

Maluku



Welcome to the original 'spice islands'. Back in the 16th century when nutmeg, cloves and mace were global commodities that grew nowhere else, Maluku was a place where money really did 'grow on trees'. Incredibly, it was the search for Maluku's valuable spices that kick-started the whole process of European colonisation in Asia. Today spices have minimal economic clout and Maluku (formerly 'the Moluccas') has dropped out of global consciousness.

The region is protected from mass tourism by distance, unpredictable transport and memories of a brief yet tragically destructive period of intercommunal conflict (1999–2002). But peace has long since returned to this scattering of idyllic islands where the complex web of effusively welcoming cultures envelops visitors with an almost Polynesian charm. While transport can prove infuriatingly inconvenient, with flexibility and patience you can snorkel the brilliant **Bandas**, explore the beach-strewn Kei Islands, survey North Maluku's mesmerising volcano islands and explore ruined Dutch fortresses, all well within the limits of a two-month visa.

With picture-perfect desert-island beaches at backpacker prices and world-class snorkelling right in front of your guest house, this is the ideal place for travellers prepared to wind down many gears, learn Bahasa Indonesia and revel in a tropical discovery that seems almost too good to be true.

HIGHLIGHTS

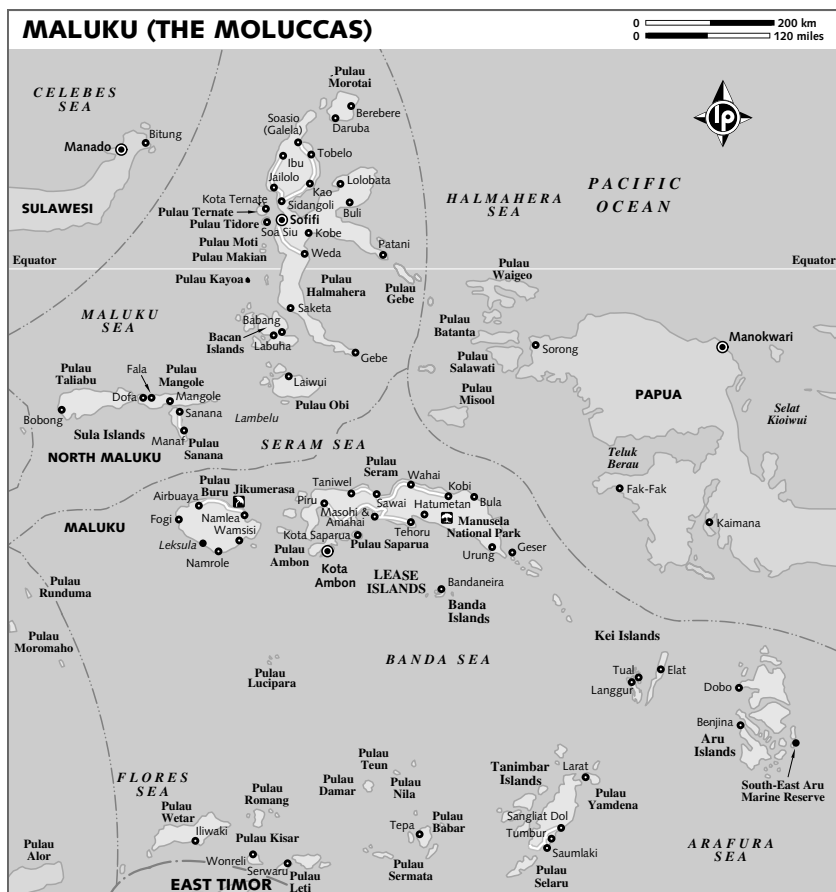
- Snorkelling some of the world's finest accessible coral gardens in the historically fascinating **Banda Islands** (p756)
- Unwinding at **Ohoidertawun** (p767) or **Pasir Panjang** (p767), two stunning yet virtually undiscovered sweeps of the purest white sand
- Dining at Floridas on **Pulau Ternate** (p733) as the sunset burnishes golden highlights onto the jungle-furred volcanic cone of neighbouring **Pulau Tidore** (p735)
- Staying at one of the offbeat getaways on **Pulau Saparua** (p751) before mainstream tourism discovers the island's white-sand beaches, friendly villages and extensive diving potential
- Discovering idyllic empty beaches and WWII remnants on the desert islands scattered around **Morotai** (p740)



■ POPULATION: 2.1 MILLION

■ LAND AREA: 85,728 SQ KM

■ HIGHEST PEAK: GUNUNG BINAYA (3027M)



HISTORY

Precolonial Times

The name Maluku probably originated as *Jazirat-al-Muluk* (Land of Many Kings). The 'kings' in question ruled Ternate, Tidore, Bacan and other Maluku 'spice islands'. Their majestic fleets of *kora-kora* war canoes policed empires that sometimes extended as far afield as Sulawesi and Papua. Their fabulous wealth came from a global monopoly of clove and other spice production. Spices preserved food in a world without refrigerators. And they complemented leeches to offer the best available medical hope against an array of medieval ailments. By the 1st century AD, Maluku spices were reaching Europe via tortuous and risky caravan routes through India

and the Persian Gulf. This made them vastly expensive. Eventually, Europeans figured out that they could save money by seeking the source of the spices for themselves.

The Portuguese

The Portuguese showed up in 1510. Their intercontinental expedition incurred awful losses of lives and ships but still managed to prove financially profitable. The Portuguese cheekily tried to reduce their costs by demanding a trade monopoly. Without any intention to respect such terms, Ternate's sultan agreed to a Portuguese clove monopoly in return for help against arch-enemy Tidore. Tidore responded by enlisting Spanish military assistance. Consistently committing cultural

blunders, the Europeans soon outstayed their welcome and, having failed to monopolise the local clove trade, the Portuguese 'retired' south to trade from Ambon, Seram and the Banda Islands after 1795.

The Dutch

In the late 16th century the Dutch arrived with faster boats, better guns and greater financial backing. Their better-built ships could use direct sea routes from South Africa that trumped their Hispanic competitors who stuck to slower, seasonal coastal routes via India. While seeing off new English rivals, the Dutch repeated many of the same cultural faux pas that had brought down the Portuguese. However, their determination to control a spice monopoly was brutally enforced. Most infamously, in the Banda Islands uncooperative islanders were simply massacred and replaced by more compliant Dutch-owned slaves.

Subjugating Ternate and Ambon took longer but, by the 1660s, the Dutch had wiped out all local opposition and had evicted the last Spanish garrisons from Ternate and Tidore. For a century the spice monopoly made a fortune for Holland. However, without competition the operation became increasingly inefficient. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) eventually collapsed into bankruptcy in 1795 and was nationalised. A year later, with Holland suffering the aftermath of the French Revolution, the British occupied Maluku. Politically this was a short episode, but commercially it spelt disaster. The British smuggled out precious spice-tree seedlings, replanting them in Malaya (Malaysia) and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Thus within a few short decades Maluku's once unique spices were being produced more cheaply elsewhere. As the spice trade declined, many Christian Ambonese and Kei Islanders found themselves new employment in the Royal Netherlands Indies Army (KNIL), where they became respected as loyal fighters.

WWII & Independence

Maluku's remoteness meant it was used as an open prison for independence activists Hatta and Syahrir who remained on Bandaneira until 23 February 1942, just minutes before Japanese bombardments began. Japan controlled the archipelago until General MacArthur's allied counterattacks of 1944, though the last

Japanese soldier on Morotai (see p740) only finally surrendered in 1973!

After WWII it soon became apparent that Indonesia was heading for independence as a unified, predominantly Muslim, Javanese-controlled republic. Predominantly Christian southern Maluku panicked and tried to break away in 1950 by proclaiming the Republik Maluku Selatan (RMS). Indonesian republican troops steadily retook the islands and by November the RMS 'government' had fled Ambon. However, in the Seram jungles, armed RMS opposition rumbled on until the mid-1960s.

During the independence tussles, several thousand Malukan KNIL troops in Java had stayed loyal to the Dutch. Once the Dutch accepted Indonesian independence, these soldiers were in an awkward position: as RMS sympathisers they feared reprisals, so some 12,000 Malukans were resettled in the Netherlands where today around 40,000 of their descendants remain. The dream of an independent 'South Moluccas' lived on in the Netherlands, culminating in two Maluku-related train hijacks there in the mid-1970s. After that there was negligible RMS activity...at least until 1999.

The Troubles

In 1999 Indonesia's economy was in tatters, elements of the army were disaffected and the unexpected breakaway of East Timor may have rekindled the hopes of RMS agitators. Just at this tense time, Maluku was to be split into two separate provinces, each with augmented regional powers. Especially in Ambon, where the Muslim-Christian ratio was finely balanced, each religious community could see the political benefits of frightening away members of the other. Although Malukan society had long been a model of peaceful Christian-Muslim coexistence, intercommunal squabbles turned to riots and full-blown massacres. To avenge an infamous mass killing of Muslims in Tobelo, a fundamentalist Islamic group called Laskar Jihad shipped around 3000 jihadis from Java in April 2000, racking up tensions even higher. Churches, mosques and whole villages were torched with thousands displaced or left homeless. Tempers began to cool with the February 2002 Malino II Accord and especially in October when Laskar Jihad suddenly disbanded and left Ambon, probably

thanks to American pressure on Indonesia following the New York terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001.

Maluku Today

Apart from a few 2004 riots in Kota Ambon, recovery was remarkably swift. With the dust settled, locals wonder how they had ever been duped into the destructive spiral, most blaming outside *agents provocateurs* for stirring up the bloodbath. Today all is peaceful while many local economies are receiving significant boosts from the upgrading of *kecamatan* (subdistricts) to *kabupaten* (regencies). Such seemingly minor semantic differences result in a cascade of new building projects, infrastructure improvements and bureaucratic jobs.

CULTURE

Maluku's people have very mixed blood. To Malay and Melanesian precursors have been added Indian, Arab, Chinese and Portuguese genes, with more recent additions of Bugis (from Sulawesi seafarers) and Javanese (from transmigrants). Melanesian features are strongest on the Kei and Aru Islands. Although there are still traditional communities of Nua-ulu (Seram) and Togutil (Halmahera), don't expect Papua-style tribal garb: Malukuans, especially in Ambon, see themselves as one of the most Westernised groups in Indonesia. But a great diversity remains. Incredibly, the region has over 130 distinct traditional languages, many now used in blended pidgin forms with additions from Bahasa Indonesia. Muslims are more numerous in most of North Maluku. Christians form majorities in several central and southern areas.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Ambon and Ternate are the region's air hubs. Both have several daily connections to Jakarta, mostly via Makassar or Manado (Sulawesi). There are several connections from Ambon to Papua but only one weekly flight to Nusa Tenggara, Merpati's heavily booked Ambon-Kisar-Kupang run.

Sea

Four Pelni liners visit Ambon on bi-weekly cycles from Bau Bau (southeast Sulawesi, 12 hours), Makassar (31 to 36 hours), Surabaya (60 to 68 hours) and/or Jakarta (Tanjung

TOP BUDGET CHILLOUTS

Watch the waves and unwind at these delightful yet very inexpensive little Maluku retreats:

- Savana Cottages, Ohoidertawun, Kei Islands (p767)
- Vita Guest House, Bandaneira, Banda Islands (p760)
- Peningapan Lisar Bahari, Sawai, Seram (p756)
- Peningapan Benteng Duurstede, Kota Saparua, Lease Islands (p751)
- Hotel Harapan Indah, Saumlaki, Tanimbar Islands (p769)
- Molana Bungalows, Pulau Molana, Lease Islands (p752)

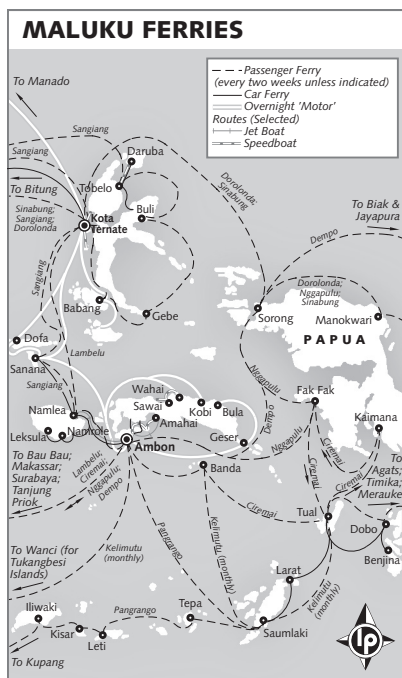
Priok; four days). Newest and fastest is *Dempo*, which bypasses Bau Bau. *Ciremai* handily continues east via the Banda and Kei Islands. Along with the *Nggapulu*, these three ships continue on to various ports in Papua. The *Lambelu* instead swings north via Buru and Ternate to terminate in Bitung (northern Sulawesi). *Sinabung* and *Dorolonda* both stop in Ternate between Bitung and Sorong. The *Pangrango* links Kupang to Ambon using a thrillingly offbeat loop via Saumlaki, Tapa, Leti and Kisar. Slower *Kelimutu* makes only monthly loops, is infamously variable and often claustrophobically crowded.

Non-Pelni vehicular ferries and/or slow *kapal motor* (wooden boats) from Sulawesi (mostly Bitung or Manado) run to Ternate, Tobelo (Halmahera) and the Sula Islands.

GETTING AROUND

Air

Merpati and Trigana Air operate numerous regional flights. However, with only four aging little prop-planes between them, engine trouble, bad weather or one-off charters can and will throw out the schedules for days. Annoyingly, Merpati only sells one-way tickets booked from the departure point, making return trips hit and miss. Smaller planes have 10kg baggage limits. Pelita (Ternate-Sanana-Ambon), Express Air (Ambon-Saumlaki-Langgur) and Wings (Ambon-Langgur) all advertise intra-Maluku flights but as yet only the Wings flight actually operates.



many areas have only mud tracks or no roads at all. On most islands shorter routes are operated by bemo (minibus), known locally as *mobil*. On Halmahera and Seram, pricey shared Kijangs (fancy seven-seater Toyotas) are more common than long-distance buses. Renting an *ojek* (motorbike taxi) is a pleasant, inexpensive way to travel if the rain holds off.

NORTH MALUKU

Although dwarfed by crazy K-shaped Pulau Halmahera, North Maluku's historically and politically most significant islands are the string of pyramidal volcanic cones off Halmahera's western coast. Ternate, Tidore and Bacan are ancient Islamic sultanates that were once the world's only sources of cloves. Nowadays cloves may seem trivial additions to mulled wine or *kretek* cigarettes. But in the Middle Ages they were enormously valuable as food preservatives and were considered cures for everything from toothache to halitosis to sexual disinterest. Funded by the spice trade, Ternate's and Tidore's sultans became the most powerful rulers in the medieval Indies but wasted much of their wealth fighting each other.

In 1511 the first Portuguese settlers arrived in Ternate. Tidore quickly responded by inviting in the Spaniards. Both islands found their hospitality rapidly exhausted as the Europeans tried to corner the spice market and preach Christianity. Ternate's Muslim population, already offended by the Europeans' imported pigs and heavy-handed 'justice', were driven to rebel in 1570 when Ternate's Sultan Hairun (Khairun) was executed and his head exhibited on a pike. The besieged Portuguese held out in their castle until 1575 when the new Ternatean sultan took it over as his palace. Five years later he entertained the English pirate-adventurer Francis Drake. After an amicable meeting, Drake astounded his host by his almost total disinterest in buying cloves. In fact, Drake's ship *Golden Hind* was already so full of stolen Spanish-American gold that he simply couldn't carry anything more.

The Spaniards and later the Dutch made themselves equally unpopular. In a history that's as fascinating as it is complicated and Machiavellian, they played Ternate off against Tidore and also confronted one another for control of an elusive clove monopoly. The Dutch prevailed eventually, though the sul-

Boat

Pelni services *within* Maluku are patchy and notoriously changeable. Some medium-range hops are served by uncomfortable ASDP ferries or by wooden boats known as *kapal motor*. The latter have limited wooden-board 'bed' spaces, but you may need to arrive several hours before departure to grab one. Perintis cargo boats are bigger but not at all designed with passengers in mind. Bring waterproofs. Speedboats link nearby islands and roadless villages. Locals use very specific terms for boat types: if there isn't a *spid* (covered multi-engine speedboat) to your destination, there might still be a *Johnson* (outboard-powered longboat) or a *ketinting/lape-lape* (smaller, short-hop motorised outrigger canoe). Regular speedboats often depart very early in the morning when seas are calmest. If chartering, smaller or diesel-powered speedboats will be slower but significantly cheaper than multi-engined petrol ones.

Road Transport

In mountainous Maluku, the few asphalted roads are often potholed and narrow while

tanates continued almost uninterrupted for most of the period and remain well-respected institutions to this day.

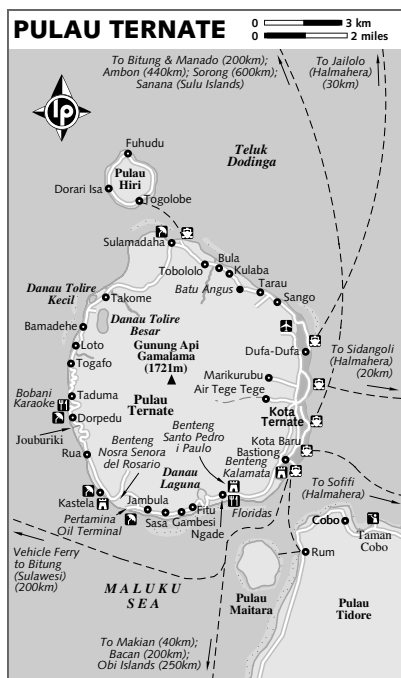
Today Ternate remains the main hub of North Maluku (Malut), though in 2007 Sofifi on Halmahera was named the province's official capital. The full move is still incomplete while construction of new offices continues in Sofifi.

Few islands in North Maluku have any real history of tourism, so visits beyond Ternate will often prove to be something of an adventure.

PULAU TERNATE

☎ 0921

The dramatic volcanic cone of 1721m Gunung Api Gamalama is Pulau Ternate. Settlements are sprinkled around its lower coastal slopes with villages on the east coast coalescing into North Maluku's biggest town, Kota Ternate. The city makes a useful transport gateway for the region and neighbouring volcanic islands look particularly photogenic viewed from the few remnant stilt-house neighbourhoods, harbours full of colourful boats or hillside restaurant terraces.



Kota Ternate

pop 106,000

Stretching around 10km from the airport to beyond Bastiong port, Kota Ternate's main north-south through-road has multiple names: Jl Sultan Khairun, Jl Merdeka, Jl Monotonu, Jl Hasan Esa and eventually Jl Raya Bastiong. The main commercial centres are Jl Pattimura and Jl Pahlawan Revolusi culminating at the Swering waterfront promenade. Jatiland is a middle-class suburb where virtually every road is called Jl Jati but confusingly the Jati Mall (under construction) and Jatiland BS (a long-terraced 'Bisnes Senter' of new shops) are on a central waterfront land-reclamation area. Jl Nuri was recently renamed Jl Alfred Wallace.

INFORMATION

Internet Access

D@gimoi (Map p732; Jl Sultan Khairun; internet/wi-fi per hr 8000/13,000Rp; ☎ 8am-midnight) Passable connection indoors, attractive outdoor garden-cafe for wi-fi use.

Muara CafeNet (Map p732; Jl Pahlawan Revolusi; per hr 7000Rp; ☎ 9am-midnight) OK connection, but sweaty; above the Muara Hotel lobby.

One-Net (Map p732; Jl Pattimura; per hr 7000Rp;

☎ 10am-midnight; ☎) Connection variable to poor; air-con could be stronger.

Money

Several banks on Jl Pahlawan Revolusi have ATMs but only **BNI** (Bank Negara Indonesia; Map p732; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Thu, 8am-noon Fri) changes money, and then only US dollars in new, unfolded \$100 bills!

Telephone

Plasa Telkom (Map p732; Jl Pattimura & Jl Pahlawan Revolusi;

☎ 8am-6pm)

Tourist Information

Aketajawe-Lolobata National Park Office (Map p730; ☎ 0852 4003 7036; aketajawe@gmail.com; Airport Rd; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) Good source of information if planning forest trips or bird-watching on Halmahera. Dani and O-on speak English.

North Maluku Tourist Office (Map p732; ☎ 312 7396; www.malukuutarprov.go.id; Jl Kamboja 14; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) Helpful English-speaking staff can answer questions, organise guides and even have a compressor and some full-set diving equipment for rent to scuba fans (450,000Rp per person per dive).

Ternate City Tourist Office (Map p732; ☎ 311 1211; Benteng Oranye; ☎ 8am-2.30pm Mon-Fri) Friendly staff, some speaking English but information is limited.

then the empty, remnant shells have been heavy-handedly over-renovated.

The biggest, most central but least complete is the 1606 **Benteng Oranye** (Map p732; originally Fort Malayo), once headquarters of the Dutch VOC operation and later the residence of Ternate's Dutch governors. Today you can wander some sections of cannon-topped bastion accessed through a hefty, restored gateway arch.

Dinky little **Benteng Tolukko** (Map p730; 10,000Rp donation appropriate), the first Portuguese stronghold on Ternate (1512), has beautifully manicured floral gardens and attractive sea views. The family living beside the entrance keeps the key.

The 1540 **Benteng Kalamata** has an unusual waterside location 1km southwest of Bastiong, waves lapping right up to its angled walls. There are great views across to Tidore. Take Rua, Sasa or Jambula bemos.

Religious Buildings

With an eye-catching dome covered in stylised Arabic calligraphy (the repeating name of Allah), the new **Masjid Al Munawwah** (Map p732) is so vast that it overshoots its new land-reclamation site with outer minarets rising directly out of the sea. Dozens more mosques attractively pimple the skyline, several churches have been rebuilt and there's a colourful 2007 **Chinese temple** (Map p732) replete with gaudy rearing dragons.

SLEEPING

You'll probably value a powerful new air conditioner given Ternate's oppressive heat and sauna-like humidity.

Budget

Accommodation under 150,000Rp is plentiful around Ahmad Yani Port but conditions are often abysmal. Although there are a few exceptions, even the nicest cheapies often have

damp patches, a slimy *mandi* (a large water tank from which water is ladled over the body) and a hint of dysfunction.

Penginapan Purnama (Map p732; ☎ 312 4649; Mohajarin Falajawa; s/d/tr 50,000/100,000/150,000Rp) In a modest family home full of old Chinese porcelain, four bare guestrooms without fan share concrete outside *mandis*.

Hotel Pantai Indah (Sulamadaha; d 50,000Rp) A 20-minute drive from town, this homestay-style place lies behind a motorbike repair shop, 50m from the beach at Sulamadaha (p734). The five simple fan rooms have private *mandi* attached. Bring mosquito repellent.

Penginapan Kembar Emas (Map p730; ☎ 311 0750; Jl Feri, Bastiong; r without/with bathroom 60,000/70,000Rp) Rooms are a little grubby but very handy if you're leaving on an early boat from Bastiong. Oddly, access required crossing a wall.

