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)
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