



Insight Guide Indonesia

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With over 17,000 islands and 300 ethnic groups, Indonesia is the perfect candidate for an Insight Guide. Filled with gorgeous color photographs, an emphasis on history and culture, and detailed descriptions of principal sites, this book is a must-have for anyone planning a trip to the world's largest archipelago. The country's motto is "Unity in Diversity," and while that lofty aim is being tested by independence movements, it's true that the diversity and complexity of the people, languages, and customs is astounding. For while parts of the island nation are well-known tourist sites--Bali comes immediately to mind--there are numerous other areas which are equally fascinating, such as Flores, with its strange mix of Catholicism and animism, Irian Jaya (West Papua), where life still resembles the Stone Age, or Sumatra, where one of the world's last matrilineal societies resides. To help you understand this strange blend, Insight Guides pulled together a team of experts to write about its features. The "People" chapter was written by a professor at the National University in Singapore who's an expert on Indonesian communal politics. Dance and theatre were covered by a Javanese dancer, while gamelan music is explained by a musicologist. The chapter on modern history and separatist provinces, written by a journalist for the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, is particularly important with Indonesian politics changing practically daily. Other feature chapters explain the role of customs and rituals, the nuances of ritual dance and theatre, the range of spice-islands cuisine, and the fantastically varied tropical habitats. The bulk of the book--the "Places" section--is your guide to the sights themselves, divided into regions and cross-referenced to excellent maps. Valuable tips line the sidebars with hints about such things as the most likely time to see court dancers, the best batik course, and warnings about health hazards (like poisonous volcanic fumes). Up to this point, the book truly excels, and will whet your appetite no end. Unfortunately, it falls short when it comes to providing ample listings of where to stay and eat. The listings are adequate for those traveling with means, but budget travelers will want to look to guides like the Lonely Planet to meet their needs. --Lesley Reed

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