

# Indonesia

## Country Facts

**Population:** 240,271,522

**Languages:** Bahasa Indonesia (official), and more than 350 local languages

**Predominant Religions:** Islam, Hindu, Christian (mostly Roman Catholic), Buddhist

**Time Zone:** Seven to nine hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time

**Voltage Requirements:** 220 volts

**Telephone Codes:** 62, country code

## **Introduction:**

Not long ago, Indonesia was one of Southeast Asia's business hot spots and a growing travel destination. Bali, especially, was (and still is) an easy and enjoyable place to visit, full of stunning sights, interesting Hindu culture, friendly people, and comfortable amenities. However, Indonesia has become a troubled land. A series of terrorist bombings in Jakarta and Bali caused a significant decline in tourism, and other bloody civil conflicts discourage nonessential travel to those areas.

If Indonesia's social and political troubles weren't enough, the country has suffered a number of devastating natural disasters in recent years. A 6.3-magnitude earthquake, a mud volcano eruption and two tsunamis have rocked the nation, killing and injuring thousands, and recovery is a slow process.

With an estimated 240 million people, Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world, with 350 cultures and many languages scattered across its widespread islands. All that diversity strains the government's ability to meet the needs of the populace. Visitors often return home more appreciative of what they have after witnessing the hard life many Indonesians lead.

## **Compassion in Indonesia:**

Compassion International's work in Indonesia began in 1968. Compassion also began work in eastern Indonesia in 2000.

In eastern Indonesia, more than 21,000 children participate in more than 130 child development centers. The Child Survival Program serves more than 560 mothers or caretakers and their babies through 16 centers.

In the rest of Indonesia, more than 55,700 children participate in more than 325 child development centers. The Child Survival Program serves more than 180 mothers or caretakers and their babies through eight centers. The Leadership Development Program serves more than 115 students.

Compassion partners with churches to help them provide Indonesian children with the opportunity to rise above their circumstances and become all God has created them to be.

### Cultural Information:

- Indonesian people are typically very friendly and curious toward their foreign guests. When they hear you trying to speak their language, they will be honored and helpful.
- Indonesians smile a great deal and expect the same when greeting foreigners. Blank or stern expressions will bring questions and doubts about the visitor's state of mind.
- Generally, greetings among all Indonesians are conducted with stateliness and formality and in a slow, deliberate manner. A hurried introduction will be perceived as disrespectful.
- When meeting someone formally, a delicate handshake and a mild nod of the head are always proper for both men and women. Most Muslims will touch their heart with their right hand after shaking hands. When Indonesians meet someone, they often start the conversation with the greeting "Selamat," which means "peace." It can also mean "congratulations," but when combined with other Indonesian words, the combination becomes a common greeting.
- Shaking hands with women is permissible, especially in urban areas. Women shake hands the same as men, although sometimes they bow with their hands folded.
- With the exception of handshakes, there is no public contact between the sexes in Indonesia. Hugging and kissing, even between husbands and wives, is forbidden in public. Moreover, if a woman touches a Muslim man, he must ritually cleanse himself before praying again.
- Conversely, physical contact between people of the same sex is perfectly acceptable. You'll likely observe men holding hands with men or walking with their arms around each other; these displays are viewed strictly as gestures of friendship.
- Traditional Indonesian society considers giving guests refreshments a very important display of respect and politeness. If you are the host of a meeting with Indonesian, you should make sure some refreshments are offered. If you are the guest, you will most probably be offered tea or coffee. It is normally advisable to accept even if you are not thirsty. A guest should wait for the host to indicate that is permissible to drink. If you are really thirsty, ask permission to start drinking. This custom is modified during the fasting month of Ramadan.
- Indonesia is a "spoon and fork" country, thus, chopsticks will only be found in Chinese and Vietnamese restaurants. If invited to a meal, do not begin eating until the host has invited you to do so. Food is always consumed with the right hand only and passed with either the right hand or with both hands in unison. The left hand is considered "unclean" and is never used alone for these functions.
- Among Indonesians, the left hand is considered unclean and, whenever possible, should not be used in public. The right hand should be used exclusively to eat, accept gifts, hold cash and touch people; these guidelines apply even if you are left-handed. You may, however, use your left hand when there are absolutely no other realistic alternatives.
- Javanese people, the largest ethnic group in Indonesia, are very stable and do not like for anything unpredictable to interfere with their calm and peaceful lives. Even in conversation, Javanese people make sure to maintain peace. To achieve this, they usually speak in an indirect manner. Rules of etiquette are very important to the

