



# Sumatra

POP 50.37 MILLION

## Includes ➔

Medan .....	494
Bukit Lawang .....	501
Danau Toba .....	508
Pulau Nias .....	515
Banda Aceh .....	521
Pulau Weh .....	526
Banyak Islands .....	531
Padang .....	537
Mentawai Islands .....	544
Bukittinggi .....	550
Kerinci Valley .....	560
Riau .....	568
Palembang .....	577
Lampung .....	580

## Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Bixio Cafe (p529)
- ➔ Pak Tri's (p541)
- ➔ Marola (p567)
- ➔ Jenny's Restaurant (p512)
- ➔ Pondok Kelapa (p576)

## Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Horas Family Home (p512)
- ➔ Pondok Tailana (p533)
- ➔ Freddie's (p527)
- ➔ Abdi Homestay (p558)
- ➔ Nachele Homestay (p507)

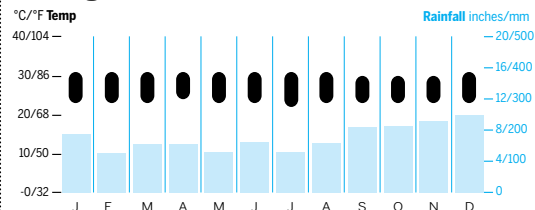
## Why Go?

Few isles tempt the imagination with the lure of adventure quite like the fierce land of Sumatra. An island of extraordinary beauty, it bubbles with life and vibrates under the power of nature. Eruptions, earthquakes and tsunamis are Sumatran headline grabbers. Steaming volcanoes brew and bluster while standing guard over lakes that sleepily lap the edges of craters. Orangutan-filled jungles host not only our red-haired cousins, but also tigers, rhinos and elephants. And down at sea level, idyllic deserted beaches are bombarded by clear barrels of surf.

As varied as the land, the people of Sumatra are a spicy broth of mixed cultures, from the devout Muslims in Aceh to the hedonistic Batak Christians around Danau Toba and the matrilineal Minangkabau of Padang. All are unified by a fear, respect and love of the wild and wondrous land of Sumatra.

## When to Go

### Padang



**Apr–Oct** Hit the waves on the Mentawai, Nias and the Banyak.

**Mid–Jun** Take in the chaotic canoe races at the Danau Toba Festival.

**Feb–Aug** Traveling during the dry season maximises wildlife sightings in the jungle.



## History

Pre-Islamic history is often more myth than fact, but archaeological evidence suggests that Sumatra was the gateway for migrating tribes from mainland Southeast Asia.

The Strait of Melaka, an important trade route between China and India, exposed the east coast of Sumatra to the region's super-powers and cultural influences such as Islam. The kingdom of Sriwijaya emerged as a local player at the end of the 7th century, with its capital presumably based near the modern city of Palembang. After Sriwijaya's influence waned, Aceh, at the northern tip of Sumatra, assumed control of trade through the strait. The era of Aceh's sultanate prevailed until the beginning of the 17th century, when Dutch traders claimed a piece of the spice trade.

The most influential port of the day, Samudra, near Lhokseumawe, eventually became the name that traders used to refer to the entire island. It was Marco Polo who corrupted the name to 'Sumatra' in his 1292 report on the area.

Throughout the colonial era, Sumatra saw many foreign powers stake a claim in its resources: the Dutch based themselves in the west Sumatran port of Padang, the British ruled in Bencoolen (now Bengkulu), American traders monopolised pepper exports from Aceh, and the Chinese exploited the reserves on the islands of Bangka and Belitung, east of Palembang.

In the early 19th century, the Dutch attempted to assert military control over all of Sumatra, a move met with resistance by its disparate tribes. In 1863 the Dutch finally established authority over Pulau Nias. Treaties and alliances brought other areas of Sumatra under Dutch rule.

The Dutch were never welcomed in Sumatra, which contributed several key figures to the independence struggle. Yet Sumatra was dissatisfied with Jakarta's rule. Between 1958 and 1961, rebel groups based in Bukittinggi and the mountains of south Sumatra resisted centralisation, which led to clashes with the Indonesian military. Fiercely independent Aceh proved to be Jakarta's most troublesome region. Aceh's separatist movement started in the late 1970s and continued until 2006.

No human conflict could compare to the destruction that occurred on Boxing Day in 2004, when a 9.0-plus-magnitude earthquake off the northwestern coast of Sumatra

triggered a region-wide tsunami, killing over 170,000 people, mainly in Aceh. The one silver lining to the disaster was that the rescue and reconstruction efforts have brought peace to region and it largely holds to date.

## **i** Getting There & Away

These days, most travellers reach Sumatra via budget airline flight or ferry from Java. The old sea routes are largely redundant.

Keep in mind that Sumatra is one hour behind Singapore and Malaysia.

### AIR

Medan is Sumatra's primary international hub, with frequent flights from its new airport to mainland Southeast Asian cities such as Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Penang with **Silk Air** ([www.silkair.com](http://www.silkair.com)), **AirAsia** ([www.airasia.com](http://www.airasia.com)) and **Malaysia Airlines** ([www.malaysiaairlines.com](http://www.malaysiaairlines.com)), respectively. In West Sumatra, Padang receives flights from Kuala Lumpur. Banda Aceh, Palembang, Pulau Batam and Pekanbaru also receive international flights from mainland Southeast Asia.

You can hop on a plane from Jakarta to every major Sumatran city aboard **Garuda** ([www.garuda-indonesia.com](http://www.garuda-indonesia.com)), **Lion Air** ([www.lionair.co.id](http://www.lionair.co.id)) or **Sriwijaya Air** ([www.sriwijayaair.co.id](http://www.sriwijayaair.co.id)), among others. Flights from Sumatra to other parts of Indonesia typically connect through Jakarta.

A word of warning: when oil-palm plantations on Sumatra's east coast are burned (annually, usually during dry season), the smoke frequently results in the closure of Pekanbaru and Jambi airports.

### BOAT

Ferries run between Dumai on Sumatra's east coast and Melaka and Klang (for Kuala Lumpur) in Malaysia, Singapore and Pulau Batam, but Dumai is only useful if you have your heart set on an international boat journey or if you're transporting a motorbike between Sumatra and Malaysia.

From Singapore, ferries make the quick hop to Pulau Batam and Pulau Bintan, the primary islands in the Riau archipelago. From Batam, boats set sail for Dumai, Palembang and Pekanbaru, but few travellers use these routes.

Ferries cross the narrow Sunda Strait, which links the southeastern tip of Sumatra at Bakauheni to Java's westernmost point of Merak. The sea crossing is a brief dip in a day-long voyage that requires several hours' worth of bus transport from both ports to Jakarta and, on the Sumatra side, Bandarlampung.