

INDONESIA:



Secluded cove, Lombok

Mention Indonesia and people instantly think of Bali, but this vast archipelago has far more to offer than just the beautiful beaches and cultural heart of this tiny island. Here, our Indonesia specialists discuss some of the other, lesser known islands and why they are special to them.



Turtle, Bunaken National Park, Sulawesi

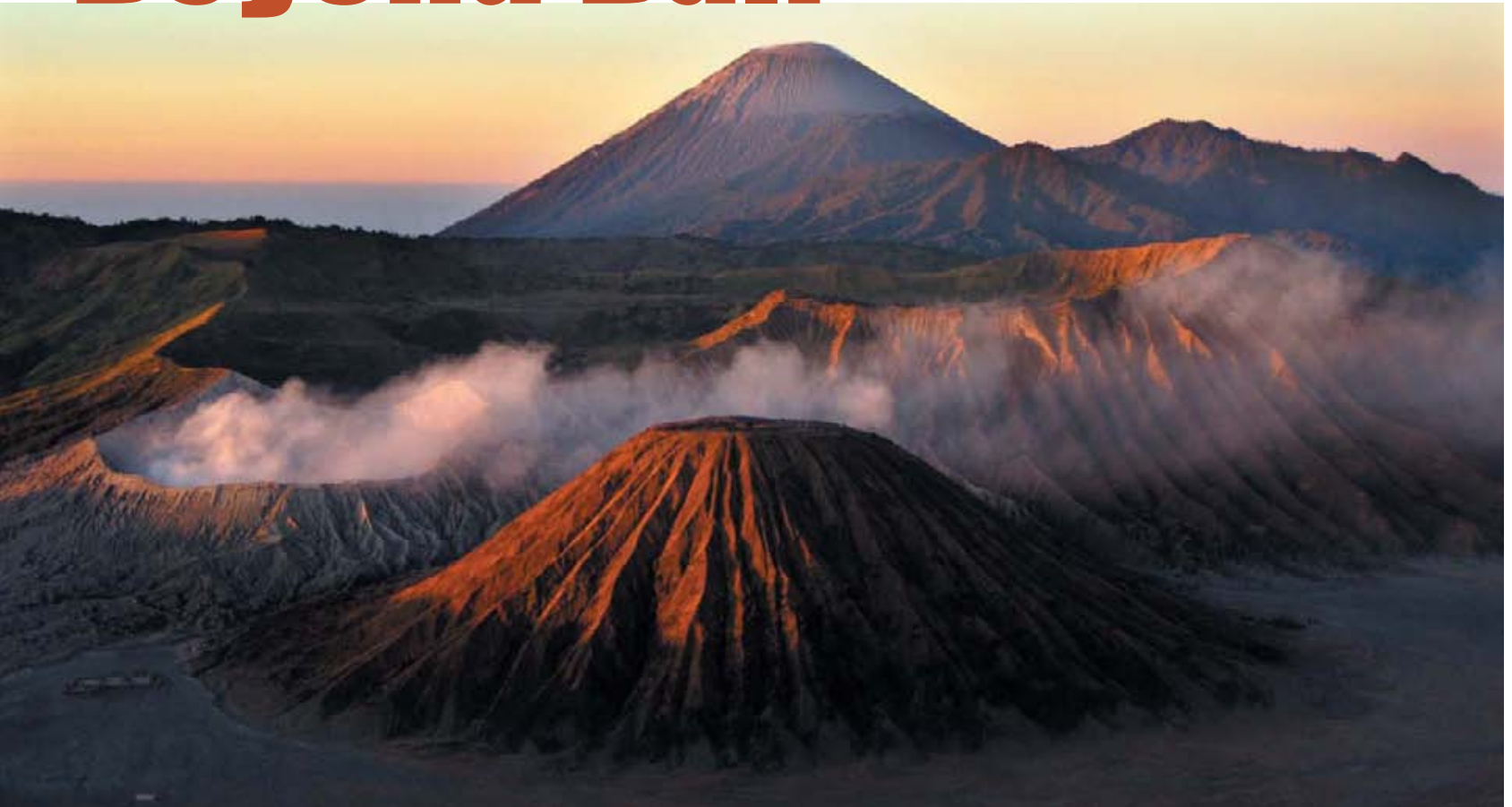


Tea picker, Java



A local market, Lombok

Beyond Bali



The majestic sight of smoking Mount Bromo at sunrise

Java and Sulawesi

I love the variety of Java. It is in the heart of the archipelago, and one of the main attractions is the great pyramidal structure of Borobudur. This is one of Southeast Asia's greatest religious relics and is often compared to Angkor Wat in Cambodia and Myanmar's Bagan.

Built between 750 and 850 AD, it was abandoned soon after completion. It lay buried and forgotten for centuries under layers of volcanic ash and it was only in the early 19th century that it was re-discovered, and later restored by the Dutch in the early 20th century. Designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1991, this is the largest Buddhist monument in the world and is a must-see for all visitors to the region.