Hotel Indah (Map p732; ☎ 312 1334; Jl Bosoiro 3; s/tw with fan 66,000/77,000Rp, with air-con 93,500/110,000Rp, with hot water 137,500/154,000Rp; 🚽) Modest old-style *penginapan* (simple lodging house) with a little garden area and quaintly dated sitting room.

Saqavia Guest House (Map p732; ☎ 311 1147; Mohajarin Falajawa; s/d 110,000/165,000Rp; 🚽) Not exotic, new air-con rooms are fair value if the custard-yellow paintwork doesn't turn your tummy.

Taman Ria (☎ 322 2124; d with fan/air-con 125,000/165,000Rp) Set back behind an under-construction waterfront menagerie-zoo, 700m beyond Benteng Kalamata, most rooms are new and well appointed but fan rooms over-heat and a handful of older cheapies (double 75,000Rp) are very sad.

Midrange

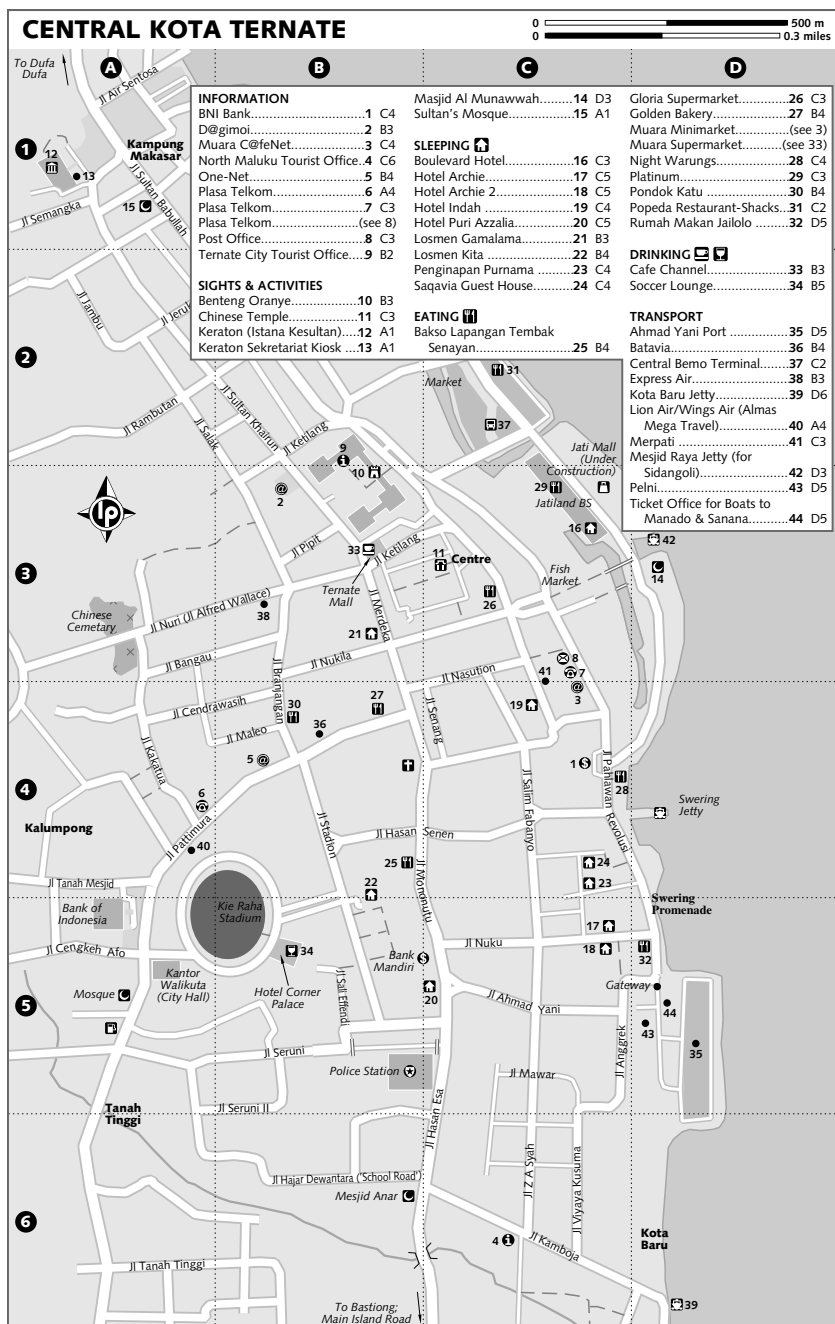
Several hotels including the Corner Palace, Nirwana and Zhavitry look great from the outside but are disappointing within, often lacking windows in all but the priciest rooms. The great-value Tiara doesn't take foreigners.

Losmen Gamalama (Map p732; ☎ 312 5943; Jl Merdeka; s/d 200,000/250,000Rp; 🚽) Eight fresh new rooms around an interior courtyard, one floor above an attractive Japanese-styled water feature and prayer area.

Losmen Kita (Map p732; ☎ 312 1950; Jl Stadion; tw with cold/hot showers 200,000/250,000Rp; 🚽) Rambling low-rise bed factory with nearly 50 clean but bland rooms around a tree-shaded car park.

HELLO MISTER

Few places in Indonesia have so many ultra-keen English-language students desperate to help tourists in return for conversation practice. They pop up everywhere. This can result in delightful friendships or infuriating feelings of being pestered, depending on your outlook and good fortune.



Bukit Pelangi Hotel (Map p730; ☎ 312 2180; Jl Jati Selatan 338; d 210,000-299,000Rp, ste 325,000Rp; 🍷) The old building rises amid palms like a colonial palace, though rooms here are variable: look at a few and avoid the cheap back ones (145,000Rp). The appealing new building has a stylish, Escheresque feel and upstairs is wonderfully airy with fine balcony spaces overlooking Tidore. Suites are especially recommended.

Boulevard Hotel (Map p732; ☎ 311 0777; Jatiland BS; standard/business/deluxe/view 256,450/302,450/325,450/350,450Rp; 🍷) After the inviting exterior and Klimt-dominated lobby, most rooms are disappointingly windowless and generic. 'View' rooms (3rd floor, no lift) are altogether more appealing.

Hotel Archie (Map p732; ☎ 311 0555; Jl Nuku 6; d/ste 286,000/357,500Rp; 🍷) Vastly better than most equivalently priced competitors, Archie has English-speaking staff, immaculately kept rooms with hot water, fancy ceiling mouldings, multichannel TV, toilet paper, minibar and several 'secret' sitting spaces. Rooms in swish Archie 2 across the road are brand new with curious theatrical columns in front of the bathtubs.

our pick Hotel Puri Azzalia (Map p732; ☎ 312 1959; puri.azzalia@yahoo.com; Jl Mononutu 275; d/ste 308,000/396,000Rp; 🍷) Behind a stylish 50s-retro facade, this charming little boutique hotel is tastefully appointed with local artefacts, hung fabrics and fresh orchids.

Top End

Amara Hotel (Map p730; ☎ 312 1800; www.belainternationalhotel.com, www.amarahotels.com; Jl Jati Raya; d rack/walk-in rates from 1,000,000/550,000Rp; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Far and away Ternate's most luxurious option, the Amara has 195 immaculate, gently fashionable rooms in coffee-and-cream colours, all with balconies and views. Even the cheapest one is spacious and equipped to international standards. 'Executive' rooms (1,250,000/687,500Rp) add bathtub and free wi-fi. 'Cabana' rooms (1,300,000/715,000Rp) have direct access to the vast central swimming pool in which lie 'islands' of palm trees.

EATING

Rumah makan (eating houses) offer cheap eats around the markets with several shacks north of the bemo terminal serving local specialities *ikan gohu* (raw-fish morsels in a tangy peanut-edged marinade) and *popeda*

(Malukan sago) as part of 20,000Rp all-you-can-eat spreads including fish, cassava and a dozen other side dishes.

Numerous warungs (food stalls) appear at night on the Swering promenade (Jl Pahlawan Revolusi). A couple of unmarked eateries in Bastion Harbour sporadically produce superb roast fish (from 12,000Rp with rice) that's arguably better than anything at the city's far more expensive seafood restaurants.

Rumah Makan Jailolo (Map p732; Jl Pahlawan Revolusi 7; meals from 13,000Rp; ☎ 7am-9.30pm) Bright, reliable place for inexpensive point-and-pick meals.

Bakso Lapangan Tembak Senayan (Map p732; Jl Mononutu; meals 19,250-41,000Rp, juices 14,500Rp; ☎ 10am-10pm) The new-meets-old architecture keeps you cool without air-con and attracts an unpretentious middle-class crowd for snacks, meals and drinks.

Pondok Katu (Map p732; ☎ 312 7332; Jl Branjanan 28; mains 25,000-37,000Rp; ☎ 10am-10pm; 🍷) This long-lasting family favourite serves seafood lunches and good Chinese food in a gently attractive columned dining hall.

our pick Floridas (☎ 321 4430; meals 20,000-45,000Rp, crab meals 250,000Rp, drinks 6000-20,000Rp; ☎ 10am-11pm) A 10,000Rp *ojek* ride southwest of town, Floridas sits high above a steep slope of banana trees that twinkle at night with fireflies. Behind the main dining hall, ledge tables provide splendid bay views across to the superimposed volcanic cones of Tidore and Maitara. Try the delicious *ikan woku kenari*, fish steak (not boneless!) marinated in a mildly spicy sauce of kenari almonds, sweet chilli and lemongrass, then roasted in a banana leaf.

Platinum (Map p732; ☎ 312 2820; Jatiland BS; mains 38,000-155,000Rp, juices 16,500Rp, rice 6000Rp; ☎ 11am-midnight; 🍷) Maluku's hippest Western-style cafe-restaurant has a trendy retro interior from which you can watch chefs at work through a giant glass window. A very wide-ranging multilingual menu includes pastas (49,000Rp), steaks (111,000Rp to 155,000Rp) and numerous Indonesian favourites.

Supermarkets include **Gloria** (Map p732; Jl Bosoiri) and **Muara** (Map p732; Jl Pahlawan Revolusi & Ternate Mall). **Golden Bakery** (Map p732; Jl Pattimura; ☎ 9am-10pm) bakes a fine selection of fresh bread and pastries.

DRINKING

In Ternate alcohol isn't sold in restaurants and is fiercely expensive in karaoke bars (beer from 60,000/160,000Rp per bottle/pitcher).

The Soccer Lounge (Map p732; Corner Palace Hotel; Jl Stadion; beer 60,000Rp) This bar's once fine decor is looking seriously worn, but its large windows overlook the Kie Raha Stadium, so when Ternate's major-league football team Persiter is playing at home, you could watch beer-in-hand from here without risking heatstroke in the overcrowded, unshaded stands.

Cafe Channel (Map p732; Ternate Mall, Jl Merdeka; coffees & juices 11,000-14,300Rp; ☎ 8am-10pm; ♿) Good if pre-sweetened coffee is misnamed 'espresso' at this attractive cafe with ball lamps, black and tangerine furniture and an open roadside terrace section.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Lion Air/Wings Air (Map p732; Almas Mega Travel; ☎ 311 1555; Jl Pattimura; ✈ 8am-8pm) flies three times daily to Manado with connections to Makassar, Jakarta and Surabaya. For Jakarta via Makassar, **Batavia** (Map p732; ☎ 312 2799; Jl Pattimura; ✈ 8am-6pm & 8pm-10pm) flies daily, and **Express Air** (Map p732; ☎ 312 2846; Jl Nuri/Jl Alfred Wallace; ✈ 9am-6pm) four times weekly. **Merpati** (Map p732; ☎ 312 1651; Jl Bosoi; ✈ 8am-4pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon Sun) flies daily to Makassar, twice weekly to Galela and Gebe, and weekly to Morotai (Friday), Fala (Wednesday) and Sanana (Tuesday via Labuha, Bacan).

Trigana Air (Map p730; Archie Travel; ☎ 312 8484; Jl Raya Bastiong; ✈ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) flies three times weekly Ternate-Sanana-Ambon-Tual, Ternate-Manado and Ternate-Buli.

Boat

Ahmad Yani port is the passenger harbour for **Pelni** (Map p732; ☎ 312 1434; ✈ 8am-4pm Mon-Sat) liners. *Sangiang* loops around Halmahera. Eastbound *Dorolonda* and *Sinabung* head to Sorong (183,000Rp, 14 to 16 hours) and other Papuan ports. Westbound ones both go to Bitung (northern Sulawesi; 135,000Rp, seven hours), *Sinabung* continuing to Bau Bau via Banggai (24 hours), *Dorolonda* proceeding to Balikpapan (47 hours) via Pantoloan near Palu, Sulawesi. *Lambelu* links Ternate with Ambon (155,000Rp, 19 hours) via Namlea (Buru; 137,500Rp).

Non-Pelni boats *RM Theodora/Intim Teratai* both sail from here to Manado (165,000Rp, 21 hours) on Friday/Sunday and to Sanana (Sula Islands, 260,000Rp, 16 hours) at 2pm on Tuesday/Thursday.

Other jetties:

Bastiong ferry port (Map p730) Vehicle ferries daily to Rum (Tidore; 5000Rp, 7am, 1pm, 4pm), Sidangoli (9am),

three times weekly to Sofifi and overnight to Bitung (Sulawesi; 75,000Rp, 11pm Saturday).

Bastiong 'first' port (Map p730) Speedboats to Rum (Tidore; 8000Rp), Gurapin (Kayoa; 80,000Rp, 5am three times weekly) and Makian (50,000Rp, 5am daily). Boats to Babang (Bacan; 100,000Rp, 7pm), Lelei (8am, three times weekly), Obi and western Halmahera.

Dufa-Dufa jetty (Map p730) To Jailolo (Halmahera) by speedboat (38,000Rp, one hour) or 2pm *kapal motor* (27,000Rp, 1½ hours, returns 8am).

Kota Baru jetty (Map p732) Speedboats to Sofifi (Halmahera, 30,000Rp to 50,000Rp).

Mesjid Raya jetty (Map p732) Speedboats to Sidangoli (Halmahera, 28,000Rp).

GETTING AROUND

For the 6km from Babullah Airport to central Ternate taxis want an outrageous 50,000Rp, but if you walk 10 minutes south, bemos from outside Hairun University cost only 3000Rp to the central market. From there bemos run in all directions (3000Rp) but *ojeks* (4000Rp per hop) are generally more convenient.

Gunung Api Gamalama

Ternate's central volcano erupted in 1840, destroying almost every house on the island. Although it has blown its fiery nose as recently as 2003, it is not considered imminently dangerous. A vulcanology unit keeps careful watch from Marikurubu village, where traditionally anyone planning the five-hour climb to Gamalama's summit (steep, hazardous and foolish without a guide) should seek the blessing of the *kepala adat*. There are pleasant, shorter clove-grove hikes from Air Tege Tege village (near the transmitter tower), but even here the going rapidly gets very steep. The tourist offices can help you find guides.

Outside Kota Ternate

This section works anticlockwise, leaving Kota Ternate via **Batu Angus**. That's a spiky 300-year-old lava flow, not a type of steak. At the top of the island, **Sulamadhaha** has a popular if somewhat litter-strewn black-sand beach with heavy swells. From a cove some 800m east, public longboats (5000Rp per person) cross to the offshore volcanic cone of **Pulau Hiri** around 8am, 1pm and 5pm each way. Hiri was the last step of the sultan's family's *Sound of Music*-style escape from Ternate during WWII. Northern Hiri has relatively good snorkelling by Ternate standards.

Beyond the village of **Takome**, the main road returns to the coast beside the small, muddy Danau Tolire Kecil. Less than a kilometre further, a paved side lane (2000Rp fee) climbs to the rim of **Danau Tolire Besar**. Startlingly sheer cliffs plummet down to the lugubriously green, crocodile-infested waters of this deep crater lake. Local children offer guide services should you want to descend yourself (1½ hours return on foot).

A footpath from the southern edge of Dorpedu leads down to **Jouburiki**, the beach where Ternate's very first sultan was supposedly crowned in 1257. More picturesquely black-sand beaches are found at **Rua** and **Kastela**. The latter village is named for the 1522 Portuguese fort of **Benteng Nosra Senora del Rosario**, whose ruins have been partially renovated. Topped with a giant clove, a concrete monument here graphically reminds you that the Portuguese murdered Sultan Hairun in 1570, then got their comeuppance five years later.

Danau Laguna is a pleasant, spring-fed bowl-lake with a lushly forested perimeter. Across the straits lie the conical islands of Tidore and Maitara as featured on Indonesia's 1000Rp notes. Those volcanoes align perfectly when viewed from the Floridas restaurant (p733) just beyond Ngade. Across the road are only the stubby roadside remnants of **Benteng Santo Pedro i Paulo**, once Ternate's main line of defence against a 1606 Spanish attack.

GETTING AROUND

From Kota Ternate's central terminal, bemos run frequently to Sulamadaha (5000Rp, anti-clockwise) and Kastela (4000Rp, clockwise). No single bemo goes right around the island but some north-route vehicles drive as far as Togafo (6000Rp). From there it's a pleasantly windy 2km walk to Taduma, where the longest south-route bemos start. Consider chartering an *ojek* to loop around the island with photo stops (around 30,000Rp per hour).

PULAU TIDORE

☎ 0921

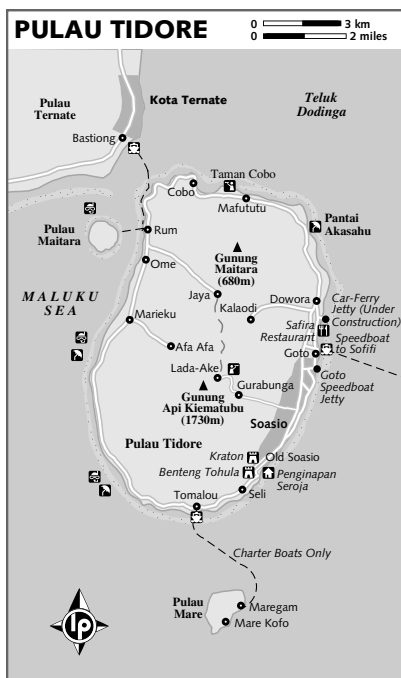
Gently, charming Tidore makes a refreshing day-trip escape from the bustle of Ternate, its neighbour and implacable historical enemy. An independent Islamic sultanate from 1109, Tidore's sultanate was abolished in the Sukarno era but the 36th sultan was reinstated in 1999. The island's proud volcanic profile looks especially magnificent

when viewed from Bastiong on Ternate. In Tidorean language *sukur dofu* means 'thank you', *saki* means 'delicious' and *sterek (lau)* means '(very) good'.

Soasio

Above the southernmost edge of Tidore's capital, Soasio, lie the sparse, overgrown remnants of **Benteng Tohula**, Tidore's 17th-century Spanish fort. Around 200m north the **Sonyine Malige Sultan's Memorial Museum** displays the sultan's sedan chair and giant spittoons, plus the royal crown topped with cassowary feathers. The crown is considered as magical as Ternate's *mahkota* (see p730). Getting in, you'll have to find the curator, Umar Muhammad, who works at the DIKNAS office in the Dinas Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan building, 2km north. Outside office hours try his home in Gamatufgange. Umar has been known to demand rather hefty entry fees of up to 100,000Rp.

A block inland from the museum, sturdy whitewashed base bastions are all that remains of the original **kraton** royal citadel (Istana Sultan) which now contains an unfinished contemporary palace-villa with a garish blue roof.



Lada-Ake

High up a disconcertingly steep road, Lada-Ake village retains a few traditional homes made of split bamboo set on mossy dry-stone bases. Curious *guwige* basket poles offer nests to chickens. Many women still use traditional *saloi* (conical back baskets) when foraging in the surrounding lush forest. Glimpses of Ternate are an inspiring view from the approach road from Gurabunga. *Ojeks* cost 50,000Rp for a return trip from Goto. Rare bemos charge 12,000Rp each way.

Around Tidore

Most other Tidorean villages are simply strips of homes on either side of the round-island coast road. None of these are outstanding, though several have small ribbons of beach. **Pantai Akasahu** is typically underwhelming but popular for its grubby little hot-spring pool. From here the quiet road to **Rum** is attractive, with fine views over Ternate. A three-minute speedboat hop from Rum, **Pulau Maitara** has clear blue waters for better snorkelling and swimming. **Pulau Mare** is famed for its attractive, no-frills pottery.

Sleeping & Eating

Tidore's easy to visit as a day trip from Ternate but Soasio has a few small *penginapan*.

Penginapan Seroja (☎ 316 1456; Jl Sultan Hassanuddin; s/tw 75,000/150,000Rp; 🍴) Decked with flowers, this attractive waterside family house-hotel lies 50m south of the museum in old Soasio. Its air-con twin rooms are decently appointed but windowless. Singles with fan are extremely basic but enjoy little sitting areas overlooking the water across a lovely little orchid garden.

Safira Restaurant (☎ 0813 4017 9499; mains 12,000-30,000Rp; 🍴 7am-9pm Mon-Sat) This waterside house-restaurant serves limited food but is ideal for sipping 9000Rp fresh juices at sit-on-floor garden pavilions serenaded by waves amid colourful bougainvillea. It's around 1km north of the Goto market, Tidore's most extensive.

Getting There & Around

Very frequent 12-seater speedboats depart until dusk (8000Rp, seven minutes) from Ternate's Bastiong 'first' port arriving at Rum. There are also Bastiong-Rum car ferries (5000Rp, three times daily) and a Goto-Sofifi ferry is planned from a new dock near Dowora. Goto-Sofifi speedboats (30,000Rp) mostly leave Goto before 9am and return around 2pm.

Frequent bemos run Rum-Soasio-Goto (9000Rp, 30 minutes) using the south-coast road. No bemos use the quiet Rum-Mafututu route but that pretty road is now asphalted. Rum-Goto *ojeks* cost 40,000Rp.

SOUTH OF TIDORE

Makian

Spiky-topped **Pulau Makian** is an impressive, 1357m volcano with a photogenically huge gash in the cone's northern flank. Its rare eruptions killed over 2000 people in 1760 and caused a full-scale temporary evacuation in 1988.

Lelei

West of low-slung **Pulau Kayoa**, the **Guraci** group is a sprinkling of small, low, palm islands. Here the idyllically peaceful little two-village island **Pulau Lelei** is touted somewhat misleadingly as a dive resort. There's certainly a remarkable wealth of colourful reef fish just off Lelei's northern village, and a 100,000Rp boat ride away Pulau Rajawali offers a good chance of getting personal with large rays (especially on full- and new-moon days). However, the islands' gently sloped coral gardens have received a pretty severe battering. **Diving** (dives incl boat & equipment 450,000Rp) using good new scuba gear is available only when the helpful organiser, **Mr Tamrin** (☎ 0852 4064 2284; Desun Satu), is in residence, but there's no real dive master. Lelei's 12 beautifully designed, three-room Minahasan-style **beach villas** (d 150,000Rp) have large sitting rooms and great balconies, but cleaning is haphazard, there's no restaurant and there's little hope of electricity when you're the only guest. Arachnophobes, beware. Mr Tamrin's family keep the villa keys, provide **meals** (breakfast/dinner 10,000/30,000Rp), free snorkel rental and alternative homestay rooms (50,000Rp).

