

East Timor

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Diving Dili** – some of the world’s best shore diving can be found right near the scruffy capital (p139)
- **Atauro Island** – East Timor in a microcosm, with funky lodgings on untouched beaches plus perfect reefs offshore (p141)
- **Hatubuilico and Mt Ramelau** – coffee plantations and misty valleys give way to sweeping views that are best reached via predawn climbs (p144)
- **Baucau** – the Old Town reeks of Portuguese colonial charm, while a perfect beach lies below (p142)
- **Jaco Island** – a sacred spot with pristine white-sand beauty, and settlements unchanged for centuries (p143)
- **Off the beaten track** – roads that barely merit the name penetrate the lush interior and the unvisited south coast; try the road from Bobonaro to Zumalai (p144)

FAST FACTS

- **Budget** US\$20 to US\$50 a day
- **Capital** Dili
- **Costs** guesthouse room US\$10, 1.5L bottle of water US\$0.50, beer US\$2.50, noodle dish from a local eatery US\$1 to US\$2, shore dive US\$40
- **Country code** ☎ 670
- **Languages** Tetun, Portuguese, Indonesian, English
- **Money** US\$ (US dollar)
- **Phrases (Tetun)** *ola* (hello), *adeus* (good-bye), *obrigadu/a* (m/f) (thank you), *kolisensa* (excuse me)
- **Time** GMT + nine hours
- **Visas** US\$30 on arrival



TRAVEL HINTS

East Timor is a timeless place, so ditch your watch. Transport departure times are vague notions and journey times – due to weather, goats in the road, wash-outs etc – are highly variable. Go with the flow and you’ll be relaxed even when the restaurant preparing your meal seems to be growing the plant.

OVERLAND ROUTES

Overland travel is possible between East Timor and Indonesian West Timor, but give yourself plenty of time.

Nothing is easy about East Timor (Timor-Leste in the locally preferred Portuguese) and that’s both its blessing and its curse.

Independence hasn’t been simple; years spent under Portuguese and Indonesian thumbs have been burdened by tragedy, and recent history shows why you can’t just declare yourself a new country (as happened in 2002) and expect things to be hunky-dory.

Travellers will experience some of the challenges the Timorese contend with on a daily basis, and that may be the best reason to visit. The tourism infrastructure is barely developed, yet there’s just enough for the adventurous to experience this beautiful place without undue travail. The diving is magnificent, the countryside superb and the people genuinely welcoming. And just as the locals have found ways to get by, you will too – which only makes your journey more rewarding.

Sure the roads are crap and getting from one place to another can take forever, but the flip side is that you’ll rarely be following in others’ footsteps. You can get into the unique cultural rhythm that combines European and Asian beats. There’s a nod and a wave from everyone you meet. Soon you’ll realise that what’s easiest about East Timor is its charm.

CURRENT EVENTS

East Timor stays in the news for all the wrong reasons: political turmoil, unrest, catastrophe. Although problems abound, people outside the country are left with an overly dire picture. Yes there were bad riots in 2006, yes there are tens of thousands of refugees living in camps in and around the capital, and yes Dili and much of the rest of the country is scarred by rounds of destruction that began when the Indonesians pillaged the place on their way out in 1999.

But what news reports don’t show is that East Timor is a place where people are surprisingly relaxed, where they go about the business of getting on with life, and where threats to visitors are relatively few.

The significance of the elections held in 2007 cannot be stated strongly enough. A mere five years after independence, the Timorese turned out in droves to elect a president and parliament in polls that were remarkably trouble free.

That East Timor has accomplished so much in such little time is extraordinary. In 2002 it was still effectively a one-party nation under Fretilin, which had led the struggle for independence during the entire Indonesian occupation. After the UN backed away from propping up the government in 2005, it was natural that divisions would occur. Fretilin splintered and old animosities played out. Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri sacked one third of the army in March 2006, and in the ensuing months of rioting more than 150,000 people fled their homes. Relative peace only returned after public demonstrations forced Alkatiri to quit, and forces from the UN, Australia and others returned to the country.

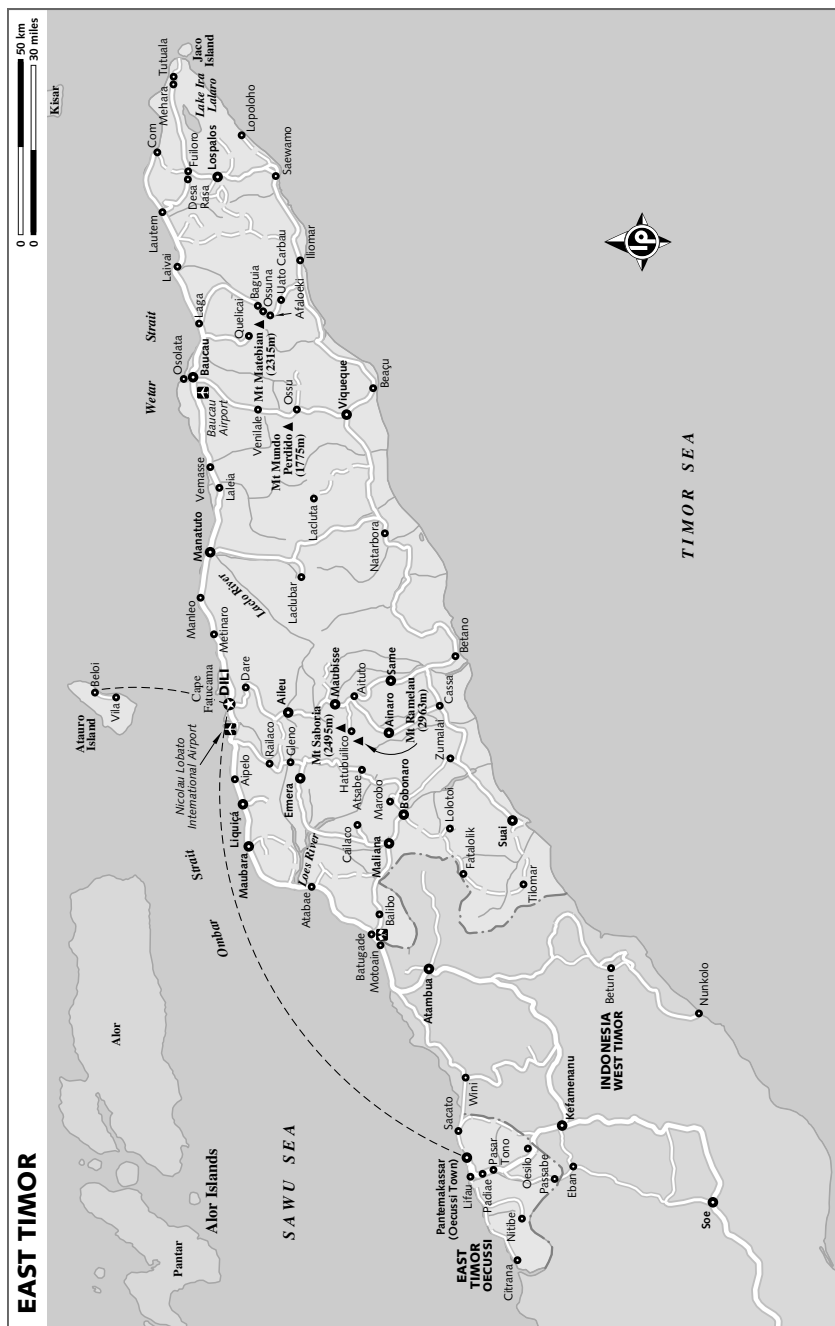
Given the turmoil, many predicted that the 2007 elections would be a disaster. Yet a funny thing happened on the way to the riot: things went off pretty smoothly, mostly due to the determination of the average Timorese. The Fretilin monopoly was replaced by 14 political parties, representing a broad spectrum of politics.

After two rounds of elections, José Ramos-Horta was chosen as president by 70% of the voters in May 2007. One month later, the parliamentary elections resulted in no party having a clear majority. Fretilin had the most votes but only received 29% of the overall vote; Xanana Gusmão’s Council of National Resistance of Timor (CNRT) got 24% of the vote, and the rest was split between other parties. Eventually, Gusmão was able to form a coalition with the other parties and was named prime minister, which infuriated Fretilin. In an all-too-familiar spectacle, Fretilin supporters rioted, causing damage in Dili and across the nation; tens of thousands joined the 100,000-plus people already living in camps.

As long as the party politics trump unified action, it will be very difficult for the government to confront the long list of problems that bedevil East Timor, including education, food, roads and more. With the UN and other international forces anxious to leave, it will be up to the Timorese to start building a viable future.

HISTORY Portuguese Settle In

Little is known of Timor before AD 1500, although Chinese and Javanese traders visited the island from at least the 13th century, and possibly as early as the 7th century. These



traders searched the coastal settlements for aromatic sandalwood, which was valued for its use in making furniture and incense, and beeswax, used for making candles. Portuguese traders arrived between 1509 and 1511, but it wasn't until 1556 that a handful of Dominican friars established the first Portuguese settlement at Lifau – in the present-day Oecussi enclave – and set about converting the Timorese to Catholicism.

In 1642, Francisco Fernandes led a Portuguese military expedition to weaken the power of the Timor kings. Comprised primarily of Topasses, the 'black Portuguese' mestizos (people of mixed parentage) from neighbouring Flores, his small army of musketeers settled in Timor, extending Portuguese influence into the interior.

To counter the Portuguese, the Dutch established a base at Kupang in western Timor in 1653. The Portuguese appointed an administrator to Lifau in 1656, but the Topasses went on to become a law unto themselves, driving out the Portuguese governor in 1705.

By 1749 the Topasses controlled central Timor and marched on Kupang, but the Dutch won the ensuing battle, expanding their control of western Timor in the process. On the Portuguese side, after more attacks from the Topasses in Lifau, the colonial base was moved east to Dili in 1769.

