

ASIA · DIVING · BEACHES · HIKING · OFF THE BEATEN PATH · HISTORY

 Timor-Leste

Timor-Leste is one of Asia's youngest and least-visited countries: Atauro Island's reefs hold some