Cramped slow boats **KM Rahmat Ilahi** or **SS Bajoi** depart Bastiong at 8am on Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, stopping at a string of remote islands including Lelei (65,000Rp, seven hours). On return they pick up from Lelei around 10am two days later. Alternatively, charter Mr Tamrin's speedboat (350,000Rp) to Gurapin (Pulau Kayoa), where there's a *penginapan*, a Wednesday morning boat to Bacan (returns Thursday) and a 5am speedboat to Ternate (Monday, Wednesday and Saturday).

RUMAH ADAT & BAILEU

Known as *baileu* in Ambon and the Lease Islands (which also have fine examples), *rumah adat* are airy open-sided thatched structures doubling as village meeting places and general hang-outs. Some even have a communal TV. Many were burnt during the 1999–2002 troubles and others have been tastelessly modernised. However, those in several Christian villages north of Jailolo remain original, some dating from the villages' foundation (eg 1910 at Lolori). Several Jailolo-area *rumah adat* display a pair of *sasadu*, hairy balls hung from palm pennants at the end of an elongated apex beam. Rather than crude innuendo, their intended symbolism is as the 'feet' (representing stability) of the community. Tucked away into the palm-woven beams you may spot a *sie-sie* (bamboo pipe-cup) used for quaffing distilled palm wine on special occasions.

Facing the market, five minutes' walk from Jailolo's main jetty, is the simple but homely **Penginapan Jailolo** (☎ 222 1022; s/d 75,000/150,000Rp). Very close by, **Penginapan Camar** (☎ 222 1100; Jl Gufasa; r 75,000–200,000Rp; ♿) has fully refurbished, mostly air-con rooms sharing a lovely rear sitting area that surveys the bay, mangroves and jetty. Newer and outwardly plusher, the boxy **Hotel d'Hoek** (☎ 222 1200; Jl Hatebicara; d 300,000–650,000Rp; ♿) has less charm and is inconveniently located 3km out of centre near the Marimbati junction.

Hole-in-the-wall eateries in the market serve superb *nasi ikan* (fish with rice) at 11,000Rp. Large speedboats to Dufa Dufa (Ternate; 38,000Rp, one hour) typically take an hour or so to fill up. The last departure is around 5pm.

Around Jailolo

A very pleasant 12km *ojek* excursion takes you to **Marimbati**, set on a long black-sand beach (beware of currents if swimming). En route the floral villages of **Hoku Hoku**, **Taboso**, **Lolori** and **Gamtala** each maintain their own traditionally thatched *rumah adat* meeting hall (see boxed text, above). Those speaking OK Bahasa Indonesia (or Dutch) might gain an audience with the present sultan who lives 1.6km north of Marimbati village. Reached by entirely different road via Akelamo, **Susupu** is a picturesque volcano-backed village at the far-northern end of Marimbati beach.

Sofifi

For most travellers this small market village is just a connection point on the Tobelo–Ternate journey. However, Sofifi is now officially the capital of North Maluku (Malut) province and numerous government departments will even-

tually be relocated here from Ternate. The huge new governor's office is almost complete on a hilltop 5km east of Sofifi port and has sweeping views. A Sofifi visitors' centre for the remote **Aketajawe & Lolobata National Parks** (☎ 0852 4003 7036; aketajawe-lolobata@gmail.com; Jl 40) was due to open in 2010 at the time of writing. Ornithologists seeking the exceedingly rare Wallace's standard-wing bird of paradise (*burung bidadari*) should ask park staff (some English-speaking) for help locating the local bird-guide Demianus ('Anung') whose hard-to-find house is accessed by hiking from Tanah Putih, itself around 30 minutes by *ojek* from Sidangoli.

Sofifi–Bastiong speedboats (40 minutes) cost 50,000Rp for fast-filling 12-seaters, and 30,000Rp for bigger versions that might take an hour to fill up. Kijangs bound for Tobelo (80,000Rp, 3½ hours) and Weda (120,000Rp) wait by the Sofifi dock till early afternoon, but guessing which vehicle will be the first to leave can prove hit and miss.

Tobelo

☎ 0924

Modest Tobelo is northern Halmahera's only real 'town'. The main Kao–Galela road (Jl Kemakmuran/Jl H Simange) is bisected just north of the market by Jl Pelabuhan leading 300m to the main port. In contrast to most of North Maluku, Tobelo is predominantly Christian, so beers are sold and you can even get lunch during Ramadan. Its bay is fronted by a pretty jigsaw of islands, many ringed with golden sandy beaches. The most accessible is **Pulau Kumo**, just a 10-minute ride away by shared outrigger. It's crowded on Sunday.

INFORMATION

BNI (Bank Negara Indonesia; Jl Kemakmuran) 24-hour ATM. No money exchange.

Star Computer (Jl Elim; internet/wi-fi per hr 10,000/5000Rp; ☎ 8am–10pm Mon–Sat) Connection is somewhat temperamental but there's a pleasant Wild West-styled wi-fi hot-spot cafe (juices 8000Rp).

Tourist Office (Dinas Parawisata; ☎ 262 1001; www.halmaherautara.com; Jl Puskesmas; ☎ 8am–4pm Mon–Fri) One block inland from Jl Kemakmuran, this attractively appointed new tourist office is working on a map of the region's scuba and snorkelling sites. It plans a dive centre on Pulau Kakara in the bay off Tobelo. English is spoken.

SLEEPING & EATING

There are a dozen perfectly survivable options but most are rather lacklustre.

Penginapan Asean Jaya (☎ 262 1051; Jl Pelabuhan; s/tw 40,000/65,000Rp) Typical bed-in-a-box budget rooms share small *mandis*. Anis, the delightful owner, speaks English.

Penginapan Meraksi Flower (☎ 262 1129; Jl Bhavangkara; tw 110,000–165,000Rp; 🍷) Pleasant rooms are pretty standard but fair value and reasonably well kept. It's 50m inland from the Hotel President.

Wisma Siasabila (☎ 262 2389; Jl Kemakmuran; standard/spring bed 165,000–220,000Rp; 🍷) Lemon-and-lime rooms around a narrow central strip of water garden are cleaner, fresher and more spacious than most in Tobelo. It's easy to miss, two doors north of the better-known Penginapan Regina.

Hotel President (☎ 262 1312; Jl Kemakmuran; d 185,000–250,000Rp; 🍷) Decor and wood-veneer ceilings look a little dated but most rooms are comfortable and the 2nd-floor lounge has sea views.

Elizabeth Inn (☎ 262 1885; Jl Kemakmuran; d 200,000–250,000Rp; 🍷) Rooms are brand new so relatively clean and comfortable, but they lack style and windows are minimal.

Kusu-Kusu (☎ 262 1870; Wosio; d 250,000Rp; 🍷) Primarily a 'spa' offering 100,000Rp massages in thatched, octagonal pavilion booths, Kusu-Kusu has three new guest rooms that are well equipped though less stylish than the signs might imply. It's 3km south of Tobelo, 200m beyond the new bemo terminal.

Kakara Cafe (☎ 262 1908; Jl Kemakmuran; meals 17,000–40,000Rp, juice 12,500Rp, beer 30,000Rp; ☎ 9am–midnight Mon–Sat, 6pm–11pm Sun) This seafood restaurant, 500m south of Galaxy Mart supermarket, is marginally more polished than most of Tobelo's simple eateries.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The nearest airports are in Kao (temporarily inactive at the time of research) and Galela

from which **Merpati** (☎ 0813 4089 0899) flies twice weekly to Ternate. The *KM Elisabet II* sails to Manado (295,000Rp, 21 hours) on Thursday at 2pm, returning Monday. Pelni's *Sangiang* loops around Halmahera from Bitung (Sulawesi) on a Ternate–Babang (Bacan)–Gebe–Buli–Tobelo–Bitung route, monthly in either direction.

Speedboats for Morotai (50,000Rp, two hours) leave at 9am and there's a *kapal motor* at 1pm (45,000Rp, four hours).

Most Kijangs to Sofifi (80,000Rp, 3½ hours) leave around 4am. Book ahead and they'll pick you up at your hotel. Others leave later in the morning if and when full (90,000Rp) from in front of the harbour office, but waits can be lengthy. Chartering is possible from 300,000Rp. Bemos run regularly to Galela (15,000Rp, one hour) from the main market. Bemos to Kao (25,000Rp) via Daru (20,000Rp) start from a new terminal 3km south, 2000Rp away by shuttle bemo. Within town, *ojeks* cost 4000Rp, and *bentor* (motorbike-rickshaws) cost 5000Rp.

South of Tobelo

Pantai Karlen is a beach of strikingly pure black sand 1km east of Pitu, 5km south of Tobelo. Around 10km further south, then 2km off the main road, **Kupa Kupa** has a white-sand swimming beach heavily shaded with mature trees. It's very photogenic when looking north, less so looking south thanks to the Pertamina Oil Terminal next door. Three simple but pleasantly furnished thatched **beach cottages** (☎ 0815 2785 6971; d 100,000Rp) have mosquito nets, bucket *mandis* and bamboo walls. They're tucked behind a charming little **cafe** (fish & cassava 25,000Rp, beer 30,000Rp) that caters mostly to Sunday picnickers and Saturday-night karaoke. Other days the site is peacefully calm except for the generator.

Danau Paca is a photogenic little lake backed by steep, lushly forested mountains. The scene is surveyed by an idyllic little weekend cafe built on stilt walkways above the waters at Talaga Paca. A tiny palm island floats around according to the wind's whim. Talaga Paca village is 2km west of the main road, 23km south of Tobelo: turn just south of the tall communication mast.

There's reputedly good snorkelling off the sandy southern tip of **Pulau Bobale**, accessed by 5000Rp shared boat from **Daru**. Daru is also the departure point for speedboats to eastern

Halmahera. A shipwrecked Japanese freighter lies just off Pantai Sosol at **Malifut**, where it was scuttled at the end of WWII.

North of Tobelo

The road north is well surfaced with several very attractive woodland sections, glimpses of coast and a fine brief view (8km) of the active volcano Dukono smoking on the horizon. At **Luari** (13km) there's a Sunday **beach** with creamy coloured sand shaded by *ketapang* trees in a pretty horseshoe bay. Turning 1.5km inland at **Galela** (aka Soasio, 25km) you come to **Danau Galela** (Danau Duma), a sizeable lake lined with villages that suffered particularly in the 1999 troubles. Several burnt-out church ruins remain. Bullock carts are common on the lake's 16km 'ring' road. On the south bank in Soakonora, **Penginapan Talaga Maloha** (☎ 0852 5683 2276; d 100,000Rp, full-board per person extra 50,000Rp) is a comfortable family homestay whose rear terrace and best rooms (4 and 5) survey the lake, where local fishermen still punt around on bamboo rafts.

Galela has its own language, in which *dalo* means 'good', *sukur dala dala* means 'thank you' and *to-tagi tagi* rather than *jalan jalan* is the ideal answer to the eternal question, 'Where are you going?'

Eastern Halmahera

Way off the tourism radar, eastern Halmahera appeals to travellers who fancy being an area's first foreigner in a generation. One place with potential is Jarajara, whose fine sandy beach is ringed by a protective coral reef with diving possibilities. Deep in the riverine hinterland, at least a two-day trek from Subaim, Jarajara or Patlean, live the nomadic Togutil people, often dressed in nothing but a loin cloth. Keen if relatively inexperienced **Ilham Hiabdullah** (☎ 0852 9836 0813; <http://ilhamtravelguide.blogspot.com>; soplo_1984@yahoo.com) is an English-speaking Ternate-based guide who organises tailor-made adventures starting from his family's Jarajara home.

Boats from Tobelo run to Patlean (Sunday), Jarajara (some Tuesdays) and Maba (four weekly). Preorganised longboat transfers allow hop-offs at intermediate villages en route. From Pelabuhan Penyebangan, 6km north of Tobelo, car ferry *Inerie* crosses to Subaim (six hours) on Thursday and Saturday nights. Trigana Air flies three times weekly between Ternate and mine-ravaged Buli.

PULAU MOROTAI

☎ 0923

A minor Japanese base during WWII, Morotai leapt to prominence when it was captured by the Allies and used to bomb Manila to bits. That was the sadly destructive fulfilment of General MacArthur's 'I will return' pledge to retake the Philippines. Among the Japanese defenders who retreated to Morotai's crumpled mountain hinterland was the famous Private Nakamura: only in 1973 did he discover that the war was over. A WWII US amphibious tank still lies rusting in a hidden palm grove, a five minutes' *ojek*-ride behind Morotai's village capital **Daruba**. There are attractive palm-backed fishing beaches along the narrow Nefelves Peninsula that stretches south from Daruba. But for better beaches explore the array of offshore islands in Morotai's sparkling turquoise waters. With a decent longboat (300,000Rp to 500,000Rp) you can make a great day trip combining Zum Zum, Kolorai, Dodola and the pearl-farming island of Ngelengele.

Around an hour's longboat ride from Daruba, idyllic **Pulau Dodola** is actually a pair of uninhabited islands linked by a low-tide sandbar. The utterly perfect white sand is so soft that it feels like you're walking on warm snow. The western lagoon offers sheltered swimming but the island's reputation for good snorkelling is exaggerated by Maluku standards. The clumps of surviving coral are marginally better around tiny **Pulau Kolorai**, a one-village island famous for its lobsters (from 150,000Rp per kilogram).

On **Pulau Zum Zum (Sum Sum)**, 25 minutes' ride from Daruba, there's a comically unrecognisable bust of General MacArthur who had his temporary WWII command base here. The island is mostly ringed by mangroves, but on its small, spongy white-sand beach you'll still find the rusty foundations of a wartime pier which deposits metal 'pebbles' amid all the discarded giant clam shells. Locals still 'fish' for WWII machine guns, shell casings and other valuable scrap.

Sleeping & Eating

Daruba has four homestay-style *penginapan*. Passengers arriving at the port or airport race each other into town to nab a room at the unmarked **Penginapan Muslim** (☎ 0812 4480 2587; d 120,000Rp; 🍴), which is rightly considered the best on offer. **Penginapan Tonga** (☎ 222 1204; r with

fian/air-con 85,000/130,000Rp) is slightly less homely. In an unmarked two-storey house, **Simpang 4** (☎ 0813 5667 3548; s 50,000Rp) has shared *mandis* but is more attractive than Muslim Dua. There are half a dozen *rumah makan*. Morotai's 2009 'promotion' to regency means that Daruba's facilities are likely to improve very considerably in coming years.

Getting There & Away

Merpati (☎ 222 1063) operates Ternate–Daruba flights on Friday. Daily to Tobelo there's a 9am speedboat (50,000Rp, two hours) and the 10am *KM Galang* (45,000Rp, four hours). A twice-weekly car ferry service should restart when the new ferry dock is finished at Juanga, 5km south of Daruba. The *KM Kie Raha* and *Pelni's Sangiang* sail to Ternate twice monthly.

SULA & BURU

For the very rare travellers passing this way, Buru and Sanana (Sula Islands) are most likely to be visited as stepping stones when taking local boats between Ternate and Ambon. Neither have money exchange nor international ATMs. In Sula language *berahi* means 'good', *mina* is 'sweet' and *sukur (eb-eb)* means 'thank you (very much)'.

Getting There & Away

Merpati (☎ Namlea 0813 4313 5533, Sanana 0929-222 1078) flies Ambon–Namlea–Namrole (Saturday), Ambon–Namlea–Sanana (Monday), Sanana–Bacan–Ternate (Tuesday) and Ternate–Fala (Wednesday). **Trigana Air** (☎ 0929-222 1505) flies Ambon–Sanana–Ternate three times weekly.

On alternate days the *Bahari Express* jet-boat (205,000Rp, four hours) departs Namlea at 8am for Ambon. An overnight car ferry runs the same days to Galala (Pulau Ambon, 70,000Rp, 13 hours). Namlea–Sanana car ferries (120,000Rp, 14 hours) run every three to five days, and there's a *kapal motor* (150,000Rp, 14 hours) roughly twice weekly. *Pelni's Lambelu* calls at Namlea between Ternate (14 hours) and Ambon (four hours) but can't actually dock resulting in a photographically chaotic melee as perilously overcrowded lighters ferry hordes of passengers to shore. *Pelni's* monthly *Sangiang* runs Ambon–Namlea–Sanana–Ternate–Bitung.

KM Intim Teratai sails overnight Thursday from Ternate to Sanana (dorm/air-con berth 260,000/350,000Rp, 15 hours), proceeds to Dofa/Fala (five/seven hours), then returns directly to Ternate. *Theodora* sails Ternate–Sanana on Tuesday night, shuttles to Dofa and Fala on Wednesday then returns to Sanana (Thursday) before overnighing back to Ternate. Once the *Theodora* has arrived (Wednesday evening), *KM Funka* departs Fala for *Jorjoga* (access point for Pantai Anjing) and *Bobong* (Pulau Taliabu's main village), continuing on to Pulau Banggai and Bau Bau (Sulawesi).

SULA ISLANDS

Pulau Sanana

☎ 0929

Although you're quite likely to be the Sulas' only foreign visitor all year, the astoundingly underutilised **tourist information office** (☎ 21227; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri) in **Sanana** has friendly English-speaking staff waiting to assist. It's hidden within the modest whitewashed shell of the 1652 Dutch fort **Benteng De Verlatching**. Around 8km north, **Bajo** is Pulau Sanana's most photogenic village, with fishermen's stilt cottages linked together by wooden plank pathways above the tidal waters.

Sanana's best accommodation choice is **Hotel Green Sula** (☎ 0812 4441 4277; Jl Telkom; s/d 150,000/200,000Rp; ♿), an airy house with ample communal seating guarded by a concrete chicken. Half a dozen basic cheapies include four-room **Penginapan Budi** (☎ 21292; Jl Merpati; r 50,000Rp).

Pulau Mangole

☎ 0929

Although speedboats run from Sanana to Mangole town, there's no road between there and Dofa or Fala, Pulau Mangole's main settlements, so you'll need to wait for the twice-weekly Sanana–Dofa–Fala ferry.

The Sulas' most famous attraction is a quadruple set of tidal whirlpools (*palung* or *sempeh*) in the narrow strait between Taliabu and Mangole islands (Selat Capalulu). The whirlpools appear as the tide changes on full- and new-moon days. A viewpoint from which to observe the phenomenon (becoming progressively less impressive as years go by) is **Tanjung Batu Gosok**, accessed by an 8km path from Dofa. The nearest accommodation is at Fala, 18km from Dofa by *ojek*. Part way

along you'll pass through Lekokadai village, from which it's a short *ketingting* (outrigger) ride to the uninhabited island **Pas Leko**, where you'll find the most accessible of the Sulas' white-sand beaches.

PULAU BURU

☎ 0913

Famed for its medicinal eucalyptus oil (*minyak kayu putih*), Buru (<http://burukab.go.id>) became Indonesia's 'anti-Siberia' in the 1960s, when communist suspects were exiled here in significant numbers. Short of quaffing *sopi* (distilled palm wine) with dumbstruck fishermen, there's not a great deal for tourists to do here, but capital **Namlea** has a gentle charm, with grassy hills giving its surroundings a very un-Malukan appearance. Over a dozen small, simple *penginapan* include friendly **Maya** (☎ 21645; Jl Mesjid Jami; r60,000Rp). It's beside a noisy mosque and the typical box rooms share *mandis*, but bay views are very pleasant from the communal balcony. Much more luxurious, **Hotel Grand Sarah** (☎ 213 021; Jl A Yani; standard/bungalow/VIP r 250,000/350,000/400,000Rp) is unexpectedly one of Maluku's best hotels. Perched on a garden view ridge directly above town, a grand sweep of stairway leads up from its inviting lobby to immaculate bedrooms with pseudo-antique furniture and acres of sash curtain.

A four-room *penginapan* is under construction 17km northwest of Namlea at **Jikumerasa**, a stunning bay of turquoise water and dazzling white sand backed by sparse palms and Sunday picnic shacks. Bemos (5000Rp, 25 minutes) run roughly hourly till 3pm.

Buru's spiritual heart is the mystical mountain lake, **Danau Rana**, but despite tales of giant eels and 'flowers of longevity', its boggy banks are visually disappointing after the two days' sweaty trek to reach it.

PULAU AMBON

Maluku's most prominent island is lush and gently mountainous, indented with two great hoops of bay. Around capital Kota Ambon, villages merge into a long, if still green, suburban ribbon. But further out light sparkles brilliantly through alluring flower gardens and swaying tropical foliage, with a particularly inspiring string of timeless coastal villages west of the airport. Disregard misleadingly out-of-date websites that claim

there's any sort of danger to visiting this delightful place. Ambon is well and truly back in business, a pleasant transport hub for reaching the lovely Lease and Banda Islands, but also a charming retreat and dive base in its own right.

History

Until 1512 Ambon was ruled by Ternate. The sultans brought the civilising force of Islam to the island's north coast and developed Hitu Lama as a major spice-trading entrepôt. When the Portuguese displaced the Ternateans, they found Ambon's less developed, non-Islamicised south more receptive to Christianity, and built the fortress around which Kota Ambon would eventually evolve. In 1599 the Dutch renamed this fort Victoria and made Kota Ambon their spice-trading base.

During WWII Kota Ambon became a Japanese military headquarters, resulting in extensive Allied bombing that destroyed most of its once-attractive colonial architecture. In 1950 Ambon was briefly the centre of the southern Malukan independence movement. This was extinguished within a few months by Indonesian military force, with a last stand at Passo village.

From 1999 until mid-2002, Ambon was ripped apart by Christian-Muslim intercommunal violence, leaving Kota Ambon looking like 1980s Beirut. However, there have been no disturbances since 2004, and strong economic resurgence has wiped away almost every visible scar of that tragic era. It's as though everyone suddenly awoke from a bad dream to find themselves back in their busy little South-Sea paradise.

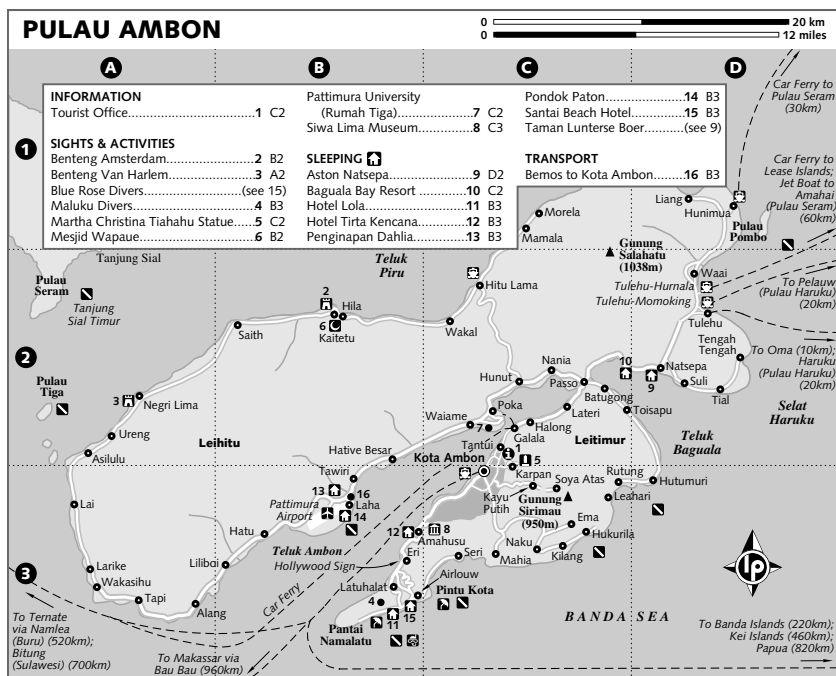
KOTA AMBON

☎ 0911 / pop 368,000

By the region's dreamy tropical standards, Maluku's capital, commercial centre and transport hub is a busy, throbbing metropolis. Sights are minimal and architecture wins no prizes, but compared to cities elsewhere, Kota Ambon retains a languid charm emphasised by a perfect arc of bay and its lushly tree-dappled mountainous backdrop.

Orientation

Almost all public road transportation emanates from the traffic-clogged Mardika market area. Jl Dr Sam Ratulangi, Jl Said Perintah and



Jl AY Patty are the major commercial streets. Busy Jl Sultan Babullah comes cacophonously to life at dusk.

Information

Maluku's phone numbers currently have 5-, 6- and 7-digit varieties. Expect rationalisation.

INTERNET ACCESS

Several places are grindingly slow. The following are faster:

K@tongNet (Jl Sam Ratulangi 91; per hr 5000Rp;

☎ 8am-2am) Rather sweaty.

Target (Jl Sultan Hairun; per hr 7500Rp; ☎ 10am-11pm) Central though cramped.

Warnet Tifa (Jl Rijali; per hr 5000Rp; ☎ 9am-1am) Good air-conditioning.

Wartel Aladin (Jl Sultan Babullah; per hr 6000Rp; ☎ 24hr if custom dictates) Reasonably spacious with good air-con.

With your own laptop, there's free wi-fi at gently trendy **Cafe Beta** (Jl Pantai Mardika; juice 12,000Rp, coffee 7000-10,000Rp; ☎ 6pm-11pm) and in the lobby cafe of **Hotel Amans** (p746; great connection).

MONEY

Change or withdraw enough money in Ambon for trips to outlying islands where there are no exchange facilities whatever.

Bank Mandiri (Jl Pantai Mardika; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri) Best available rates for new US\$100 bills, albeit still relatively low.

BCA (Bank Central Asia; Jl Sultan Hairun 24; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri) Exchanges euros, Aussie and US dollars, but you can expect a long wait. ATMs allow 2,500,000Rp withdrawals.

BNI (Bank Negara Indonesia; Jl Said Perintah 12; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri) Poor exchange rates but relatively swift service (counter 08).

PT Indova (☎ 352 590; Jl Kopra) Abysmal rates but dollar exchange is possible at virtually any time. Call to have the door opened.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Laszlo Wagner (www.east-indonesia.info) This very experienced Hungarian-born Maluku fanatic has contributed numerous informative Maluku webpages to www.virtualtourist.com and now leads tailor-made tours into remote areas of Maluku and Papua.

Tourist Info Desk (Pattimura Airport; ☎ 10am-3pm Mon-Sat) Unmarked but useful desk straight ahead on leaving baggage claim.

Tourist Office (Map p743; Dinas Parawisata; ☎ 312 300; Jl Jenderal Sudirman, Tantai; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) Offers fistfuls of colourful free brochures. Tantai bemos pass by, a 4km loop outbound from Mardika but less than 1km returning.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

PT Daya Patal (☎ 353 344; spicetr@gmail.com; Jl Said Perintah; ☎ 8am-6pm) Ever-obliging agency with several knowledgeable English-speaking staff. Sells airline and Peln tickets and is creating a dive lodge on Pulau Saparua.

PT Matrassas Abadi (☎ 311 111; matrass_amq@hotmail.com; Jl AY Pattya 52; ☎ 8am-9pm) Well-organised English-speaking travel agency for domestic air tickets.

Sights

The town's biggest mosque, **Masjid Raya al-Fatah** (Jl Sultan Babullah) is a modern concrete affair. The fanciful green **Masjid Jami** next door is much more photogenic. **Maranatha Cathedral** (Jl Pattimura) has a staid if iconic tower. **Francis Xavier Cathedral** (Jl Pattimura) has a facade crusted with saint statues and silver-strut steeples which glimmer mysteriously. Undramatic **Benteng Victoria** (out of bounds, army use) is the Dutch-era fortress. It's fronted by a gilded statue of Slamet Riyadi, an Indonesian commander who died retaking the place from RMS rebels in 1950. A bellicose **Pattimura Memorial** brandishes his *parang* (machete) and *salawaka* (spindly Malukan shield) in the park behind. A hilltop **Martha Christina Tiahahu statue** (Map p743) commemorates Pattimura's contemporary (see boxed text, p752) and enjoys wonderful views.

Allied servicemen who died in WWII are remembered in a beautifully manicured **Commonwealth War Cemetery** (Tantai), shaded beneath towering trees fuzzed with epiphytes.

In the southern suburbs, the **Siwa Lima Museum** (Map p743; ☎ 341 652; admission 3000Rp; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) has two main buildings separated by 500m of road snaking beautifully up through steep, lovingly tended gardens. The upper ethnographic building displays regional costumes, building styles, totems, *doti-doti* (voodoo-style curse-boats), local fabrics, weapons and *kepala desa* 'power sticks'. Diorama windows demonstrate *sopi* distillation and sago production and there's a walk-through recreation of a neolithic cave dwelling. The lower maritime museum lacks English captioning but the crustacea, model boats and gigantic whale skeletons are self-explanatory. Air Salobar *mobils* (2000Rp)

from Ambon turn around at the gardens' eastern gateway. An *ojek* to the door saves the sweaty climb.

Festivals & Events

The annual **Darwin-Ambon Yacht Race** (www.darwinambonrace.com.au; ☎ July), once Ambon's main international sporting event, restarted modestly in 2007. The **Darwin-Saumlaki Rally** (www.sailindonesia.net) also sails to Ambon.

Sleeping

There are alternatives around the airport (see p750) and on beaches at Latuhalat (p749) and Natsepa (p749).

BUDGET

If you're unfussy, there's plenty of choice, but only a few budget places make even the most cursory attempt to hide their cockroaches and damp stains.

Penginapan Asri (☎ 311 217; tw with fan & shared bathroom 65,000-80,000Rp, r with air-con 110,000-160,000Rp; ☎) Many rooms lack natural light, but the Asri is very central and much better kept than most other hotels in this price range.

Penginapan Beta (☎ 353 463; Jl Wim Reawaru; tw with fan/air-con 80,000/120,000Rp; ☎) The 'pink prison' looks like a mouldering dump from outside, but while the compact rooms lack privacy they're fairly well kept and reasonably priced with ensuite bathrooms.

Abdualie Hotel (☎ 352 057; Jl Sultan Babullah; tw with fan/air-con from 82,500/176,000Rp; ☎) Well run and eternally popular with local petty salesmen. The cheap rooms attract plentiful mosquitoes, but the 'executive' rooms are tastefully decorated off an almost colonial-feel hallway. Air-con is often trumped by power cuts.

Hotel Jamilah (☎ 353 626; Jl Soabali; d 125,000Rp; ☎) Behind a grotto of fake golden rocks, this 15-room family hotel has a peaceful, homely charm and ample areas of communal lounge space. Rooms are freshly painted though the lurid pink attached *mandis* are a slight let-down.

Pondok Wisata 'Avena' Lestari (☎ 355 596, 0813 4303 3842; Jl WR Supratman 18; s/d/tr 150,000/165,000/220,000Rp; ☎) This welcoming family homestay has neat, clean air-conditioned rooms and airy communal spaces. Helpful owner Jan speaks fluent Dutch and English, but finding him to check in or out can sometimes take a while: there's no reception. Doors lock at 11pm.

Wisma Grace (☎ 234 1717; tw without/with hot water 170,000/220,000Rp; 🏠) Comparatively new, Grace has good, clean, beige-brown tiled floors, and better rooms have minibars, but some walls already need repainting.

our pick Hotel Tirta Kencana (Map p743; ☎ 345 840; tirta.kencana@yahoo.co.id; Jl Raya, Amahusu; d cottage/standard/deluxe/ste 181,000/212,000/272,000/333,000Rp; 🏠) This immaculately maintained waterside hotel has particularly appealing deluxe rooms with balconies facing the limpid blue bay through a line of palms. There's a lovely open-air waterfront cafe-restaurant and a small massage-spa. It's 7km southwest from central Ambon, 2km beyond Siwa Lima Museum. Take Amahusu or Latuhalat bemos.

MIDRANGE

Ambon's better hotels are all air-conditioned, bathrooms have hot showers and at least some staff speak basic English. Several offer significantly cheaper 'discount rates' without even asking.

Hotel Grand Soya (☎ 312 019; Jl Cenderawasih 20; discount-/full-price tw from 234,000/390,000Rp; 🏠 ☎) With attractive, dark wood furniture and useful extras like in-room safes, this is one of Ambon's most popular, central addresses. Wi-fi (11,000Rp per hour) is available in the slightly chintzy lobby.

Hotel Amboina (☎ 355 514; Jl K Ulupaha; s 375,000Rp, d standard/executive/ste from 300,000/450,000/500,000Rp; 🏠) Reception is stylishly minimalist and a soothing cream-colour scheme prevails. However, while rooms have been recently redecorated, most are windowless and those that aren't suffer from oppressive road noise.

Hotel Amans (Ambon Manise; ☎ 353 888; www.amans-hotel.com; Jl Pantai Mardika 53A; discounted/annex d from 320,000/190,000Rp; 🏠 📺 ☎) Neither luxurious nor dowdy, the Amans has over 150 unremarkable but fairly priced midrange rooms whose rack rates are regularly slashed without ado for walk-in guests. English-speaking staff abound and there's free wi-fi in the pleasantly refurbished rear-lobby area. If you don't mind a higher proportion of carpet burns and minor furniture damage, try the tatter Amans Inns annex (190,000Rp to 240,000Rp) which is located directly behind. Look first, as a few rooms are cruddy but most of the spacious, upper-floor 'gold' rooms are a great deal and you still get soap, top sheet, hot water, air-con and multichannel TV.

Hotel Mutiara (☎ 353 873; hotel_mutiara_ambon@yahoo.com, www.hotelmutiaraambon.com; Jl Pattimura; s/d deluxe 407,000/484,000Rp, VIP 495,000/550,000Rp; 🏠) Behind a dainty curtain of tropical foliage, this cosy, tastefully executed 26-room hotel has a welcoming European atmosphere and small but mostly well-appointed rooms sporting superclean bathrooms and framed local fabrics. Four cheaper rooms (single/double 264,000/3300,000Rp) are a significant step down in quality. The hotel's bouncy carpets are just starting to age.

At the time of research, a 10-storey **Swiss-Belhotel** (Jl Benteng Kapaha) was under construction opposite the overpriced Hotel Manise.

Eating

Cheap *rumah makan* abound, especially around Mardika market, the ports, the Pelni office and Jl Sultan Babullah. Evening warungs appear on Jl Sultan Babullah and Jl Pantai Mardika. An intriguing variety of restaurants and coffee shops lie within two blocks of the Trikora monument, especially down Jl Said Perintah.

RM Paradise (Jl PH Latumahina; dishes 5000Rp, fish market price; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat) Outwardly a typical, cheap dining barn, the Paradise is considered *the* place for hard-to-find genuine Ambonese food including *papeda* (see the boxed text, opposite).

Tomasoa RW (Jl Jan Paays; dog with cassava 10,000Rp; ☎ 4.30-11pm Mon-Sat) Cooked in spicy ginger chunks, dog meat is eaten in tiny shack dives like this one, washed down with half-bottles of *sopi* (13,000Rp).

KFC (Ambon Plaza Mall, 2nd fl; chicken per piece 11,000Rp; ☎ 9am-9pm) Ambon's contemporary fast-food palace has luxurious air-conditioning.

Restaurant New Barcelona (☎ 347 728; Jl Said Perintah; mains 15,000-40,000Rp, beer 20,000Rp; ☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Sat, 6-10pm Sun) Inexpensive if unspectacular Chinese dishes bolster a free-wheeling menu including seafood-, tofu-, pigeon- and even frog-based dishes.

Cafe Panorama (☎ 351 884; Jl CM Tiahahu; mains 23,000-65,000Rp, juices 10,000-20,000Rp, beer 25,000Rp; ☎ 11am-11pm) Pseudo-colonial and ethnic design elements add to the strikingly wide city view from this agreeable hillside resto-cafe. Partly English menus include local favourites, sizzler-plate steaks, calamari rings and valiant attempts at chicken cordon bleu in thick garlic-cream sauce. Karpan bemos drive past, but so does the endless deafening traffic.

MALUKAN FOOD

Despite what you'll see in most restaurants, Maluku's traditional staple isn't rice but *kasbi* (boiled cassava) or *papeda* (sago), called *papeda* in Ternate. That's served as an amorphous, colourless goo that you ladle into plates of *kuah-ikan* (fish soup), then suck down as though trying to swallow a live jellyfish. Odd, but surprisingly good when accompanied with *sayur garu* (papaya flower), *kohu-kohu* (green-bean/coconut/fish mix), *papari* (a unique mixed vegetable), *keladi-root* and cassava-leaf spinach. For protein, fish and seafood are king, typically served with a lightly spiced citrus dip called *dabu dabu* or *colo colo*. But some locals also eat pigeon, frog and even dog – known as RW ('eyre-weh'), as in Manado.

Originally unique to the Banda Islands, the spice-yielding kernel of nutmeg (*pala*) grows within a fruit that itself makes deliciously tart jams and distinctive sweet 'wine' (available at Ambon's Sibul Sibul; see below). Nutmeg grows best in the shade of magnificent *kenari* trees which themselves yield an almond-like nut locally used in confectionery and sauces. *Kenari* nut chunks float atop *air goraka*, a distinctive ginger-coffee hot beverage.

Sageru (palm wine) is distilled into powerfully alcoholic *sopi* even in Muslim areas, but even though they're commonly sipped by off-duty fishermen and used for some *adat* (traditional law) ceremonies, neither are openly sold in normal shops.

Tantui Seafood (☎ 0852 3223 7888; Tantui; mains from 25,000Rp, juice 15,000Rp; ☎ 11am-11pm; ♿) Sit inside on faintly silly, bow-wrapped chairs or out on the waterside terrace for generous portions of shrimp-rich nasi goreng seafood with perfectly grilled fish or spicy squid (*cumi bakar*).

Istana Berakat (Jl Diponegoro; mains 35,000-55,000Rp; ☎ 10am-10pm) Decor is entirely lacklustre but the seafood and vegetarian *sapo tahu* (tofu sizzler, 42,500Rp) are excellent. Across the street its sister restaurant Berakat Ambonia is renowned for pork dishes.

Other reliable places for fresh fish include bright if bland **New Ratu Gurih** (Jl Diponegoro; meals 30,000-50,000Rp), **Sari Guri** (Jl Dana Kopra; mains 25,000-50,000Rp, beer 25,000Rp; ☎ 9am-11pm) and more attractive but less busy **Dede's** (Jl Said Perintah; fish meals 25,000-40,000Rp, beer 23,000Rp; ☎ 9am-10pm).

SELF-CATERING

Mardika is the biggest market.

Useful stores include:

Cinderella Bread Shop (Jl AY Patty; ☎ 8am-8pm) Try the brilliantly named *Shaggy Twist*, a soft croissant-shaped roll topped with cheese (5000Rp).

Citra Supermarket (Jl Tulukabessy; ☎ 8am-9pm)

Indojaya Supermarket (Jl Jan Paays; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-8pm Sun)

Drinking

Barokah Bakery (Jl AM Sangaji; ☎ 6.30am-7pm) Reduce plastic waste by refilling water bottles for 500Rp at this little bakery-cafe. Handy for the port.

Kopi Tradisi Joas (Jl Said Perintah; coffee 5000-11,000Rp; ☎ 6.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat) Local bigwigs talk politics for hours over Joas' rich mocha-style 'secret-recipe' coffees and slices of deep-fried breadfruit (*sukun goreng*, 1000Rp) in this simple but attractive cafe with wood-panelled walls and a central avocado tree.

Kedir Pasir Putih (Jl Sultan Babullah; tea/juices/snacks from 4000/12,000/15,000Rp; ☎ 7am-2am) South-Sea island-themed juice-bar which comes to life after dark when the lanterns and fairy lights twinkle through the faux foliage.

ourpick Sibul-Sibul (☎ 312 525; Jl Said Perintah; juices 8000-14,000Rp, beer 24,000Rp, coffee 5000-7000Rp, fish'n'chips 20,000Rp; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 1.30-8pm Sun) Ambon-born star portraits deck the walls of this sweet little coffee shop which plays Malukan music and serves local snacks like *koyabu* (cassava cake, 3000Rp), *lopis pulut* (sticky rice with palm jaggery) and *kenari* nut brownies. Owner June speaks English.

Comparatively stylish places for a beer include the convivial lobby bars of Hotels Mutiara (beer 38,500Rp), Amans (27,500Rp) and Amboina (27,500Rp). The last one suffers from live 'music'.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Beyond Maluku

Between them, **Batavia** (☎ 346 380; www.batavia-air.co.id; Jl AY Patty 31; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun), **Lion/Wings Air** (☎ 351 532; Pattimura Airport) and **Sriwijaya** (☎ 354 498; www.sriwijayaair-online.com; Jl AM Sangaji 79; ☎ 9am-6pm) operate five daily

Jakarta–Ambon flights, typically costing around 800,000Rp. Both Wings and **Express Air** (☎ 323 807; Pattimura Airport) fly three times weekly to Sorong, with connections to Jayapura and Manokwari. Express's advertised Ambon–Manado flight (999,000Rp) is oddly routed via Sorong too. Alternatively, for Manado take Lion/Wings via Makassar (daily). Merpati's Ambon–Kisar–Kupang flight currently departs on Monday, returning on Thursday.

Within Maluku

Merpati (☎ 352 481; Jl Ahmad Yani; ✉ 9am–4.30pm Mon–Fri, 9am–3pm Sat–Sun) connects several smaller airports. Flights can only be booked one way.

Trigana Air (☎ 343 393; Jl Soabali; ✉ 8am–8pm) offers handy Langgur–Ambon–Sanana–Ternate flights, returning next day. Beware that both Merpati and Trigana schedules are notorious for last-minute changes and cancellations.

BOAT

Pelni services include *Ciremai* heading to Papua via Bandaneira (Banda Islands; seven hours) and Tual (Kei Islands; 21 hours), typically departing Ambon at 5pm on alternate Saturdays. The new *Dempo* sails non-stop to Sorong, continuing to Jayapura via Biak. Westbound *Ciremai*, *Lambelu*, *Nggapulu* and *Dempo* run to Makassar (34 hours) via Bau Bau (24 hours, except for *Dempo*). All but *Nggapulu* continue to Tanjung Priok (Jakarta, four days).

For Ternate the most comfortable option is *Lambelu*, currently departing at 2pm on alternate Tuesdays. It takes 20 hours via Namlea (Buru, four hours) and continues on to Bitung (northern Sulawesi), arriving at 9pm

Wednesday. Slower, less predictable *Sangiang* runs direct to Ternate (27 hours) one Tuesday per month, and via Namlea and Sanana on a different Monday (38 hours).

Pangrango runs to Kupang (four days) via Saumlaki (33 hours) and remote southwestern Maluku (p771). *Kelimutu* heads monthly to Tual (57 hours) via Banda (12 hours) and Saumlaki (36 hours).

Timetables are infamously changeable, so copy the monthly schedule at the glass-faced **Pelni** (☎ 348 219; ✉ 9am–3pm Mon–Fri, 9am–noon Sat) office. To buy tickets head down, around the back, then upstairs again, or purchase from any Pelni agency.

For non-Pelni boats see the boxed text, below. For Lease Islands car ferry timetables see p751.

Two yacht races also stop in Ambon, but to participate you must start in Darwin, Australia; see p745 for details.

BUS & BEMO

Road transport (including buses to Seram via the Hunimua car ferry) starts from various points along Jl Pantai Mardika. For Natsepa (4000Rp), Tulehu–Momoking (5000Rp) and Tulehu–Hurnala (7000Rp) take Waai or Darussalam bemos. Latuhalat (3000Rp) and Amahusu bemos also pick up passengers beside the Trikora monument on Jl Dr Latumenten.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Pattimura Airport is 30km round the bay from central Kota Ambon. Hatu- and Liliboi-bound bemos pass the airport gates (6000Rp,

WHICH PORT?

| Port | Destination | Notes |
|-----------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Galala | Namlea (Buru) | car ferry; alternate days |
| Hunimua | Waipirit (Seram) | main car ferry; six daily |
| Slamet Riyadi | Wahai, Kobi, Bula (Seram) | kapal motor |
| | Leksula (Buru) | kapal motor |
| Tulehu–Hurnala | Amahai (Seram) | jet boat; 8.30am & 3.30pm Mon–Sat |
| | Lease Islands, Seram | car ferry |
| | Haria (Pulau Saparua) | kapal motor; 1pm Mon–Sat |
| Tulehu market | Haruku, Oma, Rohomoni | speedboats; daily when full |
| | Kailolo (Pulau Haruku) | speedboats; daily when full |
| Tulehu–Momoking | Haria (Pulau Saparua) | speedboats; daily when full |
| | Pelaauw (Pulau Haruku) | speedboats; daily when full |
| | Nusa Laut | speedboats; 7am Tue & Sat |
| Yos Sudarso | various | Pelni ships |
| | Namlea (Buru) | Bahari Express; alternate days |

70 minutes from Mardika). **Nusaniwe Indah** (☎ 353 714; Jl WR Supratman) runs a 5am airport minibus (50,000Rp, 50 minutes, prebooking essential) from outside Hotel Manise. Taxis charge 150,000Rp (sometimes negotiable).

BEMO

For any bemo ride consider getting on/off at least 200m away from Mardika market (the terminus), where vehicles typically jostle interminably through chaotic traffic jams.

Ultrafrequent Lin III bemos (*mobils*) head southwest down Jl Pantai Mardika and either Jl Dr Sam Ratulangi or Jl AY Patty, swinging around the Trikora monument onto Jl Dr Latumenten. After 2km they loop back via Jl Sultan Babullah and Jl Yos Sudarso.

Tantui bemos run northeast from Mardika, passing the Commonwealth War Cemetery and Tantui Seafood, then looping back past the tourist office.

AROUND PULAU AMBON

Soya Atas

High above Ambon on the cool slopes of **Gunung Srimau** (950m) is **Soya Atas** village, whose convincingly rebuilt **church** has risen from the ashes after being torched during the intercommunal strife of 2002. Across the road, a tacky **St Francis Xavier statue** recalls the original Jesuit's 1546 Christianising mission here. Steep footpaths lead down to Ema and other villages beyond.

Southern Leitimur

Latuhalat straddles a low pass culminating in a pair of popular, well-shaded 'Sunday beaches' (admission 2000Rp), **Santai** and **Namalatu**. Neither offers great swimming but both have a hotel and dive operation (see boxed text, p750). Walk between the two in 15 minutes or take one of the famous **musical becak** (bicycle-rickshaws), which hit customers with maximum-decibel Indonesian pop.

Further east are two attractive **Pintu Kota** 'recreation parks', perched atop attractive meadows which end in cliffs plunging towards the crashing waves below. The coast road dead-ends at the forgotten little fishing village of **Seri**, where outriggers and drying cloves lie quietly beneath the giant *ketapang* trees.

SLEEPING & EATING

There's an inexpensive village homestay tucked behind the Maluku Divers office.

Santai Beach Hotel (☎ 323 109; Pantai Santai, Latuhalat; r with fan/air-con 110,000/225,000Rp; ♿) Eight sea-facing air-con rooms come with terraces and curtained parking. Fan rooms are good value but set back with no view. The large restaurant is popular with Ambon weekenders.

Hotel Lola (☎ 323 882; www.divingmaluku.com; Namalatu, Latuhalat; per person full-board US\$70; ☎ Oct-May) Operated by Maluku Divers but not restricted to their clients, this attractive if somewhat incomplete little resort has stylish garden bungalows with wicker furniture and framed dive photos. There's a laid-back waterfront beach bar but no beach.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Green 'Lt Halat' bemos from Kota Ambon (3000Rp, 40 minutes) run to Namalatu along a pretty waterside road through Eri, where an amusing **Hollywood sign** is painted in giant letters on the sea defences.

Eastern Leihitu

A handful of bayside retreats offer a striking contrast to the bustle of Ambon 20km away. Family-friendly **Baguala Bay Resort** (☎ 362 717; Jl Raya; deluxe/cottage/ste 300,000/350,000/450,000Rp; ♿ ♿) is set around a pair of well-kept swimming pools in a lovely waterfront palm garden that looks especially enchanting at night. Rooms attractively counterpoint white walls with dark wooden floors and oddments of local decor. The good-value seafront cafe serves Western and local food.

Around 3km further east, **Aston Natsepa** (☎ 362 257; www.astonambon.com; promotional/rack rate d from 726,000Rp/US\$108; ♿ ♿) is Ambon's first full-blown four-star resort, complete with infinity pool, professional, ever-bowing English-speaking staff and a soaring Zen-modernist atrium. Fashionably mellow-toned new rooms come with fine white linen, minibar, safe and sea-facing balconies. Construction and landscaping remained incomplete when we visited. Minimal beach.

Right next door, the much simpler **Taman Lunterse Boer** (☎ 361 366; www.picturetrail.com/natsepa; info@natsepa.org; d with fan/air-con 250,000/300,000Rp; ♿) has its own idyllic little beach (admission 2000Rp for nonguests) and six decent ensuite rooms with clean tiled floors and faintly old-fashioned little terraces with sea views.

Beyond, a 300m strip of very simple waterside snack-shack cafes leads to busier **Natsepa Main Beach** (admission 2000Rp), where three attractive

DIVING AMBON

Although there are alternatives on Saparua (p752) and Lelei (p736), Ambon is Maluku's main **scuba diving** centre. High-visibility highlights include coral-crusting volcanic pinnacles off Mahia and Hukurila, an underwater arch at Pintu Kota, a 1960s shipwreck at Waiame and red-toothed triggerfish off Pulau Tiga's vertical wall. But Ambon is most celebrated for muck diving. Numerous bizarre critter species include the unique *Histiophryne psychedelica*, a weird, jet-propelled form of bizarro first spotted in October 2008 in an unaesthetic rubbish-strewn twilight zone off Laha port.

Professionally run **Maluku Divers** (☎ 323 882; www.divingmaluku.com; Namalatu, Latuhalat; 1/2/3 dives per day US\$45/85/130, plus equipment rental US\$35; 📅 Sep-late May) has local and expat dive masters who know the spots intimately.

Also recommended, **Blue Rose Divers** (☎ 323 883; www.bluerosedivers.com; Santai Beach Hotel, Latuhalat; 1/2/3 dives per day 750,000/1,000,000/1,100,000Rp, plus equipment rental 350,000Rp negotiable) are less fluent in spoken English but have similarly new equipment and a powerful dive boat. In the off-season (📅 May-Aug) their dives start from Hitu and visit the Tanjung Setan area.

Aston Natsepa (p749) also plans a dive centre.

new cottages are being built onto the wooded cliff behind.

Waii is famous for its 'lucky' *bulut* (Moray eels). For 10,000Rp, a gentleman named Bapak Minggu tempts the eels out of the dark recesses in a concrete-sided carp pond (Jl Air Waysilaka) by feeding them raw eggs. To find the pond (which doubles oddly as the village washing pool), get off Waii bemos one block before the thatched *baileu* (see boxed text, p738) and walk two blocks inland.

Kota Ambon-Natsepa-Waii bemos run remarkably frequently till around 8pm.

Northern & Western Leihitu

Western Leihitu is home to some of Ambon's most picturesque and archetypal coastal villages. In **Alang**, a traditional thatched *baileu* rebuilt in 2004 sports a carved crocodile. In photogenic **Wakasihu** village elders while the day away at seaside platforms with views of an offshore, tree-topped mini-island. A sharper rock shard appears at the roadside beyond **Larike**. In north **Asilulu** there are multiple boat racks and fine views across to Seram's Tanjung Sial. Offshore lies Pulau Tiga, a trio of islands around which lie several diving and snorkelling spots.

Negri Lima hides the dumpy two-storey ruin of **Benteng Van Harlem**, a roofless Dutch-era tower. In **Hila** the decidedly more impressive 1649 **Benteng Amsterdam** (10,000Rp donation expected) retains hefty ramparts and a three-storey keep that's recently been reroofed though it's empty except for the swooping swallows. Seek out a key-holder to enter. That Hila should now be renowned for a Dutch fort is somewhat ironic considering it

was originally the power base of anticolonial Ambon. Five minutes' walk inland, then across a school football field, is Kaitetu's pretty little thatch-roofed **Mesjid Wapaue**. Originally built in 1414 on nearby Gunung Wawane, the mosque was supposedly transferred to the present site in 1664 by 'supernatural powers'.

SLEEPING & EATING

Several simple options cater for travellers taking early flights from Pattimura Airport. Michael (☎ 0813 4302 8872) at the airport's tourist desk arranges simple 75,000Rp family homestays. Almost directly opposite the terminal, **Penginapan Dahlia** (☎ 0812 4722 8528; r with fan/air-con 120,000/160,000Rp; 📅) is a lime-green bungalow with simple new box rooms, private *mandi* and 'double' beds so narrow they'll challenge even the most intimate sleeping partners. Hidden in Laha village 2km away, **Pondok Paton** (☎ 0813 4323 0559; s/d 125,000/150,000Rp, with air-con 200,000/225,000Rp; 📅) has a pleasant little rear sitting area on stilts overlooking a boat-and-mangrove filled creek.

No other Western Leihitu villages have accommodation or restaurants, but roadside stalls in Lai and Wakal sell fruit and barbecued fish in the afternoon.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bemos (5000Rp) leave semiregularly from Hunut to Hila and from Kota Ambon to Liliboi. To close the loop, charter an *ojek* from near the airport. The road is mostly new asphalt, but one short, rough section between the two halves of Asilulu village may prove too steep for cars.

LEASE & SERAM

LEASE ISLANDS

☎ 0931

Pronounced 'leh-a-say', these conveniently accessible yet delightfully laid-back islands have a scattering of old-world villages, lovely bays, great diving possibilities and a couple of great-value budget beach retreats. Foreign tourists remain very rare and little English is spoken, but Saparua is just starting to get 'rediscovered'.

Access is by boat, mostly from one of three ports at Tulehu (Pulau Ambon). Morning speedboats run to Tulehu-Momoking from Haria, Pelauw, Itawaka (5am only) and Nusa Laut (6.45am Monday and Friday, returning 7am next day). Heading from Haria (Saparua) a 7am *kapal motor* runs to Tulehu-Hurnala (two hours) returning at 1pm (not Sundays).

There are two car ferries, both starting from Tulehu-Hurnala. On Monday and Thursday *Mujair* departs at 9am and runs to Wailey (Pulau Seram, four hours) and back stopping en route both ways at Ume Putih (Pulau Saparua, 11.30am and 3pm). On Tuesdays *Samandar* departs at 9am and runs one way to Masohi (8½ hours) via Ume Putih (11.30am) and Nalahia (Nusa Laut, 2.15pm). It returns the same way Wednesday leaving Masohi at 8am and stopping in Nalahia about 11am and Ume Putih at 2pm. Timings can vary somewhat.

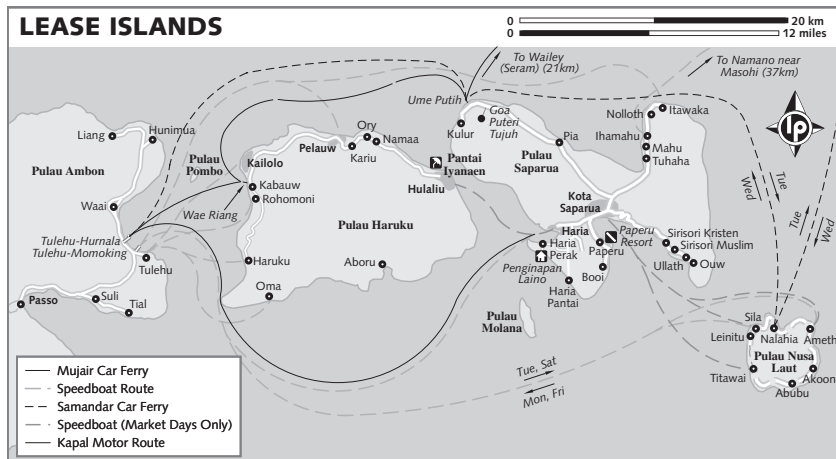
Pulau Saparua

A sprinkling of offbeat accommodation choices lies amid Saparua's shaggy forests, friendly part-thatched villages and crystal-clear fish-filled waters. Dugongs reportedly appear in Saparua Bay and you might spot dolphins en route to uninhabited Pulau Molana, where you don't need Hollywood riches to have a desert island all for yourself.

KOTA SAPARUA

The low-walled 1676 **Benteng Duurstede** (admission free), famously besieged by Pattimura in 1817 (see boxed text, p752), has been refaced with mouldering grey concrete, but the gateway is original and the cannon-studded ramparts survey a gorgeous sweep of turquoise bay. Opposite, a large but sparse **museum** displays sweetly naive, glassed-in scenes where doll figures recreate scenes from Pattimura's anticolonial exploits. Bring a torch (there's no light inside) and get the key from Robert Mual. Robert runs the unsigned **Penginapan Benteng Duurstede** (☎ 21099; d 50,000Rp) directly behind. Its seven clean, simple rooms are superb value with little terrace areas facing a delightful sandy beach that's idyllic at dawn when you'll have it almost to yourself but gets noisy with local kids on afternoons and weekends. Cold beers and excellent home-cooked food are available to savour on your terrace if you preorder.

Two minutes' walk from the fort on one of Kota Saparua's two parallel main streets is the



PATTIMURA & TIAHAHU

In 1817 the Dutch faced a small but emotionally charged uprising led by Thomas Matulesy, who briefly managed to gain control of Saparua's Benteng Duurstede. He killed all the fortress defenders but spared a six-year-old Dutch boy. For this minor 'mercy' Matulesy was popularly dubbed Pattimura ('big-hearted'). The rebels were rapidly defeated and dispatched to the gallows but have since been immortalised as symbols of anticolonial resistance. Today their statues dot the whole of Maluku, and Pattimura even features on Indonesia's 1000Rp banknotes. A much-romanticised heroine of the same saga is Martha Christine Tiahahu, whose father supported Pattimura. After his execution on Nusa Laut, Martha was put on a ship to Java but, grief-stricken, she starved herself to death. Her remains were thrown into the sea but her memory lingers on.

Penginapan Lease Indah (☎ 21040; Jl Muka Pasar; tw 70,000-80,000Rp; 📶). Also great value, its well-maintained rooms are set around a pleasant palm garden culminating in a pair of bay-view pavilion seats decked in bougainvillea. It's hidden behind the co-owned **Penginapan Perdana** (☎ 21040; Jl Muka Pasar; d without/with TV 150,000/175,000Rp), whose flashy faux-marble reception desk covers both hotels, though its rooms aren't noticeably better.

Further along Jl Muka Pasar are a few *rumah makan*, the **market** (🕒 Wed & Sat) and a Telkom building, directly behind which is the **bemo terminal** (Jl Belakang). Facing the Zebra'ot Church, the innocently ill-named **SS Restaurant** (Jl Belakang; meals 15,000-35,000; 🕒 8am-8pm) is the most comfortable eatery in town.

From Kota Saparua *ojek* fares include Haria (5000Rp), Itawaka (15,000Rp), Owu (10,000Rp) and Kulur (25,000Rp). Rare bemos cost about 40% less.

HARIA

Saparua's main port is **Haria**, with two boxy churches, a big thatched *baileu* (see boxed text, p738) and a giant white cross above the sapphire-blue bay. A five-minute *ketinting* ride across that bay (or a convoluted 7km *ojek* trip by road and unpaved track) is **Haria Perak**, from which an 800m trail crosses a scrubby headland to the four-room **Penginapan Laino** (per person full board 100,000Rp). Utterly unsigned and astonishingly isolated, this do-nothing get-away commands a long, picturesque sweep of white, if none too soft, sand. Rooms are simple boxes with bucket *mandis*, basic vinyl flooring and no fans, but each has a sea-facing terrace with lovely views towards Pulau Molana.

PULAU MOLANA

Uninhabited, roadless Pulau Molana has several great snorkelling and diving spots. A beak

of soft, dazzlingly white sand at the island's northernmost tip may be rather prone to snag driftwood, but there's great swimming here as the sand slopes down towards the east while directly west a coral wall offers excellent snorkelling. Best of all, you can stay directly behind the beach at the brand-new **Molana Bungalows** (<http://molanaisland.com>; tw full board 200,000-350,000Rp), a superb Robinson Crusoe hideaway that would be ideal for a small group of friends. Their bigger, thatched wooden bungalow called 'Marlatu' is spacious, with private bathroom and balcony. There's also a smaller bungalow ('Pieter'), plus two rather cramped rooms within the sturdy timber restaurant (shared bathrooms). The site is only staffed when guests are expected, so forewarn the owner **Pak Agus Kaya** (☎ 0813 4307 7423; umel_molanaislands@yahoo.co.id; Jl Sikar, Kampong Baru, Haria) or his English-speaking daughter Evie (☎ 0812 4716 4455) well ahead of your planned arrival. Meals (25,000Rp) are somewhat basic. A *ketinting*/speedboat from Haria costs around 120,000/250,000Rp.

DIVING RESORTS

Saparua's crystal-clear waters offer richly rewarding diving.

On a wonderfully peaceful private headland 3km from Kota Saparua, Swiss-owned dive base **Cape Paperu Resort & Spa** (☎ 0811 470 0183; www.capepaperu.com; Paperu; s/d/tr from €76/130/165) limits dives to resident guests. Their sturdy thatched bungalows are spacious, airy and lightly decorated with stylish Balinese furniture and carvings. Bigger cottages (from €107/184/234) have partial sea views. Nondiving guests aren't encouraged and walk-ins are not accepted without reservation. The resort is 800m down unpaved Jl Tamasya off the Booi road but most guests arrive by private-boat transfer from Ambon.

The 15-room **Mahu Lodge** (Mahu village; per person half-board 150,000Rp) will be a much less exclusive dive operation when reconstruction is complete in 2010. Contact Tony at **Daya Patal** (☎ 0811 470 608; spicetr@gmail.com).

NORTHEAST SAPARUA

Nolloth has Saparua's finest traditional *baileu*, a thatched if barn-like **church** (Gereja Darurat) and a selection of colourfully gaudy Christian statuettes. From adjoining **Itawaka** a 50,000Rp boat transfer takes you to Dutch-owned five-room **Penginapan Tolau Indah** (siahayav@xs4all.nl; r €25-50) nearing completion in blissful roadless isolation on a sea-facing cape with snorkelling possibilities. The best room (number 1) has a fabulous balcony overlooking Seram. Decor is tasteful and the shared bathrooms well built.

SOUTHEAST SAPARUA

At **Ullath** is a traditional-style *baileu*, overshadowed by the pointy-hatted tower of the Protestant church. The road dead-ends at **Ouw**, famous for its elegantly simple **pottery** (*sempe*). None is obviously on show but any local can lead you to a workshop, where 5000Rp is a reasonable donation to watch craftsmen build up a typical bowl on an unpowered spindle device. Misleading advertisements suggest that there's a *penginapan* on a minuscule 'beach' called Nukuwoni around a roadless cape from Ouw. In fact this place has been closed and derelict for years.

NORTHWEST SAPARUA

If you're heading to Kulus/Ume Putih for the ferry, you could make a short detour to the **Goa Puteri Tujuh** (Cave of Seven Princesses) containing a seven-section pool whose waters are so crystal-clear they're almost invisible. The access path heads inland 1.1km east of Ume Putih. After four minutes' walk, descend a short stairway beside a rusty pavilion.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Predawn speedboats run from Itawaka (55,000Rp) to Tulehu-Momoking (Ambon) and from Ihamahu (45,000Rp, one hour) to Namano near Masohi (Seram). Arrive by 4.30am, get your name on the passenger list, then pay for the ticket later when your name is called. From Haria to Ambon there's a 7am *kapal motor* (35,000Rp, two hours, not Sundays) and several speedboats (mostly early morning, 45,000Rp, leave when full).

Pulau Nusa Laut

Nusa Laut's 'capital' **Ameth** strictly protects its very fine offshore **coral gardens** by *sasi* (see boxed text, p768), so before snorkelling here, pay a 25,000Rp per person *sasi*-removal fee to the village raja (chief). The village has a kitschy 'clock-carrying' **statue** and an unusual octagonal **Beth-Eden church**. Unmarked **Penginapan Pari Nussa** (Jl Pendidikan; per person 50,000Rp) is a relatively new house facing the football pitch at Ameth's easternmost end. Rooms have fans, en-suite bucket *mandis* and clean squat toilets.

In **Sila** the attractive 1719 **Ebenhaezer church** is Maluku's oldest, but fake tiling on the roof is garishly new. Nearby the cube-shaped 1654 Dutch fort, **Benteng Beverwyk**, has been completely rebuilt with thatched roof and cement wall rendering that needs time to age. Crawling through the window slits you can access a wooden stairway to the roof terrace for bay views. Between fort and church, friendly local English teacher **Robert Abraham** (☎ 0852 4355 5106) offers a single twin-bed **homestay room** (per person 50,000Rp; ☎ from 3pm) in his typical cottage home.

The island's most picturesque villages are **Nalahia** with its steep stairways and **Akoon** with a small thatched *baileu* and shuttered church. **Titawai's** setting backed by steep forests is relatively dramatic. **Abubu** features a statue of Martha Christina Tiahahu and the large 1895 Irene Church.

More daring *ojek* drivers are prepared to do a full loop of the island for around 100,000Rp (two hours including short stops), but beware that the Titawai-Leinitu section is a narrow, overgrown footpath, not a road.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

For the weekly car-ferry timetable see p751. Speedboats leave Ameth and Sila for Tulehu-Momoking on Monday and Fridays (60,000Rp, 6.45am), returning the next day. Wednesday and Saturday dawn speedboats from each Nusa Laut village shuttle to Kota Saparua market (25,000Rp each way), returning by lunchtime. Chartering a *Johnson* longboat from Nusa Laut is easy enough and cheapest if you head for Ouw (from 150,000Rp departing Sila, 250,000Rp from Ameth). Chartering to Nusa Laut is tougher and relatively expensive as no appropriate boats moor in Ouw.

Pulau Haruku

Pulau Haruku has no formal accommodation, so visits are easiest as day trips from Ambon or in linking Ambon with Pulau Saparua. The quietly quaint Christian village of **Haruku** is famous for its November **Sasi Lompa festival**, marking the end of the annual prohibition (see boxed text, p768) on catching *lompa* flying fish. **Rohomoni** sports Maluku's most impressive **thatch-roofed mosque**. There are some attractive beaches located east of **Kailolo**.

Pelauw, Pulau Haruku's main village, has a pitiful fortress ruin and a tacky **Cakalele monument** celebrating the island's other major festival. At the western end of **Hulaliu** village, **Pantai Iyanaen** is a narrow, sandy beach with some lovely sweeps of view towards Saparua and Seram.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Speedboats leave when full (fairly regularly till afternoon) from behind Tulehu market (Ambon) to Haruku, Oma, Rohomoni and Kailolo villages (15,000Rp, 15 minutes). From beside a prominent orange building at Tulehu-Momoking, speedboats depart when full to Pelauw (25,000Rp, 25 minutes), mostly from 10am to 4pm. From Hulaliu a chartered speedboat to Haria (Saparua) costs around 150,000Rp.

GETTING AROUND

Rare bemos run between Pelauw and Kailolo. Sample *ojek* fares include Kailolo-Rohomoni (5000Rp), Kailolo-Haruku (40,000Rp) and Pelauw-Hulaliu (20,000Rp).

PULAU SERAM

☎ 0914

Some Malukans call Seram 'Nusa Ina' (Mother Island), believing that all life sprang from 'Nunusaku', a mythical peak ambiguously located somewhere in the island's western mountains. The best known of Seram's indigenous minority tribes, the Nua-ulu ('upper-river') or Alifuro people, sport red bandana headgear and were headhunters as recently as the 1940s. They live in Seram's wild, mountainous interior whose thick forests are alive with cockatoos and colourful parrots, but seeing them usually requires a punishingly masochistic trek into the remote Manusela National Park for which you'll need guides and extra permits. Bula

on the northeast coast is an oil town (www.citicresources.com/eng/business/oil.htm) serving the inland Oseil field. Seram's greatest tourist attraction is dramatic Teluk Sawai on the northern coast.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

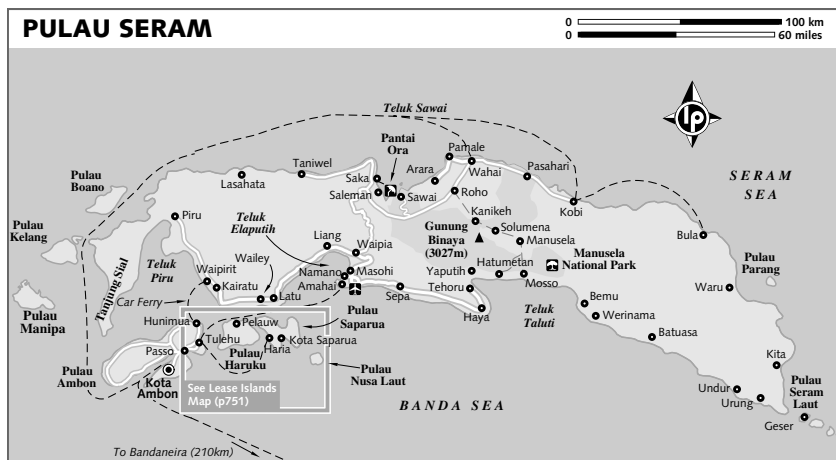
Merpati (☎ 0813 4339 5512, 0813 3043 1092; Jl MC Tiahahu) flies Amahai-Banda-Ambon both ways on Sunday, with Amahai-Banda tickets often easier to procure than Ambon-Banda runs. Ambon-Wahai-Ambon flights operate on Thursday.

Cramped, direct buses perfumed with durian and sweat operate from Mardika in Kota Ambon to various Seram towns including Masohi, Tehoru and Piru (they typically leave Ambon at 3am and 7am), using the Hunimua-Waipirit car ferry (12,000Rp extra). Overnight departures leave Ambon on alternate days, including the 7.30pm **Gumilang** (☎ 0812 4717 9632) bus to Sawai (120,000Rp, 11 hours).

It's more comfortable to start with the twice-daily Amahai jet boat (75,000Rp, 2½ hours) departing Tulehu-Hurnala at 8.30am and 3.30pm, returning at 8am and 1.30pm (no Sunday service). Daily speedboats from Namano cross to Ihamahu (Pulau Saparua) at around 7am (45,000Rp, one hour).

Masohi, Namano & Amahai

Neat if slightly dull, Masohi is the spacious purpose-built capital of central Maluku. It's only really useful to travellers as a transport interchange, though technically you're still supposed to sign in with the **Masohi Police** (Jl Dr Siwabessy; ☎ 9am-2.30pm Mon-Fri) before proceeding elsewhere in Seram. Main street Jl Soulissa heads southwest from the terminal, market and Masohi Plaza shopping mall becoming Jl Martha Tiahahu in the Christian suburbs and continuing 6km through Namano to Amahai. Here, just before Amahai's main port, the larger road turns 90 degrees heading 1km to the airport, passing the minuscule statuette-fronted **Sanggar Budaya Seram Museum** (☎ 22102; Soahuku; suggested donation 10,000Rp; ☎ by request) opposite Amahai's Ebenhaezer church. It's not really a museum at all; you'll see a few very gaudy mock-Alifuro *salawaka* (thin shields), tacky head-dresses (for sale) and *tipa* (drums) on which neighbours might accompany curator Nus Tamaela as he plays



the *totobuan* (12-bell gamelan, or traditional Javanese/Balinese orchestra) or tells stories in easy Bahasa Indonesia about traditional Nua-ulu/Alifuro ceremonies. Most involve severed heads.

Masohi has a warnet (internet centre) and several ATMs. Friendly if far from informative, the **Central Maluku Tourist Office** (Dinas Kebudayaan & Parawisata; ☎ 21462; Jl Imam Bonjol; ☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Sat) is where you'd start the three-stage application process for Manuhela National Park permits.

When time allows, friendly English teacher **Max Dopeng** (☎ 0812 4705 6459) doubles as freelance guide, tourist helper and 'super-ojek'.

SLEEPING

There's plenty of accommodation if you're stuck here though much of it (especially in central Masohi) is a little unkempt. Ultrafrequent Masohi-Amahai bemos pass by or near all of the following.

Penginapan Irene (☎ 21238; Jl MC Tiahahu, Masohi; s/d/tw with fan from 70,000/85,000/120,000Rp, with air-con from 160,000/185,000/180,000Rp; 🚽) The Irene (pronounced 'ee-reh-neh') is friendly, professionally run and suffers less road noise than most. Best choices are in the 200,000Rp range, around an attractive floral shrubbery. Many cheaper rooms are windowless.

Hotel-Restaurant Isabella (☎ 22637; Jl Manuhela 17; s with fan 75,000-95,000Rp, d with air-con from 185,000Rp; 🚽 🚿) A colourful lobby leads to mostly cramped and/or windowless rooms, but 'executive' rooms (265,000Rp) are comfortable,

with windows, hot showers and settee seating. Oddly plonked in the car park is a sizeable swimming pool open to nonguests for 10,000Rp. From the New Lelemuku head one block south, then two blocks inland.

Hotel New Lelemuku (☎ 21581; Jl MC Tiahahu, Masohi; tw with fan/air-con 90,000/185,000Rp) Decent new rooms around an ill-conceived indoor water feature.

Lounusa Beach Hotel (☎ 21379; Jl MC Tiahahu, Namano; d 100,000-150,000Rp; 🚽) Rooms are clean if not extraordinary, but the attraction here are the free cups of tea taken on delightful little rough-wood pavilion-platforms that extend on stilts into the bay behind the hotel's patch of mangrove bank (despite the name, there's no beach). Owners speak Dutch and limited English.

EATING

Numerous cheap eateries and evening warung tents are dotted along Masohi's main drag, especially within a block or two of Masohi Plaza.

Cak Eko (Jl Souliisa; meals 9000-20,000Rp, bakso 10,000Rp; ☎ 8am-11pm) Naturally cooled by traditional design, this bright, thatched barn is part of the Bakso Malang Kota chain.

Afsal (Jl Binaya; meals 13,000Rp; ☎ 7.30am-10.30pm) Attached to the otherwise disappointing Afsal Hotel, this restaurant has Masohi's most appealing interior with solid black furniture, mirrored wall panels and checkerboard floors. Food is a good if typical preprepared selection.

Northern Seram

Seram's most accessible scenic highlight is **Teluk Sawai**, a beautiful wide bay backed by soaring cliffs and rugged, forested peaks. Hidden behind a headland from the best views, the photogenic stilt-house village of **Sawai** is a great place to unwind and contemplate moonlit seas from the creaky, bamboo-walled **Penginapan Lisar Bahari** (per person full board 200,000Rp). Being perched romantically above the water, rooms at this age-old traveller favourite are predictably somewhat damp (bring a sleeping mat) and showers in the basic en-suite bathrooms are salty. There's no phone but the owner's helpful Masohi-based cousin **Wati** (☎ 0852 3050 5806) speaks English. Cost includes fish dinners, assorted snacks and endless tea. Snorkelling is possible in offshore coral gardens (bring your own gear) though the reefs show signs of bomb-fishing damage. Other possible activities include boat rides to Pulau Raja or to the bay's most spectacular western side, where dramatic cliffs rise up above the picturesque village of **Saleman**. It's famed for flocks of bat-like **Lusiala birds**, which emerge at dusk supposedly bearing the souls of human ancestors. En route, tempting little **Ora** is a handkerchief of marvellously spongy, white-sand beach on which the six rooms and pavilion restaurant of **Ora Beach Hotel** (per person full board 400,000Rp) were finally nearing completion at the time of writing. Check opening details through Ambon's Baguala Bay Resort (p749).

Well east of Sawai, lethargic little **Wahai** once housed Seram's main Dutch garrison, but a small, cannon-topped mound of stones is all that remains of the fort. There's inexpensive accommodation but little incentive to visit.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus-ferry-bus combinations (120,000Rp) run Ambon-Sawai on alternate days. Masohi-Sawai Kijangs run according to customer numbers (per person/vehicle 125,000/600,000Rp, 3½ hours). Rare Masohi-Wahai buses can drop you off at a deserted junction 6km above Sawai to make the sweaty descent on foot. If the rain holds off, Masohi-Sawai is much more appealing by *ojek* (around 150,000Rp), with some attractive areas of mountain forest en route. By prior arrangement the Lisar Bahari can arrange a longboat-Kijang connection via Saka, a beautiful boat ride from Sawai.

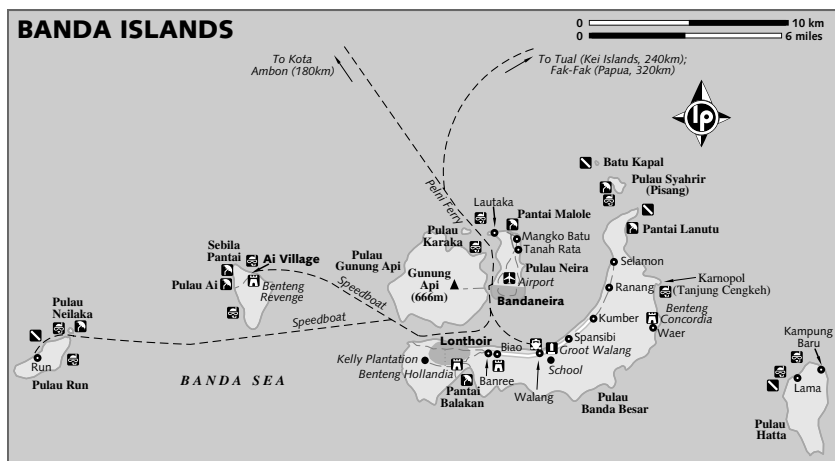
BANDA ISLANDS

☎ 0910 / pop 15,000

This tiny yet historically fascinating cluster of 10 picturesque islands is Maluku's most inviting travel destination. Particularly impressive undersea drop-offs are vibrantly plastered with multicoloured coral gardens offering superlative snorkelling. The central islands Pulau Neira (with the capital Bandaneira) and Pulau Banda Besar (the great nutmeg island) curl in picturesque crescents around a pocket-sized tropical Mt Fuji (Gunung Api; 666m). Outlying Hatta, Ai and Neilaka each have utterly undeveloped picture-postcard beaches. Were they more accessible, the Bandas might be one of Indonesia's top tourist spots. Yet for now you'll have these wonderful islands almost entirely to yourself.

History

Nutmeg, once produced almost exclusively in the Banda Islands, was reputed to ward off bubonic plague, making it one of the medieval world's most expensive commodities. Growing nutmeg takes knowledge but minimal effort, so the drudgery of manual labour was virtually unknown in the Bandas. Food, cloth and all necessities of life could be easily traded for spices with eager Arab, Chinese, Javanese and Bugis merchants who queued up to do business. Things started to go wrong when the Europeans arrived, the Portuguese in 1512, then the Dutch from 1599. These strange barbarians had no foodstuffs to trade, just knives, impractical woollens and useless trinkets of mere novelty value. So when they started demanding a trade monopoly, the notion was laughable nonsense. However, since the Dutch were dangerously armed, some *orang kaya* (elders) signed a 'contract' to keep them quiet. Nobody took it at all seriously. The Dutch sailed away and were promptly forgotten. But a few years later they were back, furious to find the English merrily trading nutmeg on Pulau Run and Pulau Ai. Entrenching themselves by force, the dominant Dutch played cat and mouse with the deliberately provocative English, while trying unsuccessfully to enforce their mythical monopoly on the locals. In 1621 Jan Pieterszoon Coen, the new governor general of the VOC (Dutch East India Company), ordered the virtual genocide of the Bandanese. Just a few hundred survivors escaped to the Kei Islands.



Coen's VOC thereupon provided slaves and land grants to oddball Dutch applicants in return for a promise that they'd settle permanently in the Bandas and produce fixed-priced spices exclusively for the company. These folk, known as *perkeniers* (from the Dutch word *perk*, meaning 'ground' or 'garden'), established nearly 70 plantations mostly on Banda Besar and Ai.

This system survived for almost 200 years but corruption and mismanagement meant that the monopoly was never as profitable as it might have been. By the 1930s, the Bandas were a place of genteel exile for better-behaved anti-Dutch dissidents including Mohammed Hatta (future Indonesian vice president) and Sultan Syahrir (later prime minister). The small school they organised while in Bandaneira inspired a whole generation of anticolonial youth.

In the 1999 troubles, churches were burnt and at least five people were killed at Walang including the 'last *perkenier*', Wim de Broeke. Most of the Christian minority fled to Seram, but the islands rapidly returned to their delightfully torpid calm.

Activities

SNORKELLING

Crystal-clear seas, shallow-water drop-offs and coral gardens teeming with multicoloured reef life offer magnificently pristine snorkelling off **Pulau Hatta**, eastern **Banda Besar** and **Pulau Ai**. Some Bandaneira homestays rent fins and snorkels to guests.

DIVING

Bandaneira's Hotel Maulana (p760) has the Bandas' only diving operation. Rental of their new *Scubapro* BCDs, regulators, wetsuit sets costs US\$38.50 in addition to dive prices (single/double/triple dive US\$49.50/93.50/132) and various fuel surcharges. That's especially expensive considering that there's no resident dive master. If groups book well ahead, Maluku Divers (www.divingmaluku.com; see boxed text, p750) can send an experienced dive leader across from Ambon.

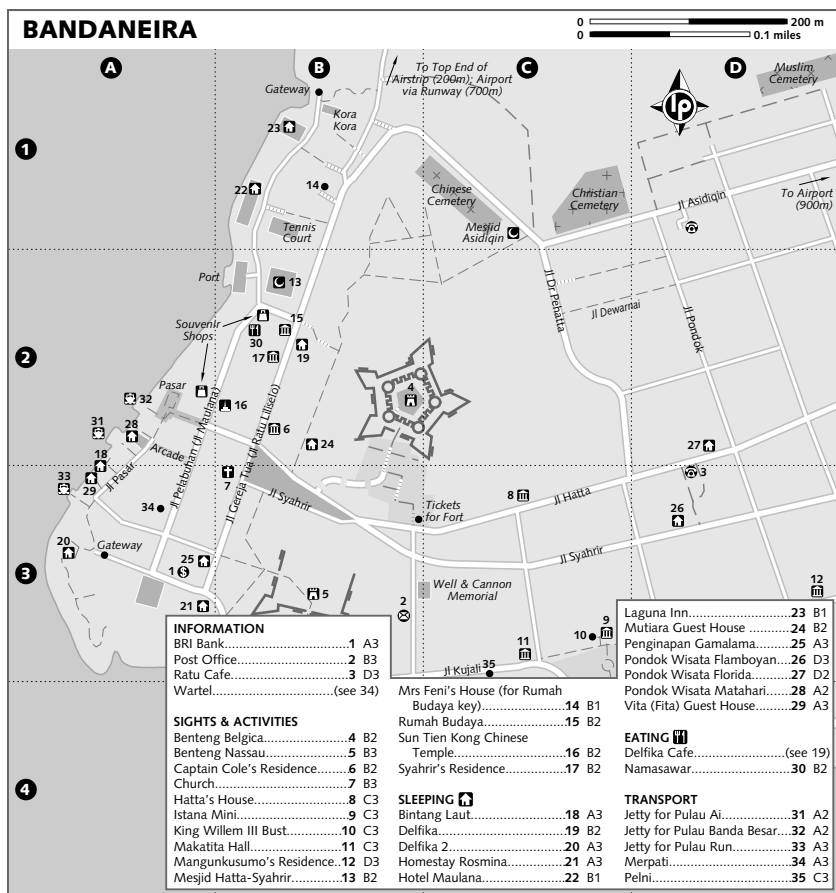
BANDANEIRA

pop 6000

Little Bandaneira has always been the Bandas' main port and administrative centre. In the Dutch era the townsfolk virtually bankrupted themselves maintaining a European lifestyle in spacious mansions that needed rebuilding whenever Gunung Api's volcanic huffs burnt them down again. Today Bandaneira's sleepy, flower-filled streets are so quiet that two becak count as a traffic jam. It's a charmingly friendly place, ideal to wander aimlessly admiring late-colonial houses, pondering mouldering ruins, watching glorious cloudscapes over Gunung Api and stumbling across the odd historic cannon lying randomly in the grass.

Information

There's no tourist office, but several guest houses have helpful English-speaking owners. Delfika (p760) gives its guests a free, basic island map and produces souvenir DVDs



(50,000Rp). For great historical background, read *Indonesian Banda* by Willard A Hanna, available from some souvenir shops and (more expensive) from the Rumah Budaya museum.

Very slow web access is available at guest houses Mutiara and Delfika (25,000Rp per hour).

Bring ample rupiah from Ambon. **BRI bank** (Bank Rakyat Indonesia; Jl Kujali) has no exchange facilities and no ATM (yet). In extremis, Abba at Mutiara Guest House (p760) can change US dollars and euros when he's in town.

A tiny area around **Ratu Cafe** (Jl Hatta) is nicknamed 'SMS corner' as it's the only place in the Bandas to receive a mobile phone signal.

Sights

FORTRESSES

In 1608, Dutch Admiral Verhoeven ordered the building of **Benteng Nassau** on foundations abandoned by the Portuguese in 1529. This was against the most express wishes of local island leaders, who ambushed and executed some 40 Dutch 'negotiators' including Verhoeven himself. The Dutch retaliated in 1621 with the infamous beheading and quartering of 44 *orang kaya* within the fortress, followed by the virtual genocide of the entire Bandanese population.

Three years later the more commanding **Benteng Belgica** (admission 20,000Rp; ☹ sporadic) was added on the hill above. It's a classic Vauban-style star fort named Belgica for Governor

General Pieter Both's native Flanders. The five massive sharp-pointed bastions were extensively crafted to deflect the cannon-fire of a potential English naval bombardment. So in 1796 it caused quite a scandal in Holland when the Brits managed to seize it (albeit briefly) without firing a shot.

From the 1860s both fortresses lapsed into ruin. Benteng Nassau remains largely overgrown, but Benteng Belgica was extensively restored in the 1990s. To reach the upper ramparts (with great views), take the second arch on the left from the central courtyard.

MUSEUM

Bandaneira's main museum, **Rumah Budaya** (Jl Gereja Tua; admission 20,000Rp), houses scatterings of amphorae, Dutch coins, *genever* flacons, a working wind-up gramophone and enough minicannons to marry off a whole village of Kei Islanders. Several lurid paintings, maps and fading photos have English captions. When closed, the museum's key is available from caretaker Mrs Feni, who lives about 200m further north.

HISTORIC HOUSES

Several historically significant Dutch-era buildings have been restored. If you manage to gain access at all (knock and hope!), much of the fun of a visit is hearing the fascinating life stories of the septuagenarian caretakers, assuming your Bahasa Indonesia is up to the task. Donations (around 10,000Rp per person) are appropriate.

Of three early-20th-century 'exile houses', **Hatta's House** (Jl Hatta) is the most appealing. It's partly furnished and Hatta's distinctive spectacles and neatly folded suit are visible in a display cupboard. Behind is the little schoolhouse that he ran in the late 1930s. **Mangkukusumo's Residence** (☎ 21215; Jl Kujali) has a grander portico but only one very sparse 'museum room'. **Syahrir's Residence** (Jl Gereja Tua) has just a few mementoes of specialist interest.

Captain Cole's Residence (Jl Gereja Tua) is the supposed lodgings of the British Marine commander who recaptured Benteng Belgica in 1810. This was just after they'd handed it back to the Dutch, having grabbed it in 1796. The roof is collapsing and it's closed to the public.

The grand but eerily empty 1820s **Istana Mini** (Jl Kujali) was a later residence for the Bandas' Dutch governors, and a haughty, medal-span-

gled bust of Dutch King Willem III rusts quietly in the side garden. **Makatita Hall** (Jl Kujali) occupies the site of the former Harmonie Club (aka 'the Soc') that once boasted seven snooker tables and was the focus of colonial-era social events.

RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS

Behind the main port is the eye-catching **Mesjid Hatta-Syahrir**. Some locals claim this was converted into a mosque from the mansion that first accommodated Hatta and Syahrir on their arrival in 1936.

The 300-year-old **Sun Tien Kong Chinese Temple** (Jl Pelabuhan) looks intriguing glimpsed through the exterior wall at night.

The restored 1852 **church** (Jl Gereja Tua) has a portico of four chubby columns, a decorative bell-clock and an antique tombstoned floor.

Separate Chinese, Christian and Muslim cemeteries are ranged around Mesjid Asidiqin in the Merdeka area.

Activities

Though not Banda's best place for **snorkelling**, Bandaneira has pleasant coral gardens at the southern end of **Tanah Rata** village, off the eastern end of the airstrip and to the north-east off **Pantai Malole**. A notable marine attraction is spotting populations of **mandarin fish** that emerge at dusk from rubble piles within Neira harbour. Though tiny, these fish are dazzlingly colourful, their whirring fins and lurid blue-orange markings seemingly designed by artistic six-year olds on acid. Snorkellers can find them in the shallows between the Vita and Bintang Laut guest houses. Divers can find deeper water populations just off the Hotel Maulana. Bring underwater torches.

Sleeping BUDGET

Over a dozen family guest houses and home-stays offer simple but clean rooms, almost all with en-suite *mandi*. Vita, Mutiara and Delfika are best set up for foreign travellers, with spoken English, great free breakfasts, snorkel rentals (15,000Rp per day) and help with boat hire always at hand. Vita and Delfika 2, along with Bintang Laut and the otherwise lacklustre Matahari, offer the major plus of a waterfront location. Where air-con is available, choosing not to have it turned on means you'll pay only the fan rate.

Delfika (☎ 21027; delfika1@yahoo.com; r with fan 60,000-125,000Rp, with air-con 125,000-150,000Rp; 🍷) There are two locations. For great bay views, upstairs rooms at the brand-new Delfika 2 annex are hard to beat. Meanwhile, the original Delfika has an old-world charm with appealing sitting room, atmospheric garden courtyard and a range of rooms mostly well renovated. The Delfika Cafe is one of Banda's most convivial.

Bintang Laut (☎ 21183; Jl Pasar; tw with fan/air-con 75,000/95,000Rp) The big plus here is a communal view jetty, but little English is spoken and clean rooms are rather dark, facing each other across a covered hallway.

Penginapan Gamalama (☎ 21053; Jl Gereja Tua; tw with fan/air-con 75,000/100,000Rp; 🍷) Functional, relatively large rooms beyond some gratuitous tree-effect concrete pillars. There's plenty of communal seating.

Homestay Rosmina (☎ 21145; Jl Kujali; s/tw 75,000/85,000Rp) Small, lacklustre homestay where manager 'Bob' speaks rather frenetic English.

ourpick Vita Guest House (Fita; ☎ 21332; al landarman@gmail.com; Jl Pasar; d with fan/air-con from 80,000/100,000Rp; 🍷) Seven comfortable rooms form a colonnaded L around a waterfront palm garden whose wonderful wooden jetty area is an ideal perch from which to gaze at Gunung Api while sipping a cold beer. Allan and family are endlessly helpful and quietly entertaining. There's a useful communal kitchen and fridge.

Mutiara Guest House (☎ 21344, 0813 3034 3377; banda_mutiara@yahoo.com; s/d/air-con r 80,000/90,000/125,000Rp; 🍷 📺) The Mutiara has superb-value new rooms and sturdy, classically styled furniture. Some elements suggest nouveau-riche suburban America, but the curious melange includes parrots, an artificial waterfall, a spice garden and a veritable museum of local collectables. Ever-energetic owner 'Abba' is tirelessly helpful when he's not globetrotting for his pearl business. Most guests meet up for the generous, convivial dinner (50,000Rp).

Pondok Wisata Matahari (☎ 21050; Jl Pasar; tw 80,000-100,000Rp) Three of the rather tired rooms look out towards Gunung Api.

Pondok Wisata Flamboyan (☎ 21233; Jl Syahrir; s/tw full-board 100,000/150,000Rp) Quiet if fairly ordinary rooms with hard beds and no mosquito screens around a lawn with a *jambu* tree. Renowned for great home cooking.

Pondok Wisata Florida (☎ 21086; Jl Hatta; r 100,000Rp) Although this aging family home has some curious oddments of old furniture including antique bedsteads and lamps, rooms are rather basic and underlit.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Maulana (☎ 21022; lawere@cbn.net.id; standard/deluxe/ste US\$60/78/84; 🍷) This pseudocolonial-style palace hotel has a lovely verandah overlooking the waterfront between palms and shaggy *ketapang* trees, with the best views from top-floor suites (no elevators). However, room decor lacks personality, and cleaning and service seem a little haphazard given the prices (negotiable). Save \$10 for single occupancy. Save another \$10 for rooms at the Laguna Inn annex, which has similar pros and cons.

Eating

Frequent cups of tea and a light breakfast are generally included in room prices, and almost every place will serve lunch or dinner (35,000Rp to 50,000Rp per person) on advance request. Mutiara, Vita and Gamalama serve cold beer (30,000Rp) to their guests. Delicious local favourites worth requesting include fish in nutmeg-fruit sauce and eggplant with *kenari*-almond sauce. These are available along with seasonal fruit juices (9500Rp) and delicious nutmeg-jam pancakes at **Delfika Cafe** (mains 15,000-30,000Rp, no alcohol).

Half a dozen non-guest house eateries lie a bone's throw of Bandaneira's port, offering *nasi ikan* from 6000Rp. **Namasawar** (☎ 21136; Jl Pelabuhan; mains 10,000-30,000Rp) has the nicest decor with split-level bamboo seating and gingham tablecloths. Several places will cook fresh seafood to order: you can accompany the owner to the market to choose your fish.

Street vendors sell presmoked fish on a stick, sticky rice, dried nutmeg-fruit slices, and pricey but delicious *halua-kenari* almond brittle. In December try *anggur*, fruits which look like black olives but taste like mildly astringent grapes.

Shopping

Several souvenir shops on Jl Pelabuhan sell a small variety of souvenirs, postcards, 'antiques', pearls, contrived artefacts and genuine local snacks.

Getting There & Away

As you tear your hair over minimalist, ever-changeable transport connections, bear in mind that were it not so infuriatingly awkward to reach, Banda would not be the blissfully unspoilt delight that it is today.

AIR

Merpati (☎ 21060; Jl Pelabuhan) flies both ways Ambon–Bandaneira–Amahai on Sunday. Consider phoning your guest house and asking them to prebook your return flight before you even arrive. Beware that last-minute itinerary changes and cancellations are all too common.

BOAT

Pelni's (☎ 21196; Jl Kujali; ☎ 8.30am–1pm & 4–6pm Mon–Sat) *Ciremai* arrives at Bandaneira every second Saturday night just before midnight from Makassar (47 hours) via Bau Bau (Sulawesi) and Ambon (seven hours). After circling through Tual (Kei Islands; 11 hours) and two Papuan ports, the ship returns the other way departing Banda at 7pm on Tuesday... assuming it's on time. That means you'll have less than three days on Banda if making a return to/from Ambon. Once a month there's an extra Ambon–Banda run on the smaller, overcrowded *Kelimutu* (12 hours) continuing to Saumlaki. Beware of pickpockets at any Pelni embarkation. Irregular cargo boats run without schedule (roughly weekly) to Tehoru or Masohi in southern Seram. Chartering a longboat to Tehoru is pricey (diesel/petrol 2,000,000/3,000,000Rp, 10/six hours).

Getting Around

The island is walkably small but *ojeks* save sweat at 3000Rp per hop, 10,000Rp to the airport or 15,000Rp to Pantai Malole. Mutiara and Vita guest houses rent mountain bikes (40,000Rp per day). Several guest houses offer free airport pick-ups. Typical boat-charter rates for full-day trips including snorkelling stops include Ai (350,000Rp), Hatta (450,000Rp), Karnopol and Pisang (300,000Rp), and Run, Neilaka and Ai (500,000Rp). Diesel boats are cheaper but considerably slower.

PULAU GUNUNG API

This devilish little 666m volcano has always been a threat to Bandaneira, Lonthoir and anyone attempting to farm its fertile slopes. Its most recent eruption in 1988 killed three

people, destroyed over 300 houses and filled the sky with ash for days. Historically, Gunung Api's eruptions have often proved to be spookily accurate omens of approaching intruders.

The volcano can be climbed for awesome sunrise views in around three hours up and back, but the unrelenting slope is arduous and the loose scree is scary especially when descending. Take ample drinking water. Guides (from 50,000Rp) are prepared to accompany hikers but the path up is obvious.

The waters around Gunung Api hide several attractive coral gardens, home to lurid purple-and-orange sea squirts, remarkably fast-growing table corals and concentrations of (mostly harmless) sea snakes. Especially good for snorkelling are the submerged north-coast lava flows ('New Lava') and areas off little Pulau Karaka's handkerchief of beach reached by chartered *ketinting* from Bandaneira (half-day around 100,000Rp).

PULAU BANDA BESAR

pop 6000

The largest island of the group, hilly Banda Besar makes a great day trip and offers some interesting woodland walks. Boats shuttle regularly from Bandaneira to several Banda Besar jetties, most frequently to **Walang** (per person/boat 4000/30,000Rp, 15 minutes). *Ojeks* (5000Rp) run via **Biao** village (home of a scraggy pet cassowary) to **Banree** where the asphalt ends. If you walk 10 minutes west along the narrow concrete sea-defence wall, you'll emerge at the new but photogenic **Masjid Al Taqwa** mosque in **Lonthoir** (pronounced 'lontor'). This is Banda Besar's sleepy, steeply layered 'capital' village whose main 'street' is actually a long stairway. That starts beside **Homestay Leiden** (Jl Warataka; per person 50,000Rp), which offers two neat guest rooms (thin mattresses, shared *mandi*) in the attractive house of earnest, English-speaking Usman Abubakar. At the top of the stairway turn right to find the **Kelly Plantation** where centuries-old, buttressed *kenari* trees tower protectively over a nutmeg grove. Or turn left to find **Benteng Hollandia**. Built in 1624, this was once one of the biggest Dutch fortresses in the Indies until shattered by a devastating 1743 earthquake. The chunky overgrown ruins are easy to miss but the site, high above the village, offers perfect palm-framed views of Gunung Api with a magical foreground of sapphire-blue shallows.

Between the steps and the fort, look for a colonnade-wrapped mosque called Masolah Asalihim and take a hidden path behind to descend southwards to **Pantai Balakan** (aka Laerkoey Beach). That's a pleasant sandy bay dotted with fishing boats, though one female reader has reported harassment here.

An alternative path with broken steps descends to Biao from near the fortress.

Bandaneira's Vita Guest House occasionally organises guided forest walks across Banda Besar combined with boat pick-up and snorkelling stops during the return ride.

Eastern Banda Besar

East-coast Banda Besar is roadless and generally accessed by boat charter from Bandaneira. **Waer** village is fronted by unreconstructed **Benteng Concordia**, a small star fortress retaining three of its four corner bastions. **Karnopol** (aka Tanjung Cengeh) offers snorkellers very rich sea life including reef sharks, though visibility is somewhat poorer than at Hatta or Ai. **Pantai Lanutu** is a pleasant, family-friendly beach stop with a gently sloping stretch of safe sand beneath your feet.

On **Pulau Pisang (Syahir)**, sunset views from semidormant **Guest House Mailena** (per person full-board 130,000Rp) are better than the snorkelling. Four simple rooms share two bathrooms, but the place is usually unmanned and nominal manager Ahmad Kadiri (Jl Pondok Pantai, Bandaneira) lacks a decent boat, adding to the logistical difficulties.

PULAU HATTA

pop 800

Formerly called Rozengain, isolated Hatta had no nutmeg. Thus its only historical relevance was a comical episode where eccentric English Captain Courthope raised a flag merely to enrage the Dutch. The island's two tiny settlements have no facilities, but right in front of Lama village is a lovely white-sand beach off which are Banda's clearest waters and richest reefs. Around 300m west of Lama, a natural underwater 'bridge' creates a beautiful blue hole over part of Hatta's stunning vertical drop-off. Pristine coral, clouds of reef fish and superb visibility make this Banda's top snorkelling spot. Some dive trips continue 20 minutes south to an underwater atoll known as Skaru, but most of the shallow-water coral here is depressingly bombed-out.

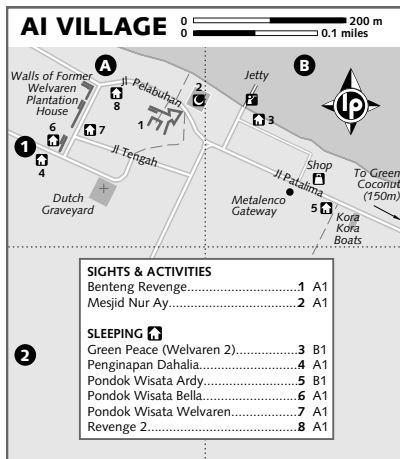
From Bandaneira count on around 450,000Rp to charter a suitably powerful boat including stops on Hatta, eastern Banda Besar and Pulau Pisang.

PULAU AI

pop 1000

Seventeenth-century English agents had built a fortress and trained Ai citizen-fighters so well that they managed to resist a 1615 Dutch attack. Indeed, the islanders then stunned the astonished Dutch with an unexpected counterattack, inflicting some 200 casualties. A year later the humiliated Dutch were preparing to make a revenge attack when a small British fleet appeared, apparently in the nick of time to defend their Ai comrades. But after a few volleys of cannon fire the English commander ceased hostilities and invited his Dutch opponent for a cup of tea. After a little chat the Dutch offered the Brits nominal trading rights and sovereignty in Pulau Run. Suitably bribed, the duplicitous Brits sloped off to Seram. When they returned, almost the entire Ai population had been massacred or had fled. The Dutch repopulated the island with slaves and prisoners. Ai's four-pointed star fortress, now an overgrown ruin, has been known poignantly ever since as **Benteng Revenge**.

Ai village has a gentle charm, and beach views back towards Bandaneira from the jetty are magnificent. But the island's greatest attraction is snorkelling the remarkably accessible, brilliantly pristine coral drop-offs just



GO ON, TAKE NEW YORK!

After the 1616 Dutch ravaging of Ai, English forces retreated to their trading post on Run and built an 'impregnable' fort (now entirely disappeared) on the tiny, waterless islet of Neilaka. Increasingly besieged, the same eccentric Captain Courthope who had taunted the Dutch on Hatta (formerly Rozengain), put honour above survival in a preposterously futile last stand, refusing even the most reasonable offers to leave. Somehow British sovereignty was maintained even after the 1621 Dutch atrocities during which all of Run's nutmeg trees were systematically destroyed. That left the English with an economically worthless scrap of land. Eventually in 1667 Britain agreed to a 'swap', giving Holland Run for a (then equally useless) North American island. That island was Manhattan. Not a bad deal, as it turned out.

a flipper flap away. There's masses to see directly in front of the village, and sea life is even more impressive off **Sebila Pantai**, 15 minutes' walk west where a wrasse 'cleaning station' attracts sharks, batfish and turtles.

Sleeping & Eating

Virtually none of the homestays have signs. Use the map and ask! Be extra careful not to waste water: Ai has no springs and all needs are provided by collecting rainwater or by laboriously transporting purchased water from Bandaneira when supplies run out. There are no restaurants, but accommodation prices (per person) include three meals.

Revenge 2 (per person 75,000Rp) Two rooms with shared bathroom offered by an enthusiastic English-speaking young owner. Has great food.

Green Coconut (Jl Patalima; per person 100,000Rp) Although food is comparatively basic, the Green Coconut has the best seafont location with wonderful sea views from its common balcony and dining room (plus room 4).

Penginapan Dahalia (per person 100,000Rp) This family house has two en-suite guest rooms and regularly recommended food.

GreenPeace/Welvaren 2 (mg_oderajaidi@yahoo.co.id; per person 100,000Rp) Purpose-built new guest house where rooms 1 and 2 overlook the jetty and have private *mandis*. Free wake-up calls from the nearby mosque.

Three Pondok Wisata, **Welvaren** (per person 75,000Rp), **Ardy** (per person 100,000Rp) and **Bella** (per person 75,000Rp), have a mixed bag of rooms.

Getting There & Away

Two or three passenger boats (20,000Rp, one hour) leave Ai for Bandaneira when full around dawn, returning between 10.30am and 1pm. To make day trips from Bandaneira you'll have to charter.

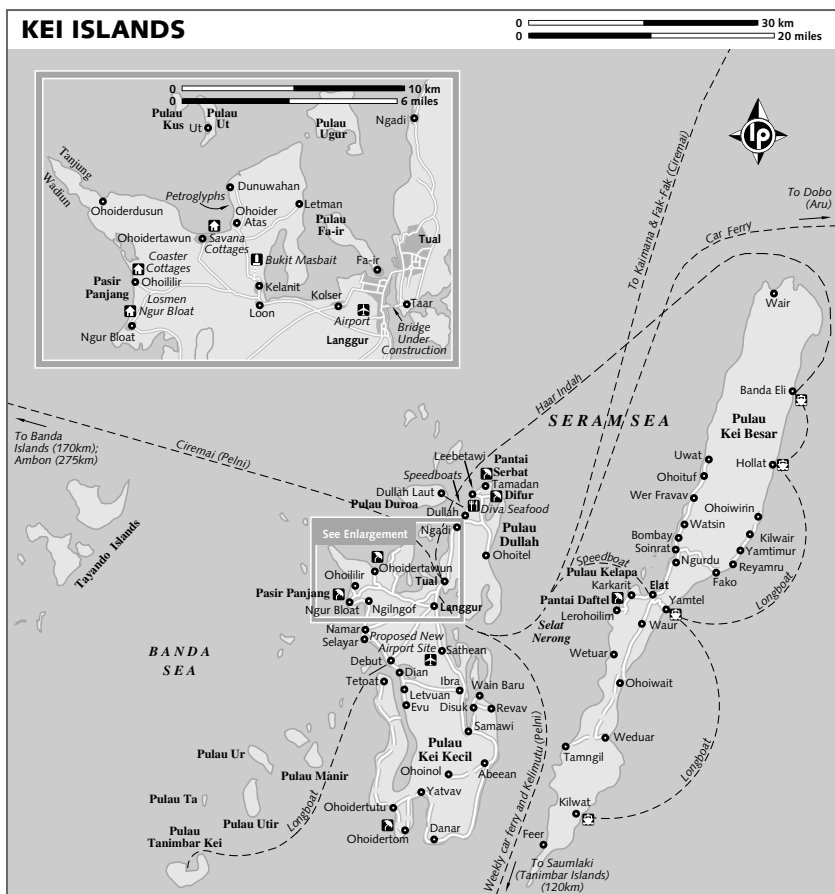
PULAU RUN (RHUN)**pop 1000**

Run village is an appealing little network of steps and floral concrete paths backed by vine-draped limestone cliffs with attractive views between the tamarind trees from the top end of Jl Eldorado. Run's main attraction is diving the deeper-water drop-off that lies 70m to 150m off the island's northwestern coast (access by boat). Visibility is magnificent but the coral has suffered some damage of late. Alternatively, beach yourself briefly on the picture-perfect white sands of **Pulau Neilaka**, an isle so small you can saunter around it in 10 minutes. There are dazzlingly photogenic views towards Gunung Api from the eastern sand spit.

A morning boat (30,000Rp, two hours) leaves Run for Bandaneira, returning around noon. Chartering (350,000Rp to 450,000Rp return from Bandaneira) makes more sense as Run has no formal accommodation and you'll need a boat anyway to reach Neilaka and the offshore drop-offs.

SOUTHERN MALUKU**KEI ISLANDS****☎ 0916**

The Kei Islands' trump cards are kilometres of stunning yet almost entirely empty white-sand beaches. Landscapes are unspectacular except on Kei Besar, but comparative accessibility and the deeply hospitable population add considerably to the islands' appeal. Beneath the mostly Christian facade, Kei culture is fascinatingly distinctive with three castes, holy trees, bride prices paid in *lela* (antique mini-cannons!) and strong belief in *sasi* (see boxed text, p768). In Kei language *bokbok* means 'good', *hanarun (li)* means '(very) beautiful' and *enbal* (cassava) is a local food staple.



The driest season is September to December, with *Belang* war-canoe races held in November. The Darwin–Saumlaki yacht rally (www.sailindonesia.net) visits Debut harbour in late July, welcomed by a cycle of traditional cultural events.

Tual & Langgur

pop 65,000

Bridging the two central islands, these two towns together form the Kei Islands' main commercial centre and transport gateway. Sights are minimal though neotraditional **Mesjid Muharjirin** (Jl Soekarno-Hatta) is stylish, **Gereja Anugerah** (Jl Soekarno-Hatta) has a space-ship-shaped bell-tower, and a **graveyard** behind Tual's stilted Kyombawa quarter

makes an attractive sunset-watching spot. Jl Jenderal Sudirman and Jl Pattimura (one-way southbound) are the main commercial streets.

BNI bank (Bank Negara Indonesia; Jl Dr Laimena; ☎ 8am–3pm Mon–Fri) has the only official currency exchange (terrible rates) and the best ATM (1,200,000Rp maximum). **LiveCom** (per hr 10,000Rp; ☎ 3–10pm Mon–Sat) has more reliable internet than **Ronevan Computer** (Jl Kartini; per hr 10,000Rp; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Sat).

The **tourist office** (Dinas Parawisata; ☎ 24063; Jl Jenderal Sudirman; ☎ 8am–2.30pm Mon–Sat, 8am–noon Fri) answers questions and dispenses maps and brochures. Friendly, well-informed Viki (☎ 0813 4331 2704; budhitoff@yahoo.com) speaks English.

SLEEPING

Tual and Langgur have ample accommodation though many travellers make straight for the beachside options (see p767).

Losmen Amelia (☎ 21387; Jl Fidnang Armau, Tual; s 25,000-40,000Rp) Box rooms with shared *mandi* are as miserable as you'd expect for the price, but the losmen's owner, Umbra, speaks some English.

Losmen Bahtera (☎ 21973; Jl Kayu Hitam, Langgur; r 60,000Rp) Basic little en-suite rooms in an unmarked three-storey mansion with lemon-yellow trim overlooking the mangroves.

Penginapan Asnolia (☎ 22106; Jl Mayor Abdullah, Tual; d 140,000-195,000Rp; ♿) Attractively upgraded new rooms are freshly painted and solidly furnished off pleasantly airy, common sitting rooms. All but two (80,000Rp, with fan) have decent air-con but bathrooms could be better.

Hotel Vilia (☎ 21878; Jl Telaver, Langgur; d 150,000-250,000Rp; ♿) Clean and airy but somewhat soulless with mangrove views from the shared 3rd-floor balcony.

Hotel Dragon (☎ 21812; Jl Jenderal Sudirman, Langgur; s/tw from 175,000/200,000Rp; ♿) Reliable, friendly and well equipped if slightly dated, the Dragon's upper-floor rooms are good value but suffer from road noise and minor plumbing niggles.

ourpick Aurelia Hotel (☎ 23748; Jl Jenderal Sudirman, Langgur; d 250,000-350,000Rp; ♿) Brand-new Western-standard rooms line a kitschy ribbon of manicured garden with gilded Corinthian columns hidden away at the side of the Kimson Center fitness-and-games complex. English is spoken in the small reception booth.

Hotel Suita (☎ 24007; hotelsuitatual@telkom.net; Jl Jenderal Sudirman, Langgur; d/deluxe/sta 325,000/600,000/850,000Rp; ♿) Bilingual service is obliging but rucked carpets and distressingly widespread damp patches thoroughly spoil the once-stylish decor. Overpriced.

EATING

Several cheap but unremarkable eateries are strung along Langgur's Jl Jenderal Sudirman with more huddling near Tual's Pasar Masrun.

Risa Cafe (Jl Jenderal Sudirman; cakes 2000-4000Rp, coffee 5000Rp, rice dishes 12,000Rp; ☎ 8am-midnight) The Kei Islands' only Western-style cafe, Risa is spacious, pleasantly lit at night and serves a mean *kopi jahe* (ginger coffee, 5000Rp).

Ayah/Family Restaurant (beside Watdek Bridge; meals 8000-25,000Rp; ☎ 9am-2am) It's not especially polished but you get to sit on a pierlike area overlooking the bridge and mangroves. The preprepared food is no more expensive than at the numerous warungs that spring up outside each evening.

Diva Seafood (☎ 21337; mains 20,000-40,000Rp, juice 15,000Rp; ☎ 9am-midnight) It's well worth trekking 10km north of Tual to sit beside an iridescent blue bay at this unusually well-appointed restaurant with indoor, outdoor and pavilion seating. Sip a fresh *sirsak* (soursop) juice or tuck into a variety of fresh fish dishes including some pseudo-Thai variants.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

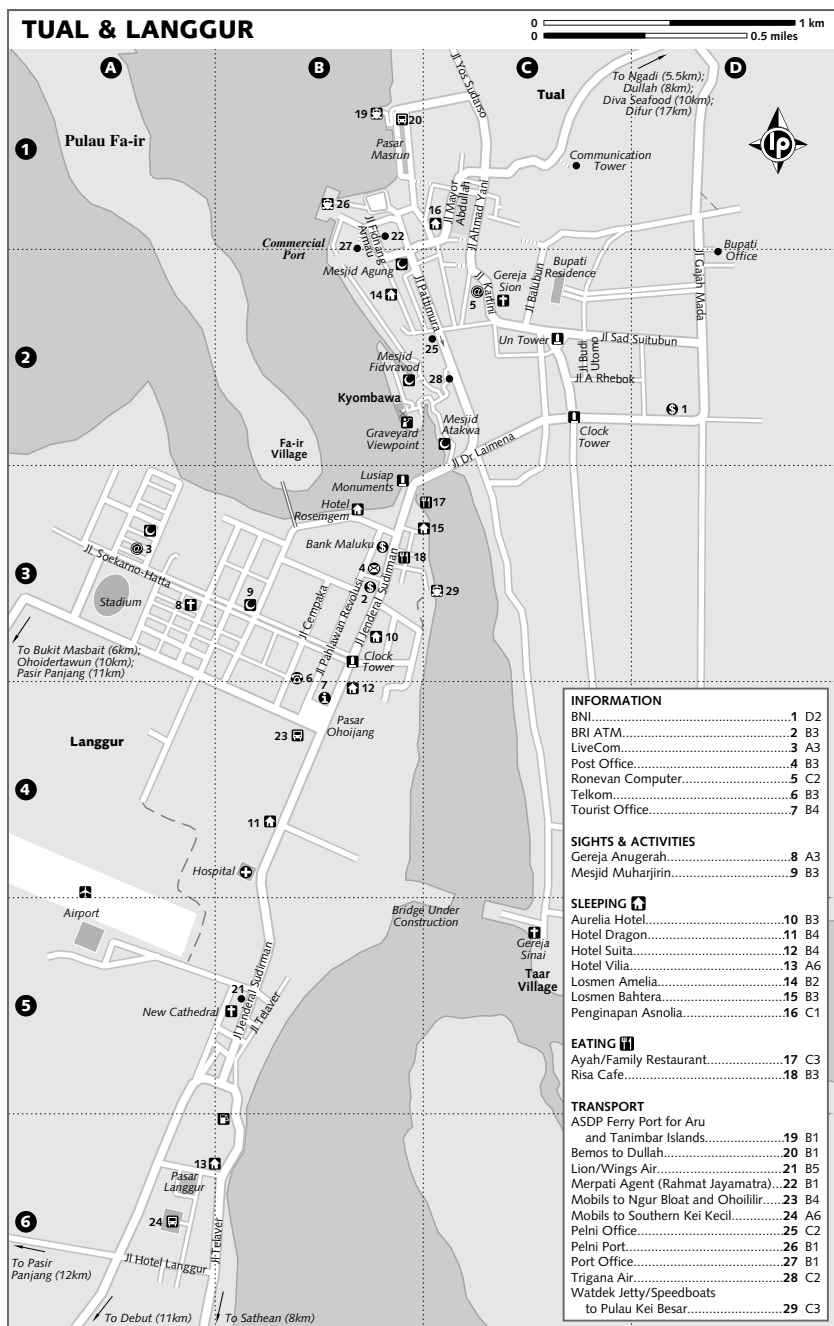
Wings Air (☎ 22186; Jl Jenderal Sudirman; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-2pm Sun) and/or **Trigana Air** (☎ 23743; Jl Pattimura; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Sat) have flights to/from Ambon (1,050,000Rp, 1½ hours) almost daily, providing gorgeous views of Tayando and Bandas en route (south windows). Some Trigana flights continue on to Sanana and Ternate. Baggage limit is 10kg. **Merpati** (☎ 21376; Rahmat Jayamatra, Jl Fidnang Armau) flights to Dobo (Friday and Saturday) are generally full, with passengers originating in Ambon.

Bemo (Mobil) & Ojek

Mobil for Debut (3000Rp), Disuk (5000Rp) and southern Kei Kecil operate from a station beside Pasar Langgur. Those for Dullah (3000Rp, fairly frequent) and Difur Beach (Sunday only) leave from Tual's Pasar Masrun. From Langgur's Pasar Ohoijang roughly one *mobil* per hour leaves to Ngur Bloat (for southern Pasir Panjang) or Ohoilir (for Coaster Cottages). Or you can take an *ojek* (15,000Rp, 25 minutes).

Boat

Pelni (☎ 22520; Jl Pattimura; ☎ 8am-2pm) liner *Ciremai* links Tual to Ambon (18 hours) via Bandaneira (10 hours). Eastbound, it loops through Kaimana and Fak-Fak in Papua, returning 36 hours later. Ferries depart from behind Pasar Masrun on Friday at 5pm to Dobo and Benjina (Aru) and on Monday to Saumlaki and Larat (Tanimbar). For Perintis cargo-ship timetables ask at the **port office** (Kantor Pelabuhan; ☎ 22475), up an unlikely back stairway.



GETTING AROUND

Bemos (2000Rp per hop) are so common they form a virtual conveyor belt along Langgur's Jl Jenderal Sudirman, mostly continuing to Tual's big Pasar Masrun market via BNI bank and/or the Un (not UN!) Tower. Southbound from Tual, 'Langgur' bemos pass Hotel Vilia and terminate at Pasar Langgur. 'Perumnas' bemos divert to the area around the Anugerah church. *Ojeks* cost 5000Rp per hop.

Kei Kecil

BUKIT MASBAIT

With great views over Langgur, the island's highest point is an important Easter pilgrimage site for Catholics. An open-armed Christ statue stands atop a globe and tower surrounded by various scenes from the crucifixion. Notice the strikingly Asian features of the Roman centurion. Access takes 10 minutes up an unmarked track (then steps) from the low pass on the Letman road just beyond Kelanit village.

OHOIDERTAWUN

The charming village of **Ohoidertawun** surveys a lovely bay that becomes a vast, white sand flat at low tide. Craftsmen sit in the palm shade carving out canoes with adzes. An elfin Elim church and pyramidal mosque coexist harmoniously. A 'holy tree' on the waterfront beside Savana Cottages is believed to enforce peace or bind relationships. And it seems to work an intangible magic on visitors who are frequently mesmerised by this wonderfully peaceful little place. A footpath and stairway leads north to Ohoider Atas village. At low tide you can splash across the sand flats past small caves cut in the limestone cliffs (some contain human bones). After around 25 minutes notice red-and-orange **petroglyphs** painted on the cliff faces. Although some designs look new, many are antique and their origin baffles archaeologists.

Sleeping

our pick **Savana Cottages** (☎ SMS only 0813 4308 3856; d 110,000Rp) For pure narcotic serenity, few budget guest houses in Indonesia can beat Savana Cottages. Watch the changing moods of nature, the swooping curlews and the tide retreating in the moonlight, while sipping an ice-cold beer or swinging from the hammock between sighing casuarinas. Four simple, double-bed cottage-style rooms come with rat-

tan balcony chairs and towels for the shared *mandis*. Mosquito nets are available and hearty breakfasts included. There's a sweet little cafe (dinner 50,000Rp) decorated with gongs, carvings and tinkling wind chimes. When not away in Holland, English-speaking owner Gerson offers a variety of interesting excursions and explanations on some of the bizarre intricacies of Kei social life.

PASIR PANJANG

The Kei Islands' most famous tourist draw is **Pasir Panjang**, 3km of white sand so powdery it feels like flour. Obliging coconut palms curve across it for your photographic delectation. And despite the brochure-cover beauty, the beach is almost entirely deserted except at weekends when a couple of karaoke outfits crank up the volume near the beach's access points: Ngur Bloat (south) and Ohoililir (north).

At the beach's reputedly haunted north end, 700m beyond Ohoililir village, **Coaster Cottages** (<http://keikeil.tk>) comprises three very different beach houses, each with excellent sunset-facing balcony-terraces. Although each one has different owners, bookings for all three are organised through English-speaking Ogbert ('Bob') Asyz (☎ 0813 4347 2978; bob.azyz@yahoo.co.id). The **Grand Villa** (house €60) is a fully equipped holiday home that's brilliantly airy, stylishly designed and lovingly maintained. The two bedrooms come elegantly draped with two vast mosquito nets. It's one of Maluku's best-quality beachside options, so consider booking way ahead. The **Middle House** (tw 150,000Rp) is contrastingly simple, with two unadorned, fanless rooms whose overly soft double mattresses come with musty pillows. Some readers consider the price excessive, but you're paying

WOMA

The spiritual centre of every Kei village is marked by an open-air shrine known as a *woma*, into whose offering dish superstitious people drop coins for good luck. Many modern *woma* are tackily painted concrete monstrosities. But in Waur you can find a rare original one in the form of an unembellished five-legged stone altar. Sitting beside it, a VOC (Dutch East India Company) minicannon points at the vast, recently rebuilt church. A message?

SASI SAVVY

Call it 'magic' or 'earth knowledge', Maluku experiences many hidden undercurrents of almost voodoo-esque beliefs, beautifully described in Lyall Watson's book *Gifts of Unexpected Things*. One such belief still widely prevalent is *sasi*, a kind of 'prohibition spell' used to protect property and prevent trespass. Physically the only barrier is a *janur* palm frond. But few would dare to break a *sasi* for fear of unknown 'effects'. For countless generations *sasi* have prevented the theft of coconuts and ensured that fish aren't caught during the breeding season. However, in 2003 some cunning Kei Islanders put a *sasi* on the Tual-Langgur bridge. All bemo traffic stopped. Nobody dared to walk across. The result was, not unintentionally, a prolonged bonanza for boatmen until the authorities finally stumped up the cash for a *sasi*-removal ceremony. Other jokers made a *sasi* across the access route to Tual's government offices so employees couldn't get to work. The 21st-century *sasi* seems to have become a unique version of the protection racket.

for a unique location. The **Doctor's House** (house 200,000Rp; ☒) is spacious and equipped with kitchenette, fridge and air-con. However, it's somewhat aging and much less hip than the Grand Villa. For 75,000Rp per person, guests at any of the houses can enjoy two well-cooked meals and a cursory breakfast.

Near the beach's southern end, a handful of Sunday snack kiosks lie amid palms around 400m north of Ngur Bloat (aka Pasir Panjang village). Here **Losmen Ngur Bloat** (d and breakfast 100,000Rp, dinner 35,000Rp, beer 30,000Rp) has four rooms with mosquito nets, AC Milan bed sheets, step-down *mandi* and private (if broken-seated) toilet. You can hear but not quite see the waves from the rickety communal terrace. When unmanned, get the keys from Evlyn Dresubun in Ngur Bloat village.

Nearby **Rahan Vatar** (r 75,000Rp, beer 30,000Rp) has a trio of narrow queen-bed rooms in a reasonably well-built, timber stilt hut – but be warned that it's primarily a karaoke shack, so expect nocturnal nuisances.

SOUTHERN KEI KECIL

From **Debut** outrigger ferries cross to Tetoat, from which a rough road continues to **Ohoidertutu Beach**. Also from Debut, daily longboats cross to **Pulau Tanimbar Kei**, the most traditional of all the Kei Islands. There's no way back till next morning (unless you charter at around 2,000,000Rp), but the tourist office is planning to have bungalow accommodation operational there by 2011.

About 4km south of Debut an unmarked track to the right leads down steps to **Gua Lian Hawan**, a pair of cave pools with ice-blue water and lots of butterflies. The good new asphalt ends at picturesque **Letvuan**, where locals dry a special type of medicinal seaweed.

A rougher road continues to **Evu**, source of Kei Kecil's fresh water. Evu's artificial splashing pool behind a *lela* (minicannon) monument is popular with weekenders, and Evu's upper village is gently photogenic.

Pulau Dullah

A series of **outlying islands** with lovely beaches and turquoise waters face **Ngadi** village, where English-speaking Ebi Renwarin can help you organise island homestays.

Dullah is famous for its *kora-kora* (canoe) rowing team, and two open-sided **boat sheds** are visible beside the main road 2km before the brilliant Diva Seafood restaurant (p765).

With blinding white sand, **Difur** is idyllic on weekdays but predictably busy on Sunday.

Pulau Kei Besar

Scenic Kei Besar is a long ridge of lush, steep hills edged with picturesque villages and several picture-perfect beaches (better for taking photos than for swimming). Expect intense kamus curiosity from locals and take your best *kamus* (dictionary) as nobody speaks English.

ELAT & AROUND

Attractively set on a bay featuring three temptingly sand-ringed islets, Elat is Kei Besar's main village. A short walk from the port in an unmarked peach-coloured house, **Penginapan Sanohi** (☎ 23013; Jl Pelabuhan; d 75,000) is the island's only formal accommodation, with pleasant new rooms off a family living area sharing two rudimentary *mandis*. The rooftop quads (100,000Rp) are older and more basic.

Elat has a market and three rice-and-fish *rumah makan*. All close by dusk, so eat early or snack on biscuits from the few tiny evening shops.

Southwest of Elat, a lane through palm fronds and bougainvillea leads 6km to **Pantai Dافتل**, a superb, if shallow-water, white-sand beach that stretches 1.8km to **Lerohoilim**, where there's a scattering of ancient graves atop a rocky outcrop called Batu Watlus. Coastal views are delightful.

Other easy *ojek*-excursions from Elat include picturesque **Yamtel** village (20 minutes east), **Waur** (15 minutes south) with its celebrated little *woma* (see boxed text, p767), or the charming west-coast villages of **Ngurdu** (3km), **Soinrat** (4km), **Bombay** (7km) and **Watsin** (8km), all with bay views, stone stairways and rocky terraces.

EAST COAST

The eastern coastline has attractive, tidal rock pools but no beaches. Villages are comparatively isolated, steeped in superstitious traditions and locals tend to speak the local Kei language rather than Bahasa Indonesia. The only current access is by boat from Yamtel, since the coast road was washed away between Fako and **Reyamru**, whose high forests hide a mysterious **batu kapal** (stone boat). Straight-faced locals will assure you this was once a Portuguese shipwreck that somehow became petrified and ran up the mountain! Some 10 minutes' walk along the beach north of **Kilwair**, Aterius Uwaubun is happy to show off his private turtle pool. Walk five minutes further to find a triple-arched rock promontory, **Watngasoar**, site of local fairy tales in which a woman turned into a *kuel* fish.

Several hours north by longboat, **Banda Eli** is home to many Bandanese who fled here from the Dutch-led massacres of 1621 (see p756). The Bandanese language, now extinct in the Banda Islands, is still spoken here and the people are renowned for metalwork. Contact Tual-Langgur's tourist office to find out whether the planned visitor cottages have yet been built.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Torpedo-shaped 50-seater speedboats shuttle between Watdek (Langgur) and Elat (25,000Rp, 65 to 80 minutes), leaving when full. That's roughly hourly between around 8.30am and 4pm. En route notice the *bagang* (fishing platforms) sitting above the waters like giant wooden spiders. Occasional *kapal motor* sail from Watdek to southern Kei Besar. The *Haar Indah* from Tual's main port sails to Banda Eli (60,000Rp, three hours) at 8am Monday, Wednesday and Saturday, returning next day.

GETTING AROUND

Mobil are very rare. By *ojek* prebook a return ride if you don't want to be stranded in traffic-less outer villages. East-coast settlements are served from Yamtel by multistop *Johnson* longboats. These depart at dawn from both Kilwat and Banda Eli, returning from Yamtel around noon (70,000Rp, around four hours). Take sunscreen, rain protection and sandals for wading through rock pools to the uncovered boats.

TANIMBAR ISLANDS

☎ 0918

The nominally Christian Tanimbar Islands are known for wild orchids, endemic parrots, woodcarvings and mysterious 'stone boats'. Although declared a conservation area in 1971, continuing logging on the group's biggest island, Pulau Yamdena, has caused international concern (see www.earthaction.org/end-yamdena-logging.html).

Saumlaki

pop 15,000

In WWII Saumlaki was the site of a suicidally heroic WWII battle, when Julius Tahija's 13 KNIL (Royal Netherlands Indies Army) troops temporarily repelled a whole Japanese invasion force. Today the unexciting little town is undergoing a sudden economic boom as the capital of the new Tanimbar 'regency'. However, there's still no money exchange, the **BRI Bank** (Jl Bhineka) ATM is unreliable and the only internet cafe had closed down when we visited. The **tourist office** (Dinas Parawisata; Jl Sukarno; ☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Fri) can provide free, vaguely misleading city maps once somebody finds the relevant cupboard keys. It's 500m inland from the smart new **Hotel Galaxy** (☎ 22222; Jl Urayana; d/sste 270,000/390,000Rp).

Saumlaki's greatest attraction is unwinding on the lovely boardwalk terrace of the appealing bayfront **Hotel Harapan Indah** (☎ 21019; Jl Bhineka; s with fan 176,000Rp, s/tw/tr with air-con 275,000/286,000/396,000; ☎). It's an ideal spot for watching spectacular sunsets while washing down fresh seafood with a cold Bintang or three. The hotel terrace also displays woodcarvings in Tanimbar's distinctive Picasso-meets-Indiana-Jones style. Such carvings make attractive souvenirs, but don't believe claims that they're 'antiques'. The 'tradition' was revived in the late 20th century as a job-creation scheme for villagers in **Tumbur** (18km north), now the island's main craft centre.



Obliging English-speaking *ojek*-driver Nus (a trained dive guide) will likely find you and be keen to help out with your transport arrangements.

Around Saumlaki WELUAN

An easy 5km *ojek* ride leads to **Pantai Weluan**, where a convex sweep of palm-backed grey-white sand is revealed at low tide, facing some funky offshore rock islands. It's overwhelmed with picnickers on Sunday (and with their rubbish on Monday). Better beaches on offshore islands are accessible by private boat.

Reached by a parallel road, **Kristus Raja** is a vaguely manic Jesus Christ statue thrusting forth his out-of-scale arms towards an invisible multitude in an isolated area of overgrown secondary scrub.

SANGLIAT DOL

Centuries ago, the Tanimbars' first settler families commemorated their seaborne arrivals by building remarkable **stone boats** which formed the spiritual heart of their original villages. The

most intact example lies in scenic **Sangliat Dol** village, 42km north of Saumlaki. Overlooked by a tall church tower, the 15m 'boat' has a mast stone and megalithic 'altar', but the stone prow's finely carved top piece was stolen in 2005. Before snapping photos, you're expected to present cash (around 25,000Rp per group) and a bottle of *sopi* (available in situ) to both the *kepala desa* (whose house is across the volleyball court) and the *tuan tanah* (traditional 'boatman'). The latter then beseeches spirit ancestors not to be annoyed by your camera-toting antics. Being a 'Christian' village, these fascinating *adat* (traditional laws) prayers start and end incongruously with a Catholic body-crossing!

There's a second, smaller stone boat on the village beach: descend the steep ceremonial stone stairway and turn left.

Up to four Arui-bound buses lurch past Sangliat Dol daily (15,000Rp, 1½ hours), the last returning around 3.30pm. The *kepala desa* can organise homestays and (with sufficient notice) local dancing for a suitable fee.

In the sea's calm season (December–April) it's hard to arrive in Sangliat Dol by boat. That costs around 200,000Rp for a return trip from attractive **Lorolun** village, which retains one of the Tanimbars' last traditional twin-level timber houses with stylised bull-horn eaves. Lorolun's uncommercialised beach sweeps northeast towards a headland with possible surfing potential (May–August). Bemos to Lorolun leave Saumlaki every couple of hours till 4pm (12,000Rp).

Getting There & Away

A new 'Saumlaki International' airport is under construction 4km from Lorolun, but for now only tiny prop-planes can land on the ultrashort runway of Olilit Airport, 1km east of central Saumlaki. On Sunday **Merpati** (☎ 21027; Hotel Harapan Indah) flies Ambon–Saumlaki–Larat–Langgur and back. Three times weekly **Trigana Air** (☎ 270 5355; Jl Nusantara; ✈ 8am–6pm) flies Ambon–Saumlaki–Langgur–Ambon, but to fly Saumlaki–Langgur you'll generally be charged the full Saumlaki–Ambon fare unless you risk going 'stand-by'.

The Ambon–Saumlaki trip takes 36 hours on Pelni's monthly *Kelimutu* (via Banda, 22 hours), or 33 hours direct on the *Pangrango*, which continues on a three-day odyssey to Kupang, West Timor. The uncomfortable *Koromolin* ferry (see boxed text, opposite) from

CACOPHONOUS KOROMOLIN: THE ASDP FERRY EXPERIENCE

Is this a ferry or a bazaar? At Tual, the ro-ro gantry opens but no cars drive on. Instead, the vehicle deck of the aging ferry is quickly covered with vinyl matting from which a noisy trade in meals, drinks and more mats takes place. Extraordinary numbers of people come and go, but as the ferry prepares to leave the rusty car deck remains full, traders becoming almost organically replaced by groups of travellers. While there are in fact seats and around 80 *Kelas 1* bunks upstairs, these are stuffy, enclosed and much more prone to seasickness-inducing roll once at sea. Thus many passengers stay downstairs hoping that rain squalls don't shower them too badly through the big open-sided boat frame. Arriving at Dobo, you understand why no vehicles were brought aboard. There's no way to get them off again! Instead, as the ferry docks, an extraordinary tsunami of porters and meeter-greeters surge over the boat's sides in an endless wave. Welcome to Aru!

Tual travels overnight on Monday via Larat, returning Wednesday at 5pm (150,000Rp).

Sail Saumlaki Rally (www.sailindonesia.net, www.manta.org.au/saumlaki/DSCLogJuly2006.pdf) is an annual yacht expedition from Darwin, Australia.

SOUTHWESTERN MALUKU

A comparatively arid arc of islands swings west towards Timor. The region's capital is Wonreli on **Kisar**, which anecdotally got its current name from a 1665 mix-up. A lost Dutch VOC official arrived on one of its white-sand beaches and asked the bemused locals where he was standing. Reasonably enough, he was told '*kiasar!*' (on the sand!). The name stuck. A weekly Merpati flight connects Kisar with both Ambon and Kupang in Nusa Tenggara. Apart from Perintis cargo boats, the only other public transport is on Pelni's *Pangrango* running each way from Saumlaki to **Tepa** (11 hours), **Leti** (25 hours), **Kisar** (33 hours), **Iliwaki** (Wetar, 38 hours) and eventually Kupang (59 hours). Once a year (November or December), Bali-based diving outfit **Seatrek** ([☎ 0361-283 358](http://seatreksailingadventures.blogspot.com); <http://seatreksailingadventures.blogspot.com>, www.anasia-cruise.com) offers live-aboard cruises in a refitted nine-berth Bugis schooner between the Kei Islands and Timor, stopping in the Tanimbars, Dai (Pulau Babar), Damar, Romang and Wetar.

ARU

☎ 0917 / pop 40,000

This steamy, low-lying island group was once part of the land bridge between New Guinea and Australia to which its flora and marsupial fauna are biologically similar. Alfred Wallace's classic *The Malay Archipelago* records his five-month stay here in 1857. Most visitors come to retrace Wallace's footsteps in search of Aru's famous birds of paradise (*cendrawasih*),

but the only one you're likely to see in Aru's busy little capital **Dobo** is a garish concrete version surveying the town's main road junction. For the real thing you'll need the time, money and linguistic skills to organise expeditions to prime spots like Pulau Baun or Pulau Maekor, both at least five hours by powerful longboat from Dobo. Don't forget mosquito repellent: malaria is prevalent.

If you're stranded in Dobo, **Pantai Durjela**, 9km west, would be idyllic but for the numerous trucks which are busily removing its gorgeous white sand.

There's lots more sand and better high-tide swimming off **Kota Lama**, a minuscule fishing village on Pulau Wokam (150,000Rp, 40 minutes by longboat from Dobo), where the very scanty ruins of a 1659 Dutch fort lie overgrown beyond the graveyard.

Dobo's most congenial accommodation is the professionally run **Penginapan Suasana Baru** ([☎ 21940](tel); Jl Ali Murtopo; d with fan/air-con from 137,500/165,000Rp; ♿), where rear rooms are built on platform which extends on stilts above the shallow bay, making for great views. It's hidden behind a comically naive statue of 1965 naval hero **Yos Sudarso** standing on a chunk of warship. Hotels Grand Aru and Sinar Harapan are also good choices, while **Penginapan Cendrawasih** ([☎ 21095](tel); Jl Yos Sudarso; tw from 88,000Rp; ♿) is marginally the best port-area cheap.

Merpati ([☎ 21260](tel); Jl Kapitan Malongo; ✈ 9am-3pm Mon-Sat) flights from Ambon via Langgur (Friday and Saturday) are typically booked solid over a week ahead. The uncomfortable ASDP *Koromolin* ferry (see boxed text, above) departs Tual at 5pm Friday, arriving at Dobo (59,000Rp) at 5am Saturday, then continuing to the pearl-farming settlement of Benjina. At 5pm Saturday it departs Dobo for the return to Tual.

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