The 1859 Treaty of Lisbon divided Timor, giving Portugal the eastern half, together with the north coast pocket of Oecussi; this was formalised in 1904. Portuguese Timor was a sleepy and neglected outpost ruled through a traditional system of *liurai* (local chiefs). Control outside Dili was limited and it wasn't until the 20th century that the Portuguese intervened in the interior.

World War Two

In 1941, Australia sent a small commando force into Portuguese Timor to counter the Japanese, deliberately breaching the colony's neutral status. Although the military initiative angered neutral Portugal and dragged Portuguese Timor into the Pacific War, it slowed the Japanese expansion. Australia's success was largely due to the support it received from the locals, for whom the cost was phenomenal. In 1942 the Portuguese handed control to the Japanese whose soldiers razed whole villages, seized food supplies and killed Timorese in areas where the Australians were operating. By the end of the war, between 40,000 and 60,000 Timorese had died.

Portuguese Pull Out; Indonesia Invades

After WWII the colony reverted to Portuguese rule until, following the coup in Portugal on 25 April 1974, Lisbon set about discarding its

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Three men are important to East Timor's future.

Mari Alkatiri is the leader of Fretilin, and is uncompromising in his response to what he sees as the desertion of Fretilin by other party members who've joined the many new political parties. After being ousted as prime minister following the 2006 riots, he has staunchly defended Fretilin's role in the country; in 2007 he led protests after Fretilin won 29% of the vote but was unable to form a government. A descendant of an old Muslim trading family, Alkatiri is a bit of an anomaly in a staunchly Catholic country.

Xanana Gusmão is East Timor's most charismatic leader. The first president of the country, he earned the enmity of many of his old Fretilin brethren by breaking with the party after independence. In the 2007 parliamentary elections, he led the Council of National Resistance of Timor (CNRT) party, which favours a pragmatic approach to relations with neighbours such as Australia and Indonesia. Gusmão was a leader of guerrilla forces from 1978 until 1992, when he was captured and imprisoned in Jakarta. A close ally of Ramos-Horta, Gusmão formed a coalition government and was named prime minister after the troubled 2007 parliamentary elections. His wife is Australian-born Kirsty Sword Gusmão, who runs the prominent charity the Alola Foundation.

José Ramos-Horta is the charismatic Nobel Prize winner who spent 20 years in exile during the Indonesian occupation. He took over as prime minister after Alkatiri was forced from office in 2006. Elected president in 2007 with a huge margin, he has disassociated himself from any political party. Single and known for his courtly ways, Ramos-Horta has said that all the nation's women are his first ladies.

colonial empire. Within a few weeks political parties had been formed in East Timor, and the Timorese Democratic Union (UDT) attempted to seize power in August 1975. A brief civil war saw its rival Fretilin (previously known as the Timorese Social Democrats) come out on top, declaring the independent existence of the Democratic Republic of East Timor on 28 November. But on 7 December the Indonesians launched their attack on Dili.

Indonesia opposed the formation of an independent East Timor, and the leftist Fretilin raised the spectre of Communism. The full-scale invasion of the former colony came one day after Henry Kissinger and Gerald Ford departed Jakarta, having tacitly given their assent. (Indeed, the Americans urged the Indonesians to conduct a swift campaign so that the world wouldn't see them using weapons provided by the USA.) Australia also sided with Indonesia, leaving the Timorese to face Indonesia alone.

By 1976 there were 35,000 Indonesian troops in East Timor. Falintil, the military wing of Fretilin, fought a guerrilla war with marked success in the first few years, but weakened considerably thereafter. The cost of the brutal takeover to the East Timorese was huge; it's estimated that at least 100,000 died in the hostilities, and ensuing disease and famine.

By 1989, Indonesia had things firmly under control and opened East Timor to tourism. Then, on 12 November 1991 Indonesian troops fired on protesters gathered at the Santa Cruz Cemetery in Dili to commemorate the killing of an independence activist. With the event captured on film and aired around the world, the embarrassed Indonesian government admitted to 19 killings, although it's estimated that over 200 died in the massacre.

While Indonesia introduced a civilian administration, the military remained in control. Aided by secret police and civilian Timorese militia to crush dissent, reports of arrest, torture and murder were numerous.

Independence

Timorese hopes for independence remained high, but Indonesia showed no signs of making concessions until the fall of the Soeharto regime. Shortly after taking office in May 1998, Soeharto's successor, President Habibie, unexpectedly announced a referendum

for East Timorese autonomy, much to the horror of the military. On 30 August 1999, East Timor voted overwhelmingly (78.5%) for independence from, rather than autonomy within, Indonesia. Though the Indonesian government promised to respect the results of the UN-sponsored vote, military-backed Timorese militias massacred, burnt and looted the country.

International condemnation led to UN troops bringing peace to East Timor beginning in September 1999. Half a million people had been displaced, and telecommunications, power installations, bridges, government buildings, shops and houses were destroyed. Today these scars are everywhere.

The UN set up a temporary administration during the transition to independence, and aid and foreign workers flooded into the country. As well as physically rebuilding the country, East Timor has had to create a civil service, police, judiciary, education, health system and so on, with staff recruited and trained from scratch.

The UN handed over government to East Timor on 20 May 2002. Falintil leader Xanana Gusmão was president of the new nation, and the longtime leader of Fretilin Mari Alkatiri, who ran the organisation from exile in Mozambique, was prime minister.

Birth Pangs

In December 2002, Dili was wracked by riots as years of poverty and frustration proved too much for the nascent democracy. The economy was in a shambles and people were ready for things to start improving – and fast. But without any viable industry or employment potential, East Timor was reliant almost entirely on foreign aid.

Only a small UN contingent remained in East Timor by mid-2005. As the number of outsiders shrank, the challenges of creating a new nation virtually from scratch became all too apparent. Government factions squabbled while the enormous needs of the people festered. By 2006 it was clear that too much had been expected too soon.

The Future

East Timor will continue to rely on foreign money as it struggles to establish a viable economy.

Gas and oil deposits in the Timor Sea hold the greatest potential to help East Timor's

economy to develop without the assistance of foreign aid. Proud of its image as a benefactor of East Timor, Australia was anything but in negotiations with the tiny country over revenues from the oil fields; through outright bullying, the Howard government tried to keep payments to East Timor negligible, despite the fact that it is one of the world's poorest countries. Only perseverance on the part of the Timorese won them an agreement that will provide US\$4 billion in the next few years and much more thereafter.

High in the hills above Dili is another resource: coffee. Some 50,000 people work to produce the country's sought-after arabica beans, noted for their cocoa and vanilla character. Shade-grown and mostly organic (because few farmers can afford fertilizers and pesticides), Timorese coffee is prized by companies such as Starbucks, and production is increasing.

East Timor's tourism industry has great potential, although there needs to be a perception of stability for numbers to grow beyond the 1500 people who visit each year.

THE CULTURE The National Psyche

East Timor's identity is firmly rooted in its survival of extreme hardship and foreign occupation. As a consequence of the long and difficult struggle for independence, the people of East Timor are profoundly politically aware – not to mention proud and loyal. While there is great respect for elders and church and community leaders, there lurks a residual suspicion surrounding foreign occupiers, most recently in the form of the UN. In a country where Catholicism cloaks animistic beliefs and practices, religious beliefs also greatly inform the national consciousness.

Lifestyle

Most East Timorese lead a subsistence lifestyle: what is farmed (or caught) is eaten. Traditional gender roles are firmly in place,

with men doing much of the physical work, and women tending to family needs. Large families are common and infant mortality is high. The infrastructure in East Timor is limited: the majority of the population does not have access to money, electricity or clean water. With a high birth rate (35% of the population is under 15) and limited agricultural output, it's thought that 20% of the Timorese are living on the edge of malnutrition at any time.

The average family income is US\$800 a year, much less in the countryside. Here you find people living much as they have for centuries, housed in thatched huts without even the barest of modern improvements such as corrugated metal or plastic sheeting. Since independence, a slew of NGOs and aid projects have tried to improve living conditions and raise agricultural production so that people will have something to sell in markets.

A small percentage of people – mostly in Dili – have jobs that provide income for consumer goods. Motorised vehicles remain rare; on weekends, buses are packed with people travelling to the family events that form the backbone of Timorese life.

Of the scores of people living in refugee camps, many are there simply because the promise of daily food and water trumps their hardscrabble existence at home.

Population

East Timor has at least a dozen indigenous groups, the largest of which is formed by the Tetun (about 25%), who live around Suai, Dili and Viqueque, as well as in West Timor. The next largest group (around 10%) is the Mambai, who live in the mountains of Maubisse, Ainaro and Same.

Other groups each account for 5% or less of the population. The Kemak live in the Ermera and Bobonaro districts around Maliana; the Bunak also live in Bobonaro, and their territory extends into West Timor and the Suai area. The Fataluku people are famous for their high-peaked houses in the area around Lospalos. More groups are scattered amongst the interior mountains.

East Timor is a young country with a booming birth rate. Life expectancy for East Timorese males is about 64 years (compared to Australia's 78); it's somewhat more for females.

MUST READ

Shakedown: Australia's Grab for Timor Oil by Paul Cleary details the hard-nosed efforts by the Howard government to force East Timor to sign away oil and gas rights in the Timor Sea to Australia for a song.

RELIGION

It's estimated that about 90% of East Timor's population is Catholic (underpinned by animist beliefs); as in Poland, the church was the rallying point of dissent during the years of occupation. The remainder of the population is Protestant, Muslim and Buddhist.

Indigenous religions revolve around an earth mother, from whom all humans are born and shall return after death, and her male counterpart, the god of the sky or sun. These are accompanied by a complex web of spirits from ancestors and nature. The *matan d'ok* (medicine man) is the village mediator with the spirits; he can divine the future and cure illness. Many people believe in various forms of black magic and it's not uncommon for people to wish evil spells upon their rivals.

ARTS

Despite 24 years of imposed Indonesian culture, East Timor has its own music and dance, architecture and textiles.

