



# Dili

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## Best Places to Stay

- » Hotel Esplanada (p49)
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## Why Go?

Recently anointed 'City of Peace' by President José Ramos-Horta, Dili has not always been in the news for its serenity. However, his dream is becoming a reality. Visitors will find some of the world's best diving, plus migrating whales, international events and delicious seafood. All of this is against a Portuguese colonial backdrop, reminders of the Indonesian occupation and the struggles since independence.

Dili is also a place of great hope, where East Timorese and people from around the world want to shed the decades of tragic legacy and become known for something good, something positive.

No matter what your plans are in Timor-Leste, Dili will play an important role in your trip. It's your stepping-off point for seeing the country and where you'll buy anything you may need for your travels. And it's where you tap into the local *ju-ju* to find out what's really going on here and in the rest of the country.

## When to Go

May is the start of the dry season and when the Sunset Fair at Cristo Rei is held. The dry season is also when the bulk of visitors descend on Dili. June has the Dili 'City of Peace' Marathon, while the Tour de Timor cycle race is held in September. In October whales begin migrating through the Wetar Strait. For those visiting around the major religious holidays, expect to see parades at Easter and ornately decorated nativity scenes in the lead-up to Christmas. Diving off the Dili coast is great year-round.

## History

There had been a Portuguese settlement in Dili for more than a century by the time the Portuguese moved their centre of government here from Lifau in 1769. Dili was always a sleepy colonial town in a sleepy and remote colony and what little press it got wasn't good.

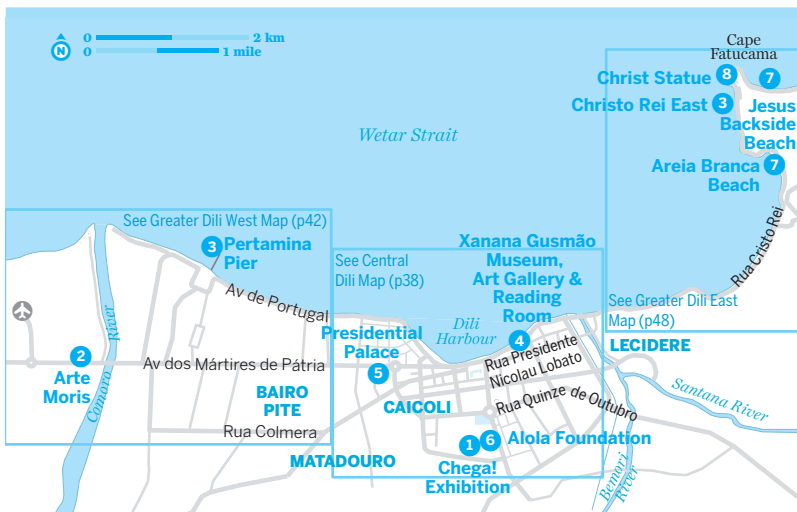
The town was never a jewel in the crown of the Portuguese colonial empire, and it still lacks lavish public buildings. When English scientist Alfred Russel Wallace spent several months here in 1861, he described Dili as:

...a most miserable place compared with even the poorest of Dutch towns... After three hundred years of occupation there has not been a mile of road made beyond the town, and there is not a solitary European resident anywhere in the interior. All the govern-

ment officials oppress and rob the natives as much as they can, and yet there is no care taken to render the town defensible should the Timorese attempt to attack it.

The Japanese occupation in WWII made Dili a bombing target for Australian RAAF flights out of Darwin, but that was virtually the only appearance Dili would make in the history books until 1975. As Portuguese rule crumbled after the 1974 revolution back in Portugal, Dili became the focus for the power struggle between rival Timorese political parties.

On 11 August 1975 the Timorese Democratic Union (UDT) party staged a coup in Dili, and the Portuguese administration withdrew to Atauro Island to watch what happened from a safe distance. Fretilin won the brief civil war and on 28 November



## Dili Highlights

- 1 Learn about the struggles of the East Timorese people at the must-see **Chega! Exhibition** (p37)
- 2 Meet Timorese artists and see their work at **Arte Moris** (p37)
- 3 Enjoy some of Timor's best **dive sites** (see box, p45), including Christo Rei East and Pertamina Pier
- 4 Learn about the man at the **Xanana Gusmão Museum, Art Gallery & Reading Room** (p37)
- 5 Visit the world's most accessible **Presidential Palace** (p41) and see the traditional warrior guards
- 6 Buy traditional *tais* and handicrafts at the **Alola Foundation** (p54)
- 7 Take a dip at one of Dili's great **beaches** (p41), including Areia Branca Beach and Jesus Backside Beach
- 8 Climb to the top of Cape Fatucama where Dili's **Christ Statue** (p37) stands