



Gili Islands

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Why Go?

Picture three miniscule desert islands, fringed by white-sand beaches and coconut palms, sitting in a turquoise sea: the Gilis are a vision of paradise. These islets have exploded in popularity, and are booming like nowhere else in Indonesia – speedboats zip visitors direct from Bali and a new hip hotel opens every month.

It's not hard to understand the Gilis' unique appeal, for a serenity endures (no motorbikes or dogs!) and a green consciousness is growing. Most development is incredibly tasteful and there are few concrete eyesores.

Each island has its own special character. Trawangan is by far the most cosmopolitan, its bar and party scene vibrant, its accommodation and restaurants close to definitive tropical chic. Gili Air has the strongest local character, a mellow atmosphere and lovely views from Rinjani. Meno is simply tranquility on earth. But all have one thing in common: they are incredibly hard to leave.

When to Go

The wet season is approximately late October until late March. But even in the height of the rainy season, when it's lashing it down in Mataram or Bali, the Gilis can be dry and sunny. High season is between June and late August, when rooms are very hard to find and prices can double (though great weather is almost guaranteed). The perfect months to visit are May and September. There's no cyclone season to worry about.

i Getting There & Away

From Bali

Several fast boats offer swift connections (about two hours) between Bali and Gili Trawangan. They leave from several departure points in Bali, most dock at Teluk Nare on Lombok before continuing onto Air and Trawangan (you'll have to disembark for Meno). Two helpful websites, **Gili Bookings** (www.gilibookings.com) and **Gili Fast-boat** (www.gili-fastboat.com), present a range of fast-boat operations. Gili Bookings is the most discerning, vetting companies for safety and reliability. Be warned that the sea between Bali and Lombok can get very rough (particularly during rainy season). Book ahead in July and August.

Gili Getaway (☎Bali reservations 0813 3707 4147, Gili reservations 0878 6432 2515; www.giligetaway.com; child/adult 490,000/660,000Rp) From Serangan at 9am, returning at 11.30am. We enjoy its impeccable service and race-car seating.

Kuda Hitam Express (☎0363-23482; www.kudahitamexpress.com; child/adult

450,000/650,000Rp) Departs from Amed at 9am daily. Returning from Trawangan at 10.15am.

Amed Sea Express (☎80 852, 0819 3617 6914; www.gili-sea-express.com; per person 600,000Rp) Makes 75-minute crossings to Amed on a 80-person speedboat. This makes many interesting itineraries possible.

Blue Water Express (☎614 4460; www.bluewater-express.com; child/adult US\$55/67) From Serangan, Bali direct at 8am and 10am. Returning at 11am and 1.30pm.

Gili Cat (☎0361-271 680; www.gilicat.com; child/adult 475,000/660,000Rp) Departs daily from Padangbai at 9.15 am, returning from Trawangan at 11.20am.

Scoot Cruise (☎612 3433; www.scootcruise.com; adult/child 675,000/550,000Rp) High-speed catamaran service between Sanur and the Gilis, via Nusa Lembongan. Departures from Sanur at 9.30am, returning from Gili at 1.25pm.

Semaya One (☎087 8088 8771; www.semayaacruise.com; child/adult 550,000/650,000Rp)



Gili Islands Highlights

- 1** Snorkelling with hawksbill and green sea turtles (p289)
- 2** Raving all night at one of Trawangan's **(in)famous parties** (p296)
- 3** Finding serenity on **Gili Meno's west coast** (p297)
- 4** Learning to **freedive** (p292) in paradise
- 5** Savouring carpaccio and pasta at **Blu da Mare** (p295)
- 6** Munching authentic Indonesian food with the dive proletariat at **Rumah Makan Kikinovi** (p295)
- 7** **Cycling** (p292) around Gili Trawangan, then climbing the hill for unbeatable sunset views
- 8** Diving with reef sharks at **Shark Point** (p293)
- 9** Enjoying the sheer thrill of eye-dazzling white sand and striped turquoise sea on **Gili Air** (p301)

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