Music & Dance

Almost all Timorese celebrations involve singing and dancing. Known as *tebe* or *tebedai*, Timorese traditional music has changed little since pre-occupation times; it is performed on ceremonial occasions. The second generation of music is *koremotan*, which is strongly influenced by country-and-western music and Portuguese folk music; guitars are the instrument of choice. You may also hear contemporary East Timorese rock, which has many similarities to cover bands of the Philippines.

Architecture

The traditional houses of East Timor vary from the large conical thatched Bunak houses known as *deuhoto*, still widely used in the west, to the unique Fataluku houses in the east. The tall, elongated Fataluku houses have stilts supporting a main living room and are topped by a high, tapering thatch roof. Although uncommon, you can still see a few of these national icons on the road to Tutuala.

Textiles

Women use simple back-strap looms to weave East Timor's magnificent fabrics, known as *tais*. The relatively small looms result in pieces of limited size, which are commonly used as shawls, baby slings or

scarfs, or stitched together as clothing. Various regions have their own distinct styles, designs and dye colours. *Tais* make excellent souvenirs (see p140).

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

Covering an area of 15,007 sq km, East Timor consists of the eastern half of the island of Timor, as well as Atauro and Jaco Islands, and the enclave of Oecussi on the north coast, 70km to the west and surrounded by Indonesian West Timor.

Once part of the Australian continental shelf, Timor fully emerged from the ocean only some four million years ago, and is therefore composed mainly of marine sediment, principally limestone. Rugged mountains, a product of the collision with the Banda Trench to the north, run the length of the country, the highest of which is Mt Ramelau (2963m).

Wildlife

East Timor is squarely in the area known as Wallacea, a kind of crossover zone between Asian and Australian plants and animals, and one of the most biologically distinctive areas on earth.

East Timor's coral reefs are home to a highly diverse range of marine life. Marine mammals include dolphins, whales and dugongs (a captivating manatee relative), while manta rays and whale sharks are found along the north coast.

More than 240 species of birds have been recorded in the skies over Timor. The Lautem district at the eastern end of the island is noted for its abundance and diversity of bird species, which include honeyeaters, yellow-crested cockatoos and flowerpeckers.

The number of mammals and reptiles in the wild are limited.

Environmental Issues

Human impact has had severe effects on East Timor's environment. Deforestation is a major concern, with around two-thirds of the country's forests destroyed. Slash and burn agricultural practices combined with Timor's climate continue to threaten the natural habitat. As yet, few areas are formally protected as national parks although parts of the mostly untouched and mangrove-heavy south coast are in line for preservation.

TRANSPORT

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are no boat services to East Timor from other countries.

Air

Dili's Nicolau Lobato International Airport (code DIL) is not an impressive entry to the country. Dirty toilets, busted light bulbs and just plain dirt are its hallmarks. There are only two airline routes to the rest of the world: to Darwin in Australia's Northern Territory and Denpasar in Bali.

Air North (code TL; ☎ in Australia 1800 627 474; www.airnorth.com.au) flies twice daily between Darwin and Dili (return fares from a shocking US\$500, 1½ hours).

Merpati (code MZ; ☎ 332 1880; www.merpati.co.id) flies almost daily between Denpasar (Bali) and Dili (return fares from an almost shocking US\$300, two hours).

Generally, most people will fly via Bali, not only because it makes a delightful stopover but also because airfares to Bali from much of the world are more competitive than those to Darwin.

Land

See p141 for information on leaving East Timor by land.

GETTING AROUND

Bicycle

New bikes can be purchased in Dili for around US\$200. Road conditions away from the north coast can be brutal, which may appeal to mountain bikers.

Boat

Ferry transport is available between Dili and Atauro Island (p142), and Dili and the Oecussi enclave (p146) on the new German-built ferry *Nakroma*. It features three classes of service: economy, business and VIP. The seats in all the classes are the same, but those in VIP are in a small and unpleasant

DEPARTURE TAX

There's a departure tax of US\$10 when leaving Dili's airport.

room. In practice business class tickets are for foreigners and economy tickets are for locals, but people freely mix across the ship. Secure space on the small top deck to avoid the many passengers who find eruptive discomfort in even the calmest of seas.

Bus

Cramped *mikrolet* (small minibuses) operate at least daily between most towns, and generally depart early in the morning. Outlying villages are serviced less frequently by *angguna* (tray trucks where passengers, including the odd buffalo or goat, all pile into the back). Ask locally for departure points. Large but still crowded buses run frequently on important routes such as Dili-Baucau.

Car & Motorcycle

Driving in East Timor is optimistically termed an adventure. Except for streets in Dili and the main road running along the north coast, most roads are deeply potholed and rutted. You'll be lucky to average 30km/h, and even then you'll need to be on the lookout for children, goats, dogs etc. Bridges and entire segments of road flood or wash away during the rainy season. Check conditions with the UN (☎ 331 2210 ext 5454, 723 0635).

Conventional cars can handle Dili and the road along the north coast east to Com and west to Batugade, as well as the road inland to Maubisse. Otherwise you will need a 4WD; bring along extra supplies, especially water, in case you get stranded.

Rentlo (☎ 723 5089; www.rentlocarhire.com; Avenida dos Martires de Patria, Comoro, Dili) is the main source of rental vehicles; it's 3km from the airport on the main road. A compact car costs from US\$40 per day, a small 4WD from US\$70. Rentals include 100km free per day. Limited liability coverage is available from \$15 per day (with a whopping US\$6000 deductible); it's probably useful given the toll the roads take on cars.

Motorcycles are quite handy in East Timor, breezing over bumps at a respectable pace. **East Timor Backpackers** (☎ 723 8121; Avenida Almirante Americo Tomas, Dili) charges US\$15 to US\$25 per day.

Alternatively you could make arrangements with a driver so that you can enjoy the scenery while he tackles the potholes (and uses his

local knowledge). Ask around and expect to negotiate; prices start from US\$40 per day.

The myriad of hazards make driving at night foolish.

Petrol (gasoline) in Portuguese is *besin*, diesel fuel is *solar*; expect to pay around US\$1 per litre.

Hitching

It's not uncommon for locals walking 5km or so into town to ask for a ride. A traveller doing the same would be expected to pay a small sum – usually the price of a *mikrolet* ride. However, hitchhiking is never entirely safe, so it's not recommended.

DILI

pop 130,000

Scruffy and chaotic, Dili is not one of Asia's great capitals. But look past the burnt-out buildings and refugee camps and you'll find a place with a quiet charm. Dignified colonial buildings await restoration, and frangipani trees drop flowers on streets trodden as often by goats and chickens as by people. The waterfront is serene and a short walk brings you to golden beaches with good snorkelling. You may not wish to linger, but Dili is where you'll find all of East Timor's services, as well as the supplies you need to explore the country. Its delightful nightspots are good places to discover the welcoming local vibe.

ORIENTATION

Dili sprawls along the waterfront from the airport to the Jesus statue at the eastern end of the bay. The central area is reasonably compact, stretching back a few parallel blocks from the waterfront.

GETTING INTO TOWN

The standard taxi fare from Nicolau Lobato International Airport, 6km west of town, is US\$5 – steep given that fares around town are US\$1 or US\$2. Alternatively, you could walk the few hundred metres past the refugee camp out to the main road and hail a *mikrolet* (small minibus) for around US\$0.25.

Accommodation and restaurant options are spread across town; there's no travellers' hub as such.

INFORMATION

As yet there's no tourist office. Check out the internet resources listed on p148 for tourist information.

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 723 3212)

Fire (☎ 723 0686)

Police (☎ 112, 723 0686)

UN Police (☎ 723 0365)

Internet Access

Global Net (Rua Jacinto de Candido; per hr US\$6;

☎ 8am-9pm) Download photos and burn CDs here.

Internet Cafe (cnr Rua Presidente Nicolau Lobato & Rua Belarmino Lobo; per hr US\$6; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm) Across from ANZ Bank; the orchid collection is more interesting than the name.

Medical Services

Medical services in East Timor are limited; serious cases may require evacuation to Darwin. Your embassy may have information on a number of options available among the local NGOs and UN.

Australian embassy (☎ 332 2111; www.easttimor.embassy.gov.au; Avenida dos Mártires da Pátria) You can make an appointment with a physician here.

Dili Nacional Hospital (☎ 331 1008; Rua Cicade Viana do Castelo) A cadre of Western volunteers assists locals at this busy place just east of Estrada de Bidau.

Foho Osan Mean Farmacia (☎ 725 6978; Rua Quinze de Outubro; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Sat, 8am-1pm Sun) Offers simple consultations and a full range of pharmaceuticals.

Money

Banks are generally open between 9am and 3.30pm Monday to Friday.

ANZ (☎ 332 4800; www.anz.com/timorleste; cnr Rua Presidente Nicolau Lobato & Rua Belarmino Lobo) The ATM dispenses US dollars but often runs dry on weekends.

Western Union (☎ 332 1586; Rua José Maria Marques) Transfers funds internationally.

Post & Telephone

The following places share a building east of the Palacio de Governo.

Post office (Rua Presidente Nicolau Lobato; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri)

Timor Telecom (☎ 332 2245; www.timortelecom.tp; Rua Presidente Nicolau Lobato; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat)

You can make international and local calls, access the internet and purchase SIM cards here.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Dili is no Potemkin village, as the many burnt-out buildings and refugee camps attest. But the reality is actually not as bad as first impressions suggest. See p147 for general information on safety. Take care at night, avoid demonstrations and steer clear of areas south of the airport road, which are known for rock throwing.

SIGHTS Waterfront

Dili's lively waterfront is lined with tangible references to East Timor's present and past. Groups of men pass hours playing cards or talking politics beneath the banyan trees. Faded Portuguese-style buildings – once the preserve of colonial officials – line the pockmarked esplanade, interspersed with businesses, burnt-out buildings and refugee camps.

The **Palacio de Governo** (Government Palace) dominates the centre of town. East of here are **fruit and fish markets** with prices that weaken as the smells strengthen. Opposite the wharf, the Indonesian-installed **Integration Monument** represents an angst-ridden Timorese breaking the chains of colonialism. Further west, the seaside **Motael Church** is one of East Timor's oldest institutions. The **Farol lighthouse** beams just beyond.