Javanese, especially when demonstrating respect for their elders. People speak quietly and in even tones because extreme emotions, such as loud laughter or sobbing, are viewed as a lack of self-control or inner refinement.

- Indonesians often bow and go so far as to bow their heads or drop their shoulders when passing a superior or older person to demonstrate their respect.
- Since the foot is also considered unclean, do not use them to point at, move or touch things. Also, refrain from resting your feet on desks or tables.
- In keeping with the belief that feet are unclean, do not show the soles of your feet or shoes. This will affect how you sit: you can cross your legs at the knee, but not with one ankle over your knee. Shoes should be removed when entering mosques and usually when entering someone's home. If you are unsure, ask.
- The "arms akimbo" position (standing tall with your hands on your hips), is always perceived as an angry, aggressive posture. This pose is popularly identified as a symbol of anger in Indonesian shadow puppet theatre.
- To beckon someone, hold your hand out, palm downward, and make a scooping motion with the fingers. Beckoning someone with the palm up and wagging one finger is often interpreted as an insult.
- When pointing, do so with an open hand instead of with your index finger. You can also point with your right thumb and a closed fist (similar to the hitchhiking signal); this gesture is also used to communicate, "You go first."
- Chewing gum in public is discouraged and impolite, especially when you're with an older person.

#### **Dos and Don'ts:**

- Do inquire first before entering a mosque, church or temple — usually, there is a caretaker. If you are not a member of that faith, you may be refused entry. If you're a woman planning to visit a mosque, do buy a scarf to cover your head.
- Don't mispronounce Yogyakarta — say *Jog-ja-KAR-ta*.
- Don't travel to Indonesia without adequate travel insurance. Specifically, make sure your policy includes air-evacuation coverage to Singapore (or a similar destination) in case of medical emergency.
- Don't be offended if Indonesians inquire about your religion, your marital status, number of children, or other personal matters. Those are common questions.
- Do ask permission before taking someone's picture.
- Do save enough *rupiah* to pay the airport departure tax (about Rp 100,000).
- Do be aware that AIDS is a serious problem in Indonesia. Bali is also known for its amorous men who target women and expect compensation for their services.
- Don't ever drink the water from the tap, regardless of what the hotel staff tells you.
- Don't endorse traveler's checks unless the cashier watches you sign. Indonesian banks may refuse to cash your check if they weren't watching every stroke of the pen. You receive better rates for higher-denomination traveler's checks and currency notes.
- Do be aware that showing the soles of your feet is considered impolite, as is touching another person's head.

- Don't give, accept or eat anything with your left hand, which is customarily used for personal hygiene.
- Do remove shoes when entering a home or mosque.

### Travel Tips

#### **Personal Safety:**

In general, Indonesians are hospitable, generous and helpful. They will go out of their way to help visitors steer clear of unseen pitfalls and obstacles. However, economic conditions can drive a wedge between locals and visitors. What is a little to visitors can be a lot to locals, so be aware of the differences and don't flaunt possessions or cash. Bring only the cash needed for the day and leave jewelry and other valuables in the hotel safe, including your passport. Carry a photocopy of your passport and visa at all times for personal identification.

The situation in many areas of Indonesia, though mostly calm and safe today, could explode into civil strife or natural disasters tomorrow. Be aware of your surroundings and exercise common sense. Avoid deserted areas, especially after nightfall. Lock car doors and keep windows rolled up while driving. Lock all doors when exiting a vehicle.

Leave at home all unnecessary credit cards, social security card, library cards and similar items you may routinely carry in your wallet. Do not take more cash than you reasonably require for that day. Use the room safe or hotel safe to secure valuables as well as additional cash. Secure cash in multiple locations – wallet, various pockets, money belts. Carry items in front pockets, not back pockets. Do not display large sums of money in public; only make visible the amount of money that approximates your purchase. Maintain a close awareness of your purse, wallet, backpack, etc. as well as the people around you. It's a good idea to keep one hand or arm in constant contact with these items especially in areas of high people traffic. Never leave items with cash in them (purse, wallet, backpack, etc.) on a bus, car, or any other location, even if the vehicle is being watched by Compassion staff or Compassion-hired contractors. Stay alert and be cautious at all times. Don't take safety & security for granted.

#### **Health:**

Sanitary conditions in many Indonesian restaurants are not up to the standards of developed countries. Most hot, freshly cooked food should be safe, but peel fresh fruit and raw vegetables, and choose meat that is thoroughly cooked. Packaged dairy products and bottled water are available everywhere. Make sure the seals are unbroken before consuming. Avoid local dairy products. Ice in major cities is produced in government-supervised plants and is usually considered safe, but assume the tap water is unsafe, even in large hotels.

Malaria is endemic in many rural areas (a particularly virulent strain infests rural Sumatra): all of Papua and Lombok are affected, but there is little or no risk in Bali resort areas or the major cities. Bring insect repellent (use it both day and night to reduce the risk of dengue fever and dengue hemorrhagic fever).

Rabies does exist but is generally limited to specific islands: If you're even nipped by any animal, seek medical attention.

Bring all prescription medicine, replacement glasses and contact lenses needed for the trip.

**We strongly advise you to contact the CDC ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)) or check with your personal physician for more information about your specific health needs while traveling, including any recommendations for immunizations. Consult your physician about taking anti-malarial medication.**

### **Money:**

The *rupiah* is the official currency in Indonesia. Paying with *rupiahs* can get confusing because there are so many zeros at the end of each currency note (Rp 500 to Rp 100,000), so exercise caution when handing over money. The U.S. dollar is also accepted in Indonesia, but avoid carrying tattered and torn notes as most money changers will not accept them. The U.S. dollar is useful in the large tourist locations, but don't expect to make an exchange in remote destinations.

Cash and travelers checks can be changed in banks, hotels and with money changers. Before making such transactions, have a rough idea of the current exchange rate. Official published rates listed on the Internet or in newspapers are slightly higher than what you will actually receive. Using credit cards is another option, but exchange rates are not usually good and your money may go through two stages of conversion from rupiah to the U.S. dollar and then to your home currency (for those who are not from the United States).

### **Weather:**

Indonesia is generally hot year-round, and the best time to visit is the dry season, usually April through October. Keep in mind that "dry" is relative — Indonesia's dry is like a hot, humid summer day for the rest of us. November through March is monsoon season (January and February are the wettest). Worldwide changes in weather patterns have affected the timing of the wet and dry seasons in Indonesia, so check forecasts before you go.

### **Dress:**

Always pack sunglasses, a hat and sunscreen — Indonesia's sun is harsh. Long sleeves and pants are recommended to keep mosquitoes at bay and for the sometimes brisk mountaintop evenings. Pack sandals, not boots (unless you're planning on doing a lot of trekking), and a beach towel, but pick up a sarong (or three) once you get there. Skin-revealing clothes are not acceptable in mosques and temples. Shorts for men or overly revealing clothes for women are not acceptable. Indonesians are generally modest and conservative in their dress.

*All information taken from Weissmann Reports, the World Factbook and Compassion International.*

