



Understand Timor-Leste

TIMOR-LESTE TODAY 102

After achieving independence in 2002, Timor-Leste has experienced a turbulent decade, but the future looks bright.

HISTORY 105

If Timor-Leste's history were a novel, it would be an entertaining read. The tragedy, of course, is that it's all true.

THE PEOPLE 115

Friendly, gregarious and fiercely proud of their independence, East Timorese people are also conservative and traditional.

ENVIRONMENT..... 120

Discover Timor-Leste's rugged mountainous landscape and its pristine waters containing an abundance of sea life.

LIVING & WORKING IN TIMOR-LESTE 126

We cover all the issues, from choosing between Dili and the Districts, to health care, security and costs of living.



population per sq km

TIMOR-LESTE



USA



UK


 ≈ 30 people

Timor-Leste Today

Independence Pains

After a prolonged and often bloody struggle, Timor-Leste finally achieved independence on 20 May 2002. Former freedom fighters Xanana Gusmão (president) and Mari Alkatiri (prime minister) were installed as leaders of the newest nation on earth just three years after it voted for self-government after 24 years of Indonesian occupation and centuries of Portuguese rule. However, the first decade of independence has been far from smooth sailing.

In December 2002 riots erupted in Dili out of frustration at unyielding economic hardship and the slow pace of reform. Demonstrators saw few, if any, opportunities for advancement or employment in an economy without a functioning private sector and almost entirely dependent on foreign aid.

Political and regional tensions that had been sidelined during the fight for independence, and in the face of a common Indonesian enemy, rose to the surface. The dominant political party, Fretilin, splintered and east-versus-west animosities also flared. When the government sacked one-third of the army due to unresolved ethnic and regional conflicts in 2006, the violent rioting that ensued destroyed thousands of homes and caused 150,000 Timorese to flee.

As peacekeeping forces returned to the streets of Timor-Leste, relative peace returned after political pressure finally forced the resignation of Prime Minister Alkatiri. He was replaced by revered independence hero José Ramos-Horta.

A total of 14 political parties, representing a wide spectrum of viewpoints and regional interests, contested the May 2007 elections, putting an end to one-party rule in Timor-Leste. Defying predictions of chaos,

STATS

- » Population: 1,066,582 (2010)
- » Population increase 2004–10: 15.5% (143,384 people)
- » Average household size: 5.8 people (2010)
- » Time for the population to double: 29 years (2010)

Top Books

East Timor: A Rough Passage to Independence (2003) James Dunn's thorough account of East Timor's history from 1975 to 1999.

A Dirty Little War (2001) John Martinkus' eyewitness story of Indonesia's sustained campaign of terror from 1997 to 1999.

A Not-So-Distant Horror: Mass Violence in East Timor (2005) Joseph Nevins reveals the international complicity during the East Timor tragedy from 1975 to independence.

Top Film

Balibo (2009) A must-watch film for anyone coming to East Timor. This award-winning film retraces the steps of the 'Balibo Five' through the eyes of the veteran journalist Roger East, who was also later killed by Indonesian troops.