Cape Fatucama & the Jesus Statue

The coast road crosses a small river at the east end of town before ending where the 27m-tall **Jesus statue** beckons from the tip of Cape Fatucama (about 7km). The series of serene **beaches** here seems a world away from the chaos of Dili just across the water.

From the top of the statue, the turquoise bays backed by green-covered mountains are stunning. As you climb the well-marked path up to Jesus, look for a little path after the last of 14 grottos. It leads down to an often deserted beach, known as **Jesus Backside beach**, where there's decent snorkelling.

There's a sprinkling of popular beachfront bars and restaurants on the cape.

A taxi to the statue from town should cost US\$2.

Xanana Reading Room

Part museum, part library, part cultural centre, the **Xanana Reading Room** (☎ 332 2831; Rua Belarmino Lobo; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat) is a must visit. The foyer displays photos and information dedicated to President Xanana Gusmão, while various fan-cooled rooms hold a decent selection of titles. Make time to watch a video about East Timor from the reading room's comprehensive collection. There's a small selection of books – the best in Dili – to trade (US\$1) or buy.

Resistance Museum

The 24-year struggle against the Indonesians is commemorated in the impressive new **Resistance Museum** (Rua Formosa; admission US\$1; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Tue-Sat, 1.30-5.30pm Sun) There's a good timeline in English, plus photos and exhibits of the gear used by Falintil while they hid in the hills (satellite phones are the tools of the modern revolution). The catalogue (US\$10) is impressive.

Arte Moris

Set in the vast remains of an Indonesian-era museum, **Arte Moris** (☎ 723 3507; Rua dos Mártires da Patria, Comoro; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) encompasses everything weird and wonderful about Dili. Art students live here while they train in a variety of media; some of the best results grace a funky sculpture garden or are on display in a gallery. Although at times whimsical, many of the works address the ongoing tragedy of life in East Timor. Many local artists are in residence, including Bibi Bulak, an inventive acting troupe that performs on stage and screen.

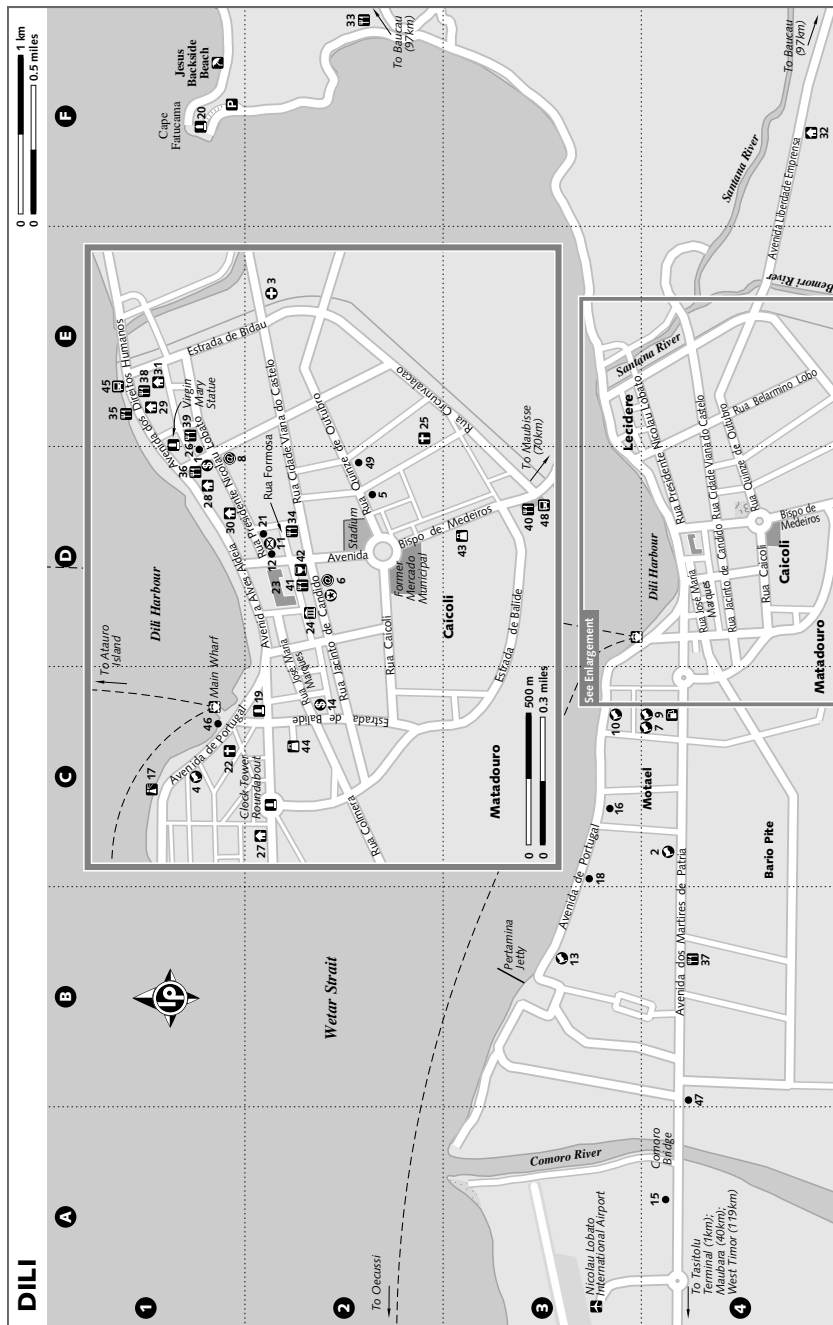
Travelling west from town, the compound is over the Comoro bridge, just before the airport.

Santa Cruz Cemetery

On 12 November 1991, Indonesian soldiers fired on a peaceful memorial procession at the Santa Cruz Cemetery. More than 200 civilians died, many of them after they were rounded up and trucked away by the military.

TRAVEL COURTESY

Smile and say *Bele?* (OK?) before taking someone's photo. You'll usually be rewarded with a *Bele!* and a smile.



One of the people killed was Kamal Bamadhaj, a New Zealand citizen and the subject of the film *Punitive Damage*; two of the many people the soldiers beat up turned out to be American journalists. The bloody attack was filmed by British journalist Max Stahl, whose footage features in the documentary *In Cold Blood*. The massacre at the Santa Cruz Cemetery is cited as a turning point in the independence struggle. The Xanana Reading Room has films about the event available for viewing.

ACTIVITIES

The reef fringing the entire north coast of East Timor provides spectacular **diving** and **snorkelling** opportunities. Many sites, including the legendary K41 east of town, are easily accessed by walking in from the beach, with dramatic drop-offs just 10m offshore in parts. The two main dive operators are located in Dili and arrange trips throughout the country and Atauro. Both offer trips for snorkellers.

Free Flow (☎ 723 4614; www.freeflowdiving.com; Avenida de Portugal) offers guided shore dives for US\$40 per dive, including transport. Many trips include delicious lunches. There's also a full range of PADI courses from US\$300.

Dive Timor Lorosae (☎ 723 7092; www.divetimor.com; Avenida de Portugal) offers day-trip diving around Atauro, including two dives from US\$125 per person (minimum four people). Shore dives around Dili (including two dives) cost from US\$75. PADI courses cost from US\$300.

SLEEPING

Beds in Dili are no bargain: the influx of UN and NGO types has jacked up rates. Should things settle down, the rates listed below may decrease by 25% or more.

East Timor Backpackers (☎ 723 8121; Avenida Almirante Americo Tomas; dm US\$10; 🏠) Dili's one hostel has 11 beds in three small rooms. Out the back there's a delightful café-bar called the Smokehouse, which is often a real travellers' scene. Up front there's a cheap-and-cheerful Indian restaurant.

Vila Harmonia (☎ 723 8265; vilaharmonia@hotmail.com; Avenida Liberdade Empresa 418, Becora; r per person US\$10) About 3km from town, this reliable old-timer has been here for over a decade. The 10 basic rooms, with bathrooms attached, form an 'L' around the garden. You're free to use the kitchen.

Rocella (☎ 723 7993; Rua Presidente Nicolau Lobato 18; r US\$20-25; 🏠) There's a bit of a Kuta-guesthouse feel at this eight-room compound. Satellite TV and sprightly décor add life to the diminutive rooms.

Venture Hotel (☎ 331 3276; venture_hotel@hotmail.com; Rua Filomena de Camera, Lecidere; r US\$23-33; 🏠 🚗) Lots of plants, a vibrant bar and an alluring pool help overcome architecture that's familiar to anyone who's worked in a remote mining camp. The Spartan rooms don't have TVs, and the cheapest share bathrooms (but you can clean up at the occasional foam parties).

Hotel Turismo (☎ 331 0555; hotelturismo_04@yahoo.com; Avenida dos Direitos Humanos, Lecidere; r US\$25-65; 🏠) Step back in time at this genteel veteran of

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the 1970s. The rooms are a bit faded, but you won't notice on the balconies of the best ones, from where you can enjoy views of Atauro Island, the sound of the surf and the smells of the fish vendors.

Hotel Dili (☎ 331 3958; reservation@hoteldili.com; Avenida dos Direitos Humanos; r US\$25-100; ♿) A rambling place with disparate buildings served by great staff, this is the best choice for business travellers to Dili. The cheapest rooms share bathrooms; all rooms have high-speed (by local standards) internet and satellite TV.

EATING & DRINKING

There are numerous pleasant restaurant-bars aimed at foreigners all along the waterfront, especially east towards the Jesus statue. You'll find cheap and cheerful storefront joints wherever there are shops.

Depot Mie Bakso (Rua Formosa; meals from US\$1.25) Popularity translates into quick turnover and very fresh food at this open-air pavilion. Fried chicken, beef *rendang* (spicy coconut curry) and silky potato cakes are usually among the offerings.