As a keen photographer, I was delighted to be taken to Borobudur at sunrise when I was able to capture something of the spirit of the temple. Its size is impressive, but I was most taken by the delicate sculptural work and detailed carvings

of the galleries and terraces that lead up its central stupa, depicting Javanese life 1,000 years ago. As you move higher, hundreds of serene Buddha images stare out from open chambers over the galleries, and reaching inside a stupa to touch the fingers of the Buddha inside is believed to bring good luck.

I certainly had good luck when visiting Mount Bromo as I travelled to eastern Java. Another perfect sunrise made for some fantastic photos, for the beauty of Bromo is not in its size but its setting. Flanked by two volcanic peaks, it stands in a sea of volcanic sand surrounded by the towering cliffs of the crater's edge. An early rise is essential to appreciate the evocative landscape and spectacular view of Mount Bromo and surrounding volcanoes from the Mount Penanjakan viewpoint.

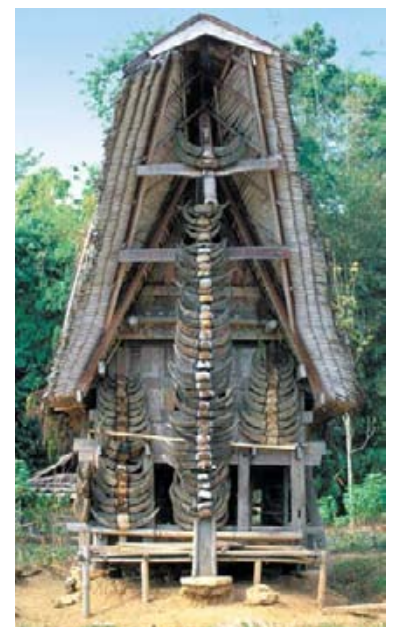
One of my most memorable visits to Indonesia was to southern Sulawesi. This is a lush, mountainous region of caves, waterfalls and large shallow lakes. Its 8.2 million inhabitants

include the seafaring Bugis and Makassarese and the Toraja, known for their unique culture. Tana Toraja is the most popular destination in Sulawesi. Located 310 kilometres from Makassar and 800 metres above sea level, it offers a slightly cooler climate than other parts of south Sulawesi. It is a mostly unspoilt area of traditional villages, unique architecture and fascinating culture. The major attractions here include the distinctive traditional architecture, the Torajan people, many interesting grave sites and the elaborate funeral ceremonies. Visitors are welcome at these celebrations which can last between three to five days, and you can find yourself with front-row seats for the traditional dancing, although the less palatable spectacles of cock fighting and a buffalo sacrifice do occur here. The best time to visit this area is between late March and September. July and August are the height of the funeral ceremonies and can be extremely busy.

Sarah Howard ▶



Father and son at the market



Traditional Torajan house

INDONESIA: Beyond Bali

Kalimantan

I had been looking forward to visiting the famed orang-utan sanctuaries in the Tanjung Puting National Park on Kalimantan ever since seeing the BBC documentary 'Equator'. Sitting on the deck of my klotok boat, bathed in sunshine, watching the trees rustling with the leaps of proboscis monkeys and waters rippling with signs of crocodiles, I was cruising through the backwaters of Indonesian Borneo in my own jungle paradise.

A remote location and concerted efforts at protection, mean visitor numbers are limited. The few Audley clients and staff lucky enough to come here in the last year have been astounded by the intimate wildlife experiences, particularly with the famed orang-utans. There are no fences or boundaries within the 400,000 hectare park (which is home to over 6,000 orang-utans), and being accompanied only by a local ranger and guide in search of these endangered animals is unforgettable. The accommodation is basic – either on the boat or in the lodge – but it is well worth sacrificing a few home comforts for this memorable experience.

Matthew Conway

Flores, Komodo Island and Northern Sulawesi

As a keen diver and nature lover, I was thrilled to visit Flores and the surrounding islands in Nusa Tenggara. My trip started in Labuan Bajo, a picturesque fishing village clinging to the western tip of Flores with an agreeably weathered, slightly ramshackle charm. It is the main jumping-off point for the Komodo and Rinca Islands, and with dozens of world-class dive sights and fine snorkelling nearby there's every reason to spend a few days in the area. The harbour is scattered with outrigger fishing boats and is sheltered by the outlying islands. The Komodo Marine Park can be explored from the mainland by smaller private day-cruises or the more luxurious one or two-night voyages that allow for further discovery of the area. Treks of varying lengths can be arranged on the main islands of Rinca and Komodo that allow you to get as close as you dare to the famed and mythical Komodo dragons that are only found in this part of the world. It's a once in a lifetime experience that can be combined with diving, snorkelling and swimming in gorgeous tropical waters off western Flores.



Local woman, Flores

I was also lucky enough to explore northern Sulawesi. This part of Indonesia is not well known, except to the world's diving community who prize the array of marine life that can be found around the islands off the coast of the northern capital, Manado, predominantly around Bunaken National Park and the Lembeh Straits. This special part of the greater island of Sulawesi also offers a unique opportunity to experience the mystical beauty of the highlands and to visit a region that is still relatively untouched by tourism. Much of the distinctive fauna is endemic to Sulawesi, including tarsiers, babirusas, rare hornbills and the cuscus. Both rustic and more luxurious beach accommodation can be discovered on the islands and also on the mainland coast around Manado.

Jack Tydeman



Hornbill, Malaysian Borneo

FACT FILE

A two-week trip to Indonesia featuring these destinations starts from £1,850 per person, based on two people sharing. Costs vary depending on which combination of islands are chosen and the standard of accommodation. The best time of year to travel to Indonesia is between May and November. Please contact Jack, Sarah or Matthew on 01993 838 110 for further details.



Borobudur, Java



Komodo dragon, Komodo Island

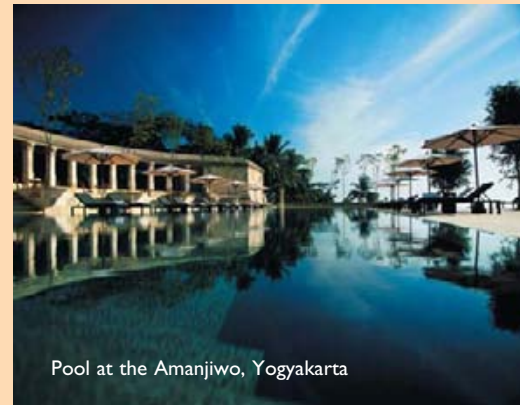


Local women, Sulawesi

Accommodation

Many of the experiences mentioned in this article involve remote locations where accommodation is practical rather than luxurious. Should you also wish to indulge in a little comfort, consider one of the following:

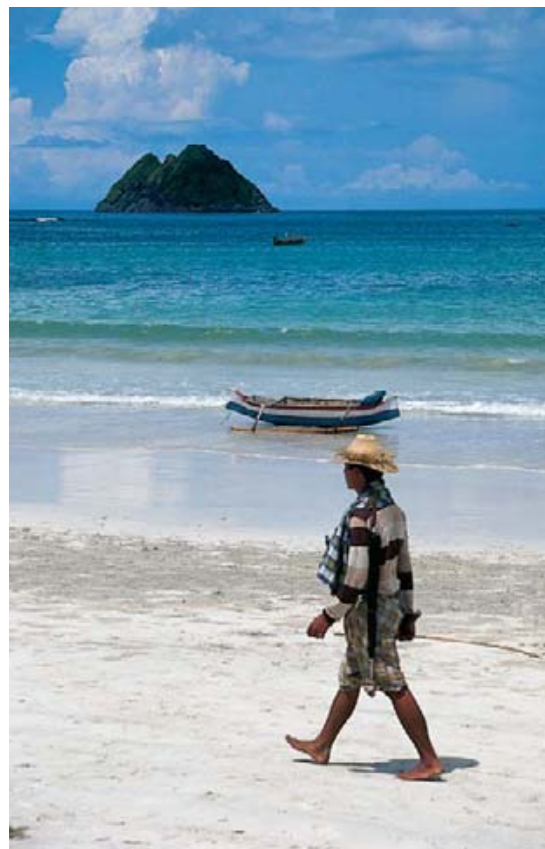
Amanjiwo is one of the finest hotels in the world and was built in a style that mimics the design of nearby Borobudur. Volcanoes and paddy fields surround this secluded resort, which has just 36 suites, a 40-metre pool and a fabulous spa. Amanjiwo specialises in cultural excursions and experiences, highlighting the influential and long-standing artistic traditions of Central Java.



Pool at the Amanjiwo, Yogyakarta

The Oberoi on Lombok would make a perfect beach break after a busy touring itinerary. The 50 villas and pavilions are dotted around 24 acres of tropical gardens, offering fabulous views of the private beach. The resort is tastefully designed to give you a true feeling of the real Lombok, and the warmth of the welcome will ensure that this part of your trip is as unforgettable as the rest.

For the ultimate in barefoot luxury, why not try the **Amanwana** on Moyo island. The camp's 20 luxury 'tents' are set under a canopy of tropical forest and feature window walls framed in teak with polished hardwood flooring. This is a wilderness hideaway where diving and snorkelling from the jetty and the camp's boats are readily accessible, offering a spectacular array of magical, iridescent and fascinating sea life. It is also the perfect place to relax and unwind while you look back on the adventures of the rest of your trip.



Local fisherman, Lombok