect trapping pitcher plant (*Nepenthea* spp) is represented by different species in many areas of western Indonesia.

The myriad of orchids are rich in species, varying in size from the largest of all orchids, the tiger orchid or *Grammatophyllum Speciosum*, to the tiny and leafless species of *Taeniophyllum* which is edible and taken by the local people as a medicine or used in handicraft. The forest soil is rich in humus which enables the luxuriant growth of a multitude of fungi, including the horse hair blight, the luminescent species, the sooty mould and the black mildew.

The flora also abounds in timber species. The dipterocarp family is renowned for its timber (meranti), resin, vegetable oil and tengkawang or illipe nuts. Ramin, a good quality timber for furniture production, is produced by the gonystylus tree. Sandalwood, Ebony, Ulin and Palembang timber are other valuable forest products. Teakwood is a product of man-made forests in Java.

Because the flora is so rich many people in Indonesia have made a good living on this natural resource. About 6,000 species of plants are known to be used directly or indirectly by the people. A striking example in this modern time is probably the use of plants in the production of traditional herbal medicine or "jamu", whereas flowers are indispensable in ceremonial, customary and traditional rites.

Indonesia's fauna can be distinguished between the islands in the west, which are distinctly Asian and those in the east, where Australian type animals are found. Amongst the five hundred species of mammals, you can see tigers, black panthers, orangutans, elephants and the Java rhino in Sumatra; freshwater dolphins, proboscis monkeys in Kalimantan; and kangaroos and wallabies in Irian Jaya. Beside that bears, tapirs and orangutans have their habitat in Sumatara and Kalimantan, buffaloes in Java and Kalimantan.

In its 300 nature reserves, comprising 120,000 sq km (or 6,5% of the nation's land mass) you'll find an incredibly vast array of animals, mammals, birdlife, reptiles, freshwater creatures and marine life. Komodo Island between Flores and Sumbawa is uniquely inhabited by the Dragon's Lizard or Komodo as the largest lizard of this kind in the world.

Of the 1,5000 species of birds, you'll marvel at the flightless cassowary, brilliant cockatoos, colourful parrots, and if you visit Maluku and Irian Jaya, up to 40 species of Birds of Paradise. You can see countless reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates including giant sea turtles.

On Sulawesi alone, there are deer, pigs, cuscus, the famous Anoa dwarf buffalo, the Babirusa with its curved tusks growing from the top of its snout and the heavy set black macaque resembling a miniature gorilla. In North Sulawesi see the cute tarsiers with their palm-sized bodies and large saucer-eyes.

Monkeys, deer snakes, and crocodiles are found in both the eastern and western parts of Indonesia.