Kebab Club (☎ 726 3642; Rua Belarmino Lobo; mains US\$3-6) Darn authentic Turkish fare, including velvety hummus, is on offer at this restaurant where the charm of the owners manages to outshine the tasty fare.

Terrace Cafe (☎ 725 9100; Rua Formosa; meals from US\$4) Join students and government workers on the breezy terrace of this popular place. Food is served up Padang-style: choose your fare from the fresh offerings behind the counter. The avocado-chocolate shake is fresh, frothy and oddly addictive.

Caz Bar (☎ 723 3961; Area Branca; dishes US\$4-8) Settle back in your chair, set right on the beach, at this popular place that tops the line-up of beachside joints east from town. Breakfast and sunset are popular times here. Watch for full-moon parties.

One More Bar (Rua Governador Filomena da Camara, Lecidere; mains US\$4-9) One More Bar has a fine second-storey position on the waterfront, behind the Virgin Mary statue. Fresh seafood is the highlight of a menu of pizza, burgers and Asian stir-fries. There's darts and a pool table, as well as live music some nights.

Castaway Bar (☎ 723 5449; Avenida de Portugal; mains US\$4-12) A very popular second-storey joint overlooking the western waterfront, Castaway Bar packs in crowds enjoying typical pizza-sandwich-Asian fare while taking

in the cool breezes and plotting ways to foil the diabolical pool table.

AJJ Bar (☎ 732 4066; Avenida Bispo de Medeiros; ☎ noon-4am) A legendary second-floor dive where locals and expats alike cram the close quarters for hot music, bad karaoke and conflict over rugby.

Dili's many markets include a large market at Taibessi, just south of the centre, and a smaller fruit and fish market on the waterfront near the Hotel Turismo. Look for tropical fruits, sweet potatoes and betel nuts. Vendors selling cold bottled water and beer (wipe the tops) can be found everywhere. There are also several supermarkets that sell everything from Tim Tams to bug repellent to fishing tackle; these include **Lita** (Avenida dos Direitos Humanos, Lecidere), whose goods include the little plastic couple for the top of your wedding cake. **Landmark** (☎ 723 1313; Avenida dos Martires de Patria, Comoro) is a large complex of shops on the airport road.

SHOPPING

Tais Mercado (Rua Sebastiao da Costa) A *tais* is a piece of East Timorese woven cloth (see p134), and each region possesses its own distinct style; this market has *tais* that are from all over the country. Quality varies greatly.

Alola Foundation (www.alolafoundation.org; Avenida Bispo de Medeiros) The shop of the revered local charity has *tais* and other crafts from around the country. Quality is high and prices are low.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

See p135 for details of getting in and out of Dili by air.

Boat

The **Nakroma ferry office** (☎ 728 09638; Avenida de Portugal; ☎ 9am-5pm) is in the large building at the port. Buy your tickets in advance. Ferries for Oecussi (economy/business class US\$4/14, 12 hours) leave at around 5pm Monday and Thursday. The Atauro service (business class \$5, two hours) runs Saturdays. See p135 for more details.

Bus

Dili's bus terminals (really little more than shabby shelters) are served by taxis and *mikrolet*. Buses run most often in the morning.

GETTING TO INDONESIA

The four-hour bus ride from Dili to the border town of Batugade costs US\$5. You have to walk 200m across the border to Motoain in West Timor, from where a *mikrolet* (small minibus) costs less than US\$2 to Atambua. Buses from Atambua to Kupang cost about US\$5 and take eight hours. Buses from Dili stop running by mid-afternoon, so don't get caught at the border as there's no place to stay. You'll need an Indonesian visa before crossing the border into West Timor (see p150).

Much easier is the through bus service between Dili and Kupang offered by **Timor Tour & Travel** (Dili ☎ 333 1014; Rua Quinze de Outubro 17; Kupang ☎ 0380-881 543; Jl Timor Raya 8). There's a daily service, which costs US\$18 and takes 12 hours in an air-conditioned minibus; book in advance.

See p297 for information on crossing the border from the opposite direction.

Tasitolu Terminal, west of the airport, is the hub for destinations to the west of the country. Travelling to the east (Baucau, Lospalos, Viqueque etc), buses go from the simple Bidau Terminal, on the waterfront near the Hotel Turismo. The Taibessi Terminal, at the huge Taibessi market, is the stop for transport to Maubisse and beyond.

GETTING AROUND

Bus

Mikrolet, buzz about on designated routes during daylight hours (US\$0.25). They stop frequently over relatively short distances, often making a taxi a more efficient option.

Car

See p135 for car-hire options. However, Dili's compact and you'll be able to reach most places on foot or by taxi.

Taxi

There are loads of clapped-out unmetered taxis beeping their way around Dili. Almost anywhere around town costs a standard US\$1, rising to US\$2 for a longer journey. A major problem is that taxis here stopped operating at night after the 2006 riots; until this changes, going out at night means setting up rides or sticking close to your lodgings.

ATAURO ISLAND

Its lush mountain interior hemmed by uninterrupted beach and coral reef, the alluring island getaway of Atauro is visible from Dili but seems a world away. This is pure escapism: you're free to do a lot or a little, with excellent walking trails and snorkelling op-

portunities (off the pier at Beloi and in front of Tua Koin), and seemingly endless beaches to prop on and watch passing outriggers.

Atauro's isolation made it a natural prison, and it's been used by both the Portuguese and Indonesian governments as a place of exile.

The community today comprises around 8000 people, mostly subsistence fishers and farmers, living in a few villages spread across the island. The main centres are along the east coast: Makili (a carving centre), Vila (with leafy lanes and a few colonial vestiges) and Beloi (where the public ferry docks), with Macadade in the mountains.

The Dili dive shops (p139) arrange underwater tours; you can arrange for snorkelling trips with local fishing boats from US\$15. Ask the locals about the many hiking possibilities.

SLEEPING

Atauro has two sleeping options that almost perfectly fit the clichés of the remote beach escape. At either place you must book in advance as food on the island is so limited that arrangements will have to be made so you can eat (meals cost from US\$4). Polite expats from Dili ask what they can bring from the supermarkets before heading over.

Tua Kóin Eco-Village (☎ 723 6085; www.atauroisland.com; r per person Sun-Thu US\$13, Fri & Sat US\$15) Eight simple thatched-roof cabins are located in this shady compound on the beach north of Vila. Operated by Atauro's NGO Roman Luan, the ecovillage runs on solar power, recycles grey water and has a great beachfront setting. The website is a fantastic source of local info.

Nemas (☎ 723 6084; r per person US\$15) Just north of the ferry dock in Beloi, Nemas is run by an Australian named Barry. There are four sun-drenched thatched cabins right on the

beach; the one Barry calls his writer's cabin has mesmerizing views from an upper level.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

The island of Atauro is 30km directly north of Dili. The **Nakroma ferry** (☎ 728 09638; Avenida de Portugal, Dili) departs from Dili every Saturday at 9am and returns at 4pm, taking two hours each way. Fares in 'business class' (meaning those charged to foreigners) are US\$5 each way.

A fishing boat also makes the run from Vila to Dili (US\$10, three hours) several days a week depending on tides. Check details with Tua Kóin Eco-Village or Nemas.

Only Vila and Beloi are linked by road, which is served by constantly shuttling trucks. Flag any down; the cost is about US\$2. If arriving by ferry, scramble aboard the first one you see before it fills up with chickens, kids and bags of rice.

If you are doing a day trip on the *Nakroma*, you'll have time to ride between the two villages, do a little exploring, including the seaside market at Beloi, and possibly have a prearranged lunch at Tua Kóin or Nemas.

EAST OF DILI

Finding beaches around every bend is one of the treats in store as you head along the north coast east of Dili. Some of the best diving in the country is found right off the shore along here.

A long bridge spans the Laclo River at **Manatuto**, 64km east of Dili, which has its own Jesus statue overlooking town. The road continues another 19km to **Laleia**, which has a twin-towered pastel-pink church. **Vemasse** is a further 9km and is noted for the fortress-like Portuguese construction on the hillside overlooking the town.

BAUCAU

The atmospheric Old Town streets of Baucau, East Timor's second city, zigzag downhill dominated by the ruins of the impressive **mercado municipal** (municipal market), built during the Portuguese era. The **town market** operates in the block next to the *mercado municipal*, with pyramid-shaped piles of potatoes, neat bunches of greens and mounds of maize forming a colourful patchwork on the pavement. Just below town, turn off the main road and

follow the lush ravine 5km down to the beach at **Osolata**. Called Pantai Wataboo, it's a series of white sand coves fringed by palms and hemmed by turquoise water.

The characterless Kota Baru (New Town) sprang up during the Indonesian era and overlooks the Old Town. On the road linking the two, **Timor Telecom** (☎ 413 0017; ☎ 9am-5pm) has slow internet access (US\$2 per hour) and offers currency exchange services.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Loro-Sae (Old Town; r with shared mandi per person US\$10) This unlovely five-room place has basic accommodation with shared *mandi* (large concrete basin from which you scoop water to rinse your body and flush the squat toilet). It's located above street level, upstairs from a very nice café.

Baucau Beach Bungalows (☎ 731 9127; Osolata; r per person US\$15) Choose between rooms in old houses and thatched bungalows at this little slice of paradise down by the beach. Meals can be arranged for US\$6 and are sourced from the fishing boats across the road.

Pousada de Baucau (☎ 724 1111; Rua de Catedral, Old Town; r from US\$55; ☎ ☎) One of East Timor's nicest hotels, this vision in pink overlooking the Old Town combines old colonial buildings with a newer wing of 10 rooms. The restaurant has good Portuguese food (meals from US\$5) and the service is delightful.

Restaurante Amalia (☎ 726 3610; Old Town; dishes US\$4-6) This charmer with a wide terrace is in an old Portuguese officers' quarters near the market. Garlic is a featured ingredient in many of the spicy dishes, and there's wine by the glass.

Getting There & Away

Numerous buses per day drive the 123km between Dili and Baucau (US\$2, three hours). Buses also run to Viqueque (US\$2, two hours) and Lospalos (US\$3, 3½ hours). Ask to be dropped off in the Old Town.

