



Sulawesi

POP 18.8 MILLION

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Best Places to Eat

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Best Places to Stay

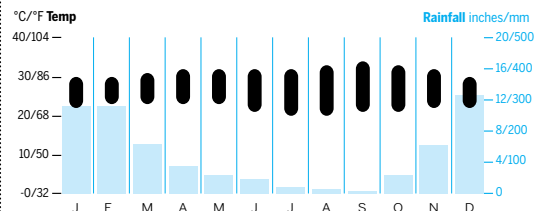
- ➔ Living Colours (p690)
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Why Go?

If you think Sulawesi's geography looks fantastic on the map, just wait until you see it for real. The massive island's multi-limbed coastline is drawn with sandy beaches that fringe coral reefs and a mind-boggling variety of fish. Meanwhile, its interior is shaded by impenetrable mountains and jungles that are thick with wildlife, such as rare nocturnal tarsiers and flamboyantly colourful maleo birds. Cultures have been able to independently evolve here, cut off from the rest of the world by the dramatic topography. Meet the Toraja highlanders, with their elaborate funeral ceremonies in which buffaloes are sacrificed and *balok* (palm sugar wine) flows freely; the Minahasans in the far north, who offer spicy dishes of everything from stewed forest rat to grilled fish; and the Bugis, who are mainly found inhabiting Sulawesi's coastal regions and are Indonesia's most famous seafarers.

When to Go

Makassar



Apr–Oct It's peak season for scuba diving, with calm seas and incredible visibility.

Nov–Mar Lembbeh Strait critters tend to come out of the muck more in the wet season.

Jun–Aug The best months to experience Tana Toraja's biggest funeral ceremonies.

History

The interior of Sulawesi provided a refuge for some of Indonesia's earliest inhabitants, some of whom preserved elements of their rich cultures well into the 20th century. The Makassarese and Bugis of the southwestern peninsula and the Christian Minahasans of the far north are the dominant groups in Sulawesi. The unique traditions, architecture and ceremonies of the Toraja people make the interior of South Sulawesi a deservedly popular destination.

Other minorities, particularly Bajau sea nomads, have played an integral role in the island's history. The rise of the kingdom of Gowa – Sulawesi's first major power – from the mid-16th century was partly due to its trading alliance with the Bajau. The Bajau supplied valuable sea produce, especially the Chinese delicacy trepang (sea cucumber), tortoiseshell, birds' nests and pearls, which attracted international traders to Gowa's capital, Makassar.

Makassar quickly became known as a cosmopolitan, tolerant and secure entrepôt that allowed traders to bypass the Dutch monopoly over the spice trade in the east – a considerable concern to the Dutch. In 1660 the Dutch sunk six Portuguese ships in Makassar harbour, captured the fort and in 1667 forced Gowa's ruler, Sultan Hasanuddin, into an alliance. Eventually, the Dutch managed to exclude all other foreign traders from Makassar, effectively shutting down the port.

Indonesia won its independence from the Dutch in 1945, but ongoing civil strife

hampered Sulawesi's attempts at post-WWII reconstruction until well into the 1960s. A period of uninterrupted peace delivered unprecedented and accelerating development, particularly evident in the ever-growing Makassar metropolis.

Tragically, the Poso region in Central Sulawesi fell into a cycle of intercommunal violence in 1998, though things have calmed down considerably since. Since 2013 the development of the Trans-Sulawesi highway and the upgrading of several regional airports have improved the island's transport connections, boosting trade and tourism.

Getting There & Away

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Domestic

The two main transport hubs are Makassar and Manado, which are well connected with the rest of Indonesia. Palu is the third most important airport. In recent years Gorontalo, Luwuk, Poso and Kendari have all seen an increase in air traffic; minor airports at towns such as Ampang, Selayar and Naha (Sangihe-Talaud Islands) also provide useful links for travellers.

There are direct flights to Java, Bali, Kalimantan, Maluku and Papua. Lion Air, Garuda Indonesia, Wings Air, Batik Air, Citilink, XpressAir, Sriwijaya Air are the main carriers.

International

Silk Air flies between Manado and Singapore four days per week for around US\$210 (one way). Air Asia flies from Makassar to Kuala Lumpur from US\$80.

THE WALLACE LINE

Detailed surveys of Borneo and Sulawesi in the 1850s by English naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace resulted in some inspired correspondence with Charles Darwin. Wallace was struck by the marked differences in wildlife, despite the two islands' proximity and similarities in climate and geography. His letters to Darwin, detailing evidence of his theory that the Indonesian archipelago was inhabited by one distinct fauna in the east and one in the west, prompted Darwin to publish similar observations from his own travels. The subsequent debate on species distribution and evolution transformed modern thought.

Wallace refined his theory in 1859, drawing a boundary between the two regions of fauna. The Wallace Line, as it became known, divided Sulawesi and Lombok to the east, and Borneo and Bali to the west. He believed that islands to the west of the line had once been part of Asia, and those to the east had been linked to a Pacific–Australian continent. Sulawesi's wildlife was so unusual that Wallace suspected it was once part of both, a fact that geologists have since proven to be true.

Other analyses of where Australian-type fauna begin to outnumber Asian fauna have placed the line further east. Lydekker's Line, which lies east of Maluku and Timor, is generally accepted as the western boundary of strictly Australian fauna, while Wallace Line marks the eastern boundary of Asian fauna.