

For jaw-dropping tropical sunsets, Lombok is hard to beat.



FLORES

On the ferry ride from Sumbawa, you'll sail through the islands of Komodo National Park, home to some of the region's best diving as well as the iconic, flesh-eating Komodo dragons. Flores itself is one of Indonesia's most appealing islands, with traditional cultures, smoking volcanoes, and a string of sublime beaches. Start in the west in the alluring tourist town of Labuanbajo, where you can wander among great restaurants and cafes while arranging trips to the national park. The trip east on the Trans-Flores Highway is one of Indonesia's highlights. Stone Age villages with unique cultures are found around Bajawa, spectacular volcanic scenery (including polychromatic lakes at Kelimutu National Park) make Moni unmissable, while you simply can't pass up Paga's perfect beaches. East of Maumere is more good diving before all hints of tourist buzz vanish as you reach remote and quiet Lanturuka.

Personality

The nearly two million inhabitants of Flores comprise five major linguistic and cultural groups and are predominantly Catholic, though animist beliefs are common. The Ngada people live in age-old villages near Bajawa and welcome visitors.

Getting there and around

Flores has several small airports. Two are important for island-hoppers: Maumere and newly expanded Labuanbajo, both of which have regular service to Bali and Kupang on West Timor. There is at least one public ferry a day from Sape on Sumbawa to Labuanbajo; these take up to seven hours. You can buy through bus tickets to Flores from major cities all the way west to Bali. You can also book passage on overnight tourist boats from Lombok to Labuanbajo which bypass Sumbawa, but be sure to vet operators for safety. Frequent buses run the length of Flores, linking all the towns on the Trans-Flores Highway, from Labuanbajo to Lanturuka. The minimum transit time on buses is more than 24 hours; most people stop off at least in Bajawa, Moni and Maumere.



Cloth making is still very literally part of the fabric of life for many West Timorese

WEST TIMOR

West Timor, the Indonesian portion of Timor island, is drawing increasing numbers of travellers. Many come for the exquisite traditional crafts such as fabrics, which are sold in tiny village markets.

But an equally good reason to venture this far east is to visit the ancient villages where time seems to have stopped several centuries ago. In isolated spots such as None (18km east of Soe), they only stopped hunting heads in 1945, while hilltop Temkessi, could be the mystic home of Yoda in Star Wars.

Personality

West Timor is one of Indonesia's friendliest places, where even former head-hunting villages are now open to visitors. At least 14 languages are spoken and there's a mix of religions.

Getting there and around

The main city of Kupang is a hub for eastern Nusa Tenggara; there are regular flights to Flores and Bali. Ferries from Lanturuka on Flores run twice a week and take about 15 hours. You can also venture on to Timor-Leste by bus (organise your visa in Kupang first).

— (www.lonelyplanet.com)