SOUTH OF BAUCAU

From Baucau you can head over rugged roads deep into the lush hills where Fretilin members hid during the Indonesian occupation. The area remains a stronghold for the party.

Some 28km south, the charming hill village of **Venilale** is nestled between Mt Matebian (2315m) in the east and Mt Mundo Perdido (Lost World; 1775m) in the west. Another

16km brings you to the misty village of **Ossu**. Some 9km south of here look for a sign on the left for the **Timor Village Hotel** (☎ 728 5611; r per person US\$20), a spotless seven-room place set on a lush hillside near a surging river and waterfall. You can arrange hiking guides here.

Viqueque, 63km from Baucau, is the centre for the identically named surrounding district, which is lined with sinuous rice terraces. The market is the centre of town. On the road leading in you'll see a series of guesthouses, including **Motel Borala** (☎ 726 7866; r per person US\$9), which has seven rooms with private bathrooms, as well as electricity for a few hours at night. Shops and cafés are nearby.

Buses and *mikrolet* make runs daily between Viqueque and Baucau (US\$2, two hours) and on to Dili.

If you have the nerve to tackle the roads, you can continue to the coast, where the stunning beach at **Beaçu** is slowly swallowing the Portuguese-built customs building. From here it's possible to continue east along the coast road in the dry season; plan on six or more hours to Lospalos.

EAST OF BAUCAU

About 20km east of Baucau is the coastal village of **Laga**, surrounded by virescent rice paddies. From here a road wends south through the mountains to the hill town of **Baguia**, set in the shadow of **Mt Matebian** (2315m). Topped with a statue of Christ and known as 'Mountain of the Souls', this holy place attracts thousands of pilgrims annually for All Souls Day (2 November) to honour deceased friends and family. Ask at the church in Baguia for trekking info.

At least three *mikrolet* per day run between Baucau and Baguia (US\$2, 2½ hours) via Laga.

Com

You hit the end of the road when you reach the austere fishing village of **Com**, 80km from Baucau via Lautem. If any place in East Timor is likely to develop as a travellers' scene, it's here. There's excellent snorkelling and a good, long beach (although it's beaten by the one at the 171km marker to the west).

Several bare-bones guesthouses have emerged near the shore and your arrival will set off a frenzy of pitches. Look at a few before deciding; expect to pay about US\$10 per person.

A few levels up in quality, the shell-studded **Com Beach Resort** (☎ 728 3311; r US\$20-80; ☎) has basic rooms that share a bathroom block, as well as pricier ones with bathrooms (value goes down as you pay more); book ahead. Snorkelling gear is available. The resort's Ocean View Restaurant (dishes US\$4 to US\$10) has a menu that includes a whole roast pig for US\$100 – only eight hours' notice is needed for the unlucky victim to be selected and cooked.

Tutuala & Jaco Island

Views of the shimmering waters of Lake Ira Lalaroe and the occasional stilted Fataluku house are just some of the highlights of the rugged 50km-long road from Lautem to Tutuala. The road ends on a bluff in Tutuala village, where there's sweeping views out to sea and an old Portuguese *pousada* (traditional Portuguese lodging) where you might be able to rent a vintage room for US\$5 per person.

And the fun has only begun, for a steep 8km track runs down to **Pantai Walu**, a stunning white-sand beach. Just offshore is Jaco Island, the ultimate beach experience; it's mostly a ring of alluring sand that seems to have been constantly sifted and bleached. The island is also a place with sacred meaning to the Timorese. You can't spend the night there, but you can usually catch a ride over with a fisherman for US\$5. The trip takes all of two minutes.

Back on Pantai Walu, the fishing folk often serve up grilled fish with garlic (US\$5) and you might be able to get a bed in a thatched hut for about the same. Then again you might not, and since food is not guaranteed here or up in Tutuala you'd best bring your own provisions and camping gear.

You can get a daily *mikrolet* to/from Lospalos (US\$1, three hours), or you can charter one from Com for about US\$15.

Lospalos

Lospalos, home to the Fataluku language group of people, is a workaday town about 28km south of Lautem. It's mostly of interest for its market and smattering of shops. The six rooms at **27@** (r with shared bathroom per person US\$8) are spotless; it's set in a shady compound near the old market. Good meals (from US\$3) are available. The name derives from the day in August 1999 when the owner's husband was among scores of locals murdered by the retreating Indonesians.

Buses and *mikrolet* run at several times daily between Lospalos and Baucau (US\$3, 3½ hours). Ask to be dropped off near the centre or old market, not in the new market far out of town.

WEST OF DILI

The western part of East Timor is quiet and often arid. Long black-sand beaches, rarely trodden, line the smooth main road that follows the jagged coast to the border town of Batugade. Inland a circuitous road in much worse shape than the one on the coast tracks through coffee plantations and desertlike stretches via Ermera.

There are numerous places all the way to the border to don a mask and wade out to reefs that are a kaleidoscope of colours and teeming with marine life.

Liquiçá, 35km west of Dili, warrants a wander for its fine Portuguese architecture and bustling market. You'll recognise **Maubara**, 40km from Dili, by the fort walls and cannons pointing out to sea. The sandy ocean floor slopes away here to a coral bed that attracts its fair share of colourful fish. Some 3km west, look for a sign marked Maubara-Fatubessi and follow a steep track up to a **retreat** (r per person US\$17) run by Carmelite nuns. The 20 immaculate rooms enjoy sweeping views, and food is available for an extra charge (meals from US\$3).

A steady stream of *mikrolet* depart Dili daily stopping at both villages. A very few go as far as the skimpy border town of **Batugade** (111km from Dili); see p141 for further details. Some *mikrolet* turn inland, travelling 14km to the misty mountain town of **Balibo**. In the main square is Australia Flag House, a restored community centre with a memorial commemorating five Australian-based journalists murdered by invading Indonesian soldiers in 1975.

Twenty-six kilometres further inland on the edge of a fertile flood plain, **Maliana** has some simple guesthouses. Another 25km east a rough track leads 1km off the main road to the mist-covered old colonial centre of **Bobonaro**, which awaits rediscovery by travellers. Near here a 'road' that sullies the very concept runs 40km down to **Zumalai**. Although rugged in the extreme – plan on three hours or more – it passes through verdant

landscape and ancient villages of thatched huts that have changed little in eons. If you stop you'll be surrounded by shrieking children; everyone you pass waves, including the goats.

SOUTH OF DILI

The thatched roofs of round houses fleck the sides of soaring mountains south of Dili, while coffee beans fleck the trees lining the road. After climbing 28km out of Dili you'll be treated to cool views of the north coast and Atauro Island beyond. Nestled in a crest is the cloud-caressing mountain town of Maubisse, while the countryside peaks further south, reaching its highest point at Mt Ramelau (2963m), a popular spot for climbs. Those with time should continue to the black sands along the south coast.

MAUBISSE

Dew-soaked Maubisse, 70km south of Dili and 1400m up, is a classic mountain town that will have you regretting those shorts. Get a bed at the classic **Pousada de Maubisse** (☎ 724 9567; r per person Mon-Thu US\$17, Fri & Sat US\$51, Sun US\$20) which overlooks the region from a knoll. Its fading grace and gorgeous grounds make for great value weekdays; the restaurant offers Portuguese-inspired dishes (US\$8 to US\$10). You could also stay with the faithful at Maubisse's elaborate **church** (r incl all meals per person US\$15). Simple stalls sell food across from the market.

Buses depart from Dili for Maubisse (US\$2, three hours) each morning.

HATUBUILICO & MT RAMELAU

Wild roses grow by the road and mountain streams trickle through the precious teeny town of Hatubuilico, located at the base of Mt Ramelau. Stay at the five-room **Pousada Alecrim Namrau** (☎ 724 9567; Rua Gruta Ramelau Hun 1; r per person US\$10) where meals can be arranged for US\$2. The uniquely decorated guesthouse is run by the village chief, who can arrange a guide (US\$5) to get you up the mountain – and up at 3am in time to reach the peak for sunrise.

Hiking from the village to the Virgin Mary statue at the top of Mt Ramelau takes around three hours; with a 4WD you can drive 2.5km to a meadow from where it's two hours to

the top. The trail leads steadily up, with an open-air 'church' on a plateau at the 2700m mark. From the peak, mountaintops ripple out to the coast, which is visible to both the south and the north. Sunrise will give you chills, both down your spine and up your arms (temperatures average 5°C).

From Maubisse, the Hatubuilico turn-off is at the 81km post; you'll reach the village after 18km. From Maubisse, *angguna* travel to Hatubuilico on market days: Wednesday and Saturday. The price depends on the number of passengers, but the trip should cost around US\$2 and take three hours.

SAME & BETANO

Same (Sar-may), 43km south of Maubisse, is at the centre of the region's hard-working coffee plantations. The rugged road here clings to hillsides dotted with banana and orange trees, and cleaved by waterfalls. Same is a sizable town, with a bustling daily market. It's a good base for exploring the remote south coast.

The niftiest place in the south, **Hotel & Restaurant Same** (Rua Na Raran; s/d US\$25/35) has 12 clean rooms with big beds and private toilets. The little compound has a decent restaurant (meals US\$4) and a small grocery.

The road continues down to the black-sand beach at Betano on the coast. From here you can journey over narrow tracks east in dry season through crocodile-infested mangroves to Viqueque (six or more hours).

Mikrolet run frequently between Maubisse and Same (US\$1, one hour), and between Same and Betano (US\$1, one hour).

SUAI

The south coast's main town, Suai sprawls 5km inland and is a confusing collection of villages. The main one, Debos, is dominated by an enormous unfinished **cathedral**, the scene of a mass slaughter by the Indonesians in 1999. If the ghosts don't bother you, the nuns offer the usual pristine but humble **accommodation** (per person US\$10). Avoid overpriced and run-down Eastern Dragon, which charges ridiculous rates to air-con-seeking NGO and UN types. Traverse the mangroves to see the moody black-sand beaches at the ocean.

Mikrolet run between Suai and Maubisse (around US\$2, at least four hours), via Ainaro (with its colourful church) or Same.

OECUSSI

Welcome to Oecussi, a serene slice of East Timor that's surrounded on three sides by Indonesian West Timor and a series of jagged mountain ranges, and fronted by the sea. A cocktail of wild beauty, isolation, deliciously slow pace and incredibly warm population, Oecussi oozes serenity.

But Oecussi does have a past. When Dominican missionaries settled here in 1556, it became the first Portuguese colony in Timor before being abandoned in favour of Dili in 1769. It was annexed by Indonesia without resistance in 1976, but it didn't escape the violence following the independence referendum in '99; houses and businesses were burned, and members of local resistance groups were shot in cold blood.

Pantemakassar, aka Oecussi town, is a sweet conglomeration of thatched and rusted tin-roofed houses cradled by groves of banana and coconut palms. Its wide dirt roads are scattered with far more goats, cows and pedestrians than cars, it's backed by red-clay coastal mountains, and there are almost no street lights, allowing the black night sky to reveal endless galaxies. There's good **snorkelling** (think schools of giant trevally and resident reef sharks) along the sheer coral drop-off about 20m offshore.

The old Portuguese fort **Fatusuba** slowly decays atop the hill 1.5km south of town. **Lifau**, located 5km west of Pantemakassar, is the site of the original Portuguese settlement; there is a monument to the first landing, and the lovely beach attracts local families for Sunday picnics. The best beach begins 2km east of town on **Pantai Mahata**, which ends at a stunning red-rock headland.

Pasar Tono, 12km south of Pantemakassar, has a colourful produce **market** that attracts villagers in traditional garb to the luscious shade of giant banyan trees along the Tono River.

Lodging is bare-bones basic. The cleanest digs are at **Rao Homestay** (r US\$10) a block south of the sports complex. **Lily Homestay** (Jl Integrasi; r US\$10) has the best kitchen (think tasty and filling chicken, beef or fish dinners; meals US\$5), and a guesthouse with shared *mandi*. Decent internet and international phone services are available at **Timor Telecom** (Rua Francisco Mousino), east of the traffic

circle. Change rupiah into US dollars at Fernando's General Store, directly opposite the sports complex.

The **Nakroma ferry** (☎ 724 0388; Avenida de Portugal, Dili; ☎ 9am-5pm) travels from Dili to Oecussi (economy/business class US\$4/US\$14, 12 hours) twice a week, departing the capital on Monday and Thursday nights. The return departure is around 5.30pm the following evening. In Pantemakassar the office is opposite the vaguely functional dock near the Integration Monument. See p135 for more details.

It's possible to travel overland from Indonesian West Timor to Oecussi, but crossing back requires an Indonesian visa, only available in Dili, so a night ferry is likely in your future.

EAST TIMOR DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Simple accommodation in East Timor costs between US\$5 and US\$10 for the night, variously charged per person or per room. The majority of places have a bed in a small room with a concrete floor; prices rise to US\$30 for air-con or private bathrooms, although outside of Dili these niceties are uncommon.

A large number of the hotels Dili's hotels were built to accommodate the influx of UN and aid workers post-1999. These places are the most likely to have air-con, sit-down loos and in-room power sockets (220V, 50Hz; there's no standard socket, so bring adaptors for Indonesian, US and Australian plugs). Should the expat/UN/NGO population ever contract, hotel prices will as well. Note that few of these places rank as posh – many were assembled from old shipping containers.

Outside Dili, guesthouses are the most common form of accommodation throughout the country, providing a basic room with shared *mandi* (a large concrete basin from which you scoop water to rinse your body and flush the squat toilet). Convents attached to churches often have cheap and spotless rooms. Most places provide meals; there's almost always free coffee and bread in the morning, as well as cooked meals on request. In rural areas, running water and power may only be available from 6pm to midnight, if at all, and hot water is a rarity.

In remote areas where there is little or no commercial accommodation, locals usually open their homes to travellers; etiquette would encourage payment (around US\$10).

There are no formal camping options in East Timor, though it's not unknown for travellers to pitch a tent in isolated areas, such as Tutuala beach. In Dili, **Mega Tours** (☎ 723 5199; timormegatours@netscape.net; Rua Presidente Nicolau Lobato, Dili) rents camping equipment for US\$5 per person.

ACTIVITIES

Diving the incredible coast and exploring the remote interior are two major reasons to visit East Timor.

Though there are few companies offering packaged activities in East Timor, there are loads of opportunities for adventurers with time and their own equipment. The island's interior has networks of limestone caves, and untrafficked roads and tracks are crying out for hardy cyclists. You can purchase a new Chinese-made mountain bike from several places in Dili for about US\$200.

Diving

Experts guess that only about 10% of East Timor's dive sites have been properly charted; there's a vast amount of incredible diving to explore. The coral reef that rims most of the island provides plenty of stellar opportunities and it's been called a 'shore-diving paradise'. Both soft and hard corals play home to a vivid variety of reef fish, and pelagic marine life cruises around spectacular drop-offs just metres offshore. Most sites are on the north coast – with a number in or near Dili – and around Atauro Island. Conditions are best during the dry season (March to September), when visibility is at around 20m to 30m. There are dive companies in Dili offering guided trips, courses and gear hire; see p139. To get some sample views, check out **Reefscenes.net** (www.reefscenes.net) and **Underwater East Timor** (www.uwet.net).

Hiking

There are fabulous hiking opportunities passing through traditional villages and traversing a variety of terrains. Many happy hikers can claim to have seen the south and north coasts of the country from its highest peak, Mt Ramelau. For hikes here or to places such as the sacred peak of Mt Matebian, you can

make arrangements through the Dili-based tour companies; see p150.

For real adventure hike in the steamy interior of Atauro Island or pretty much anywhere else in the country, especially the thinly populated south coast.

BOOKS

Books are hard to come by. Bring many.

Timor-Leste Land of Discovery is a very impressive coffee-table book filled with gorgeous images of the land and people. It's widely available in Dili.

A Not-so-Distant Horror: Mass Violence in East Timor by Joseph Nevins covers the bloody recent history of East Timor and shows how the US, Australia et al allowed the Indonesian government to slaughter thousands from 1975 to 1999.

The Redundancy of Courage by Timothy Mo is a gripping novel whose fictional country's struggle against occupation is a deliberately thinly veiled account of East Timor's actual struggle. This novel was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1991.

A Woman of Independence by Kirsty Sword Gusmão is the autobiographical account of how this Australian teacher came to be East Timor's first lady in 2002.

BUSINESS HOURS

Few places outside Dili keep strict business hours.

Offices 8am to noon and 1pm to 5pm Monday to Friday

Restaurants 10am to 9pm

Shops 9am to 6pm Monday to Friday, 9am to noon Saturday

Exceptions are noted in individual reviews.

CLIMATE

East Timor has two seasons: wet (December to April) and dry (May to November). In the dry season the north coast sees little rain (although climate change is altering this); the cooler central mountains and south coast have an occasional shower. When the rains come, they cause floods and landslides, cutting off access to roads.

Day temperatures are around 30°C to 35°C (85°F to 95°F) year-round in the lowland areas, dropping to the low 20s overnight. In the mountain areas, warm-to-hot daytime temperatures drop to a chillier 15°C (60°F) at night, less at altitude. At the end

of the dry season in parts of the north coast the mercury hovers over 35°C. See p916 for climate charts.

A good time to visit is after the wet season, from late April to July.

CUSTOMS

The usual rules (1L of alcohol, 200 cigarettes) apply to arrivals in East Timor.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Malaria and dengue are common and are real concerns for those staying in East Timor; take precautions (see p939 and p938). Consider all tap water and ice as highly suspect (bottled water is widely available) and do as the locals do: wipe off any water from the tops of beverage cans before drinking. Antibiotics and other pharmaceuticals are easily bought in Dili but are hard to find elsewhere.

The main risks associated with East Timor besides political upheaval are those universal concerns of road safety and petty crime.

The driving in East Timor is generally passive and traffic is far from dense; however, vehicles and roads are generally in poor condition, and are made more hazardous by wandering livestock. Sudden wash-outs of roads is just one reason why driving after nightfall outside Dili is foolish.

Theft most frequently occurs from cars, with mobile phones a prime target. Wandering alone on the beach at night is never a good idea, and women travelling solo should take particular care (see p923), but generally the crime rate is not high.

Given the regular bouts of political instability in East Timor, check the current situation before you visit (although government travel advisories are usually cautious in the extreme). Outside of mass unrest, political violence is not aimed at non-Timorese. If you see stone throwing or other provocations, vamoose.

DRIVING LICENCE

Your home-country driving licence or permit is acceptable in East Timor.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Embassies & Consulates in East Timor

A number of countries have embassies in Dili. Citizens of Canada and the UK should contact their embassies in Indonesia (see p336).

Australia (☎ 332 2111; www.easttimor.embassy.gov.au; Avenida dos Mártires de Pátria)

European Commission (☎ 332 5171; ectimor@arafura.net.au; Rua Santo António de Motael 8, Farol)

Indonesia (☎ 331 7107; kukridil@hotmail.com; cnr Rua Marinha & Rua Governador Cesar, Farol)

Ireland (☎ 332 4880; charles.lathrop@dfc.ie; Rua Alferes Duarte Arbiro 12, Farol)

New Zealand (☎ 331 0087; kiwidili@gmail.com; Rua Alferes Duarte Arbiro, Farol)

USA (☎ 332 4684; consdili@state.gov; Avenida de Portugal, Farol)

East Timorese Embassies & Consulates Abroad

There's only a handful of East Timorese diplomatic offices overseas.

Australia (☎ 02-6260 8800; tl_emb.canberra@bigpond.com; 25 Blaxland Cres, Griffith, Canberra, ACT 2603)

European Union (☎ 280 0096; jo_amorim@yahoo.com; Ave de Cortenbergh 12; 1040 Brussels, Belgium)

Indonesia (☎ 021 390 2978; tjkt@yahoo.com; 11th fl, Surya Bldg, Jl MH Thamrin Kav 9, Jakarta 10350)

USA (☎ 202 965 1515; embtlus@earthlink.net; 3415 Massachusetts Ave, NW Washington, DC, 20007)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

As a staunchly Catholic country, Christian holidays are celebrated with gusto; see right for dates. During any of the major holidays there will be a church celebration. Easter is particularly colourful, with parades and vigils.

FOOD & DRINK

Food

The food is not what you'll remember most about your visit to East Timor. For many locals, meat added to the staple rice-and-veg dish is a treat. That said, coastal communities do good barbecued fish, flipped straight from the sea to the grill.

The years of Indonesian and Portuguese rule have flavoured the country's palate, with Indonesian-style fried-noodle dishes and signature Portuguese items such as *bacalhau* (cod) available at many restaurants. In Dili, numerous places serve the usual mélange of pizza, sandwiches and pasta plus Thai and Indian treats. You can join locals at modest places and eat well for under US\$5.

Outside of Dili and Baucau, choices dwindle. You'll usually find a couple of simple places near the town market serving variations of chicken and beef.

Drink

Coffee is a speciality in East Timor: it's strong, black and full-bodied – and available everywhere. Bottled drinking water is readily available. Favourite beers include Indonesia's Bintang and Singapore's Tiger. Away from Dili, beverages may not be cold. That milky liquid for sale from stalls is *sopi*, a home-brewed palm wine that tastes of fermenting palm fruit, which is exactly what it is. Think of it more as punch (it has one) than wine.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

There's no organised network for gay men and lesbians in East Timor, but it's unlikely that there'll be any overt discrimination.

HOLIDAYS

East Timor has a large list of holidays. Many special days of commemoration are declared each year – sometimes on the morning of what becomes a holiday. Particularly Timorese holidays include Independence Restoration Day, which commemorates the day in 2002 when sovereignty was transferred from the UN; Popular Consultation Day, which celebrates the start of independence in 1999; and National Youth Day, which commemorates the Santa Cruz Cemetery massacre (see p137).

East Timor also celebrates Idul Adha (the Muslim day of sacrifice) and Idul Fitri (the end of Ramadan), but dates vary each year.

New Year's Day 1 January

Good Friday March/April

Labour Day 1 May

Independence Restoration Day 20 May

Corpus Christi Day May/June

Popular Consultation Day 30 August

All Saints' Day 1 November

All Souls' Day 2 November

National Youth Day 12 November

Proclamation of Independence Day 28 November

National Heroes' Day 7 December

Immaculate Conception 8 December

Christmas Day 25 December

INTERNET ACCESS

There are plenty of internet cafés in Dili, with access averaging US\$6 per hour. Other than in Baucau, access is unheard of elsewhere.

INTERNET RESOURCES

East Timor Tourism News (www.easttimortourismassociationnews.blogspot.com) Has updated tourism news from the Tourism Association of East Timor.

LANGUAGE? WHICH LANGUAGE?

Babel only had a little on East Timor. Portuguese and Tetun are East Timor's official languages, with Tetun and 15 other Timorese languages acknowledged by the constitution as national languages of great importance to the country's heritage. It's estimated that only 25% of the population speaks Portuguese, while at least 80% speaks Tetun. Most young adults also speak Bahasa Indonesia – the imposed official language from 1975 to 1999. Due to the huge UN presence in recent years, English is marginally understood, particularly in Dili. English is also taught in schools.

Any attempts made by travellers to speak Tetun are greatly appreciated. Lonely Planet's *East Timor Phrasebook* is a handy introduction. The resources at the Linguistic Institute website at the **National University** (www.asianlang.mq.edu.au/INL/) include bilingual guides for myriad languages, and entertaining commentary on the nation's convoluted language situation.

East Timor Action Network (www.etan.org) The website of this US-based organisation has a vast and compelling array of web links, and loads of information and articles.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Has information on travel in East Timor; check out the Thorn Tree forum.

Turismo de Timor-Leste (www.turismotimorleste.com) Official Department of Tourism site.

United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (www.unmit.org) This site has news and official information.

Xanana Republic Gazette (www.xananarepublic.blogspot.com) This Dili-based blog is both entertaining and informative. It has links to the ever changing line-up of local blogs, some of which are excellent.

LEGAL MATTERS

If you are the victim of serious crime go to the nearest police station and notify your embassy. The Timorese police force is only one of a passel of groups providing security in the country. If arrested, you have the right to a phone call and legal representation, which your embassy can help to locate.

Possession and trafficking of illicit drugs carry stiff penalties.

MAPS

The Timorese government's tourism department distributes a free *Timor-Leste* country map (1:750,000), which you'll find around Dili. Otherwise, accurate and up-to-date maps are a business opportunity for someone.

MEDIA Newspapers

The *Timor Post* and the *Suara Timor Lorosae* are among the daily local newspapers; they're mainly in Indonesian but with some news in Tetun. The *Guide Post* is aimed at English-speaking expats in Dili, and has useful service listings and maps. Don't expect to find any other newspapers or magazines in English.

Radio & TV

Radio is the most important branch of the media, with the national broadcaster Radio de Timor Leste (RTL) and a host of community stations. The Catholic Church's Radio Timor Kmanek (RTK) is popular. You can pick up Australian programming from the ABC in Dili on 106.5FM; the BBC is on 105.9FM.

The national public TV station is Televisao de Timor Leste (TVTL), which broadcasts for a few hours each evening. Its news programme ignores no political speech. Shows featuring local concerts have the same uneven charms as videos of your cousin's recital. Many Dili hotels have satellite TV with all the expected international channels.

MONEY

The US dollar is the official currency of East Timor. Locally minted centavos coins also circulate, which are of equal value to US cents. Make sure you arrive with some US dollars.

You'll need to make all financial transactions in Dili, where ATMs dispense US dollars and banks change travellers cheques. A few establishments in Dili accept credit cards, though there's often a hefty 5% surcharge attached.

The following are the exchange rates at the time of press:

Country	Unit	US dollars (US\$)
Australia	A\$1	0.84
Canada	C\$1	0.97
Euro zone	€1	1.39
Indonesia	10,000Rp	1.07
Japan	¥100	0.87
New Zealand	NZ\$1	0.71
UK	£1	2.01

POST

Dili's **post office** (Rua Presidente Nicolau Lobato; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) doesn't have poste restante. The mail service is pretty reliable.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

East Timor is not yet developed for tourism; visitors need to be mindful of the significant impact their behaviour can have on the environment and the population. The majority of East Timorese are highly religious so will appreciate travellers dressing conservatively and eschewing public displays of affection.

Formal protection for geographic areas and species is relatively new, limited, low profile and underresourced. You need to be mindful of the impact you have on the environment – there are no signs, rangers or information centres to remind you to 'do the right thing'.

TELEPHONE

If you're phoning an East Timor number from overseas, the international country code is ☎ 670. When making an international call from East Timor, the access code is ☎ 0011. There are no area codes in East Timor, and few land-line numbers outside Dili. Land-line numbers begin with 3 or 4; mobile numbers start with 7. You can make local and international calls from any Timor Telecom office.

A mobile phone is useful in East Timor. You can purchase a SIM card from **Timor Telecom** (www.timortelecom.tp) for US\$20, which includes US\$10 of credit. In Dili you will be besieged by street vendors offering cards with additional credit in many amounts. You'll soon need them as the monopoly on phone service allows Timor Telecom to charge up to US\$2 a minute for international calls.

TOURIST INFORMATION

East Timor doesn't have a tourist office. However, the expat community is especially generous with information. Drop by any of the popular bars, restaurants or dive shops and soon you'll be hooked into all sorts of info. Language differences aside, locals are also very happy to help.

TOURS

A tour can allow you to visit places not easily accessible by public transport, and a guide can bridge the language barrier. The following agencies are based in Dili.

Eco Discovery (☎ 332 2454; www.ecodiscovery-east

timor.com; Landmark Plaza, Avenida dos Martires de Patria, Dili) Manny Napoleão's knowledge of East Timor is encyclopedic. Custom tours plunge deep.

Harmonia Eco Tours (☎ 728 5611; www.timorvil.lagehotels.com; Rua Presidente Nicolau Lobato, Dili) Next to the Central Hotel and affiliated with the Timor Village Hotel, south of Ossa, Harmonia Eco Tours has multiday trips to the east and south starting from US\$100 per person per day.

Mega Tours (☎ 723 5199; timormegatours@netscape.net; Rua Presidente Nicolau Lobato, Dili) Two-day trips to Mt Ramelau are popular; they cost US\$280 for up to four people. Custom trips to places such as Jaco Island cost from US\$150 per day for up to four people.

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

There are no provisions for travellers with disabilities in East Timor. Potholed pavements makes wheelchair travel difficult.

VISAS

An entry visa (for up to 30 days) is granted to valid-passport holders for US\$30 on arrival in East Timor. To avoid hassles if plans change, always ask for a 30-day visa. Visas can be extended for US\$30 per month if the applicant has a valid reason to do so.

Many travellers visit East Timor to renew their Indonesian visas. An Indonesian visa takes three to five working days to process. A 30-day Indonesian tourist visa costs US\$45 from a consulate. A single-entry seven-day transit visa costs US\$20 and a double-entry version costs US\$40 (the latter is useful for land trips to Oecussi as you'll need a visa both to get there via Indonesia as well as leave).

VOLUNTEERING

Major volunteer organisations include **Australian Volunteers International** (www.australianvolunteers.com) and **UN Volunteers** (www.unv.org). There are scores more groups working in the country; visit the Links page at **East Timor Action Network** (www.etan.org) for a voluminous listing.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Women travellers need to be aware of personal security issues, particularly in Dili, as assault do occur. Do not walk or take taxis after dark, unless you're in a group.

Women travellers will attract less attention by wearing knee-length (or longer) clothes, and may want to cover their shoulders. Bikinis are tolerated in only a few locations, such as the popular beaches in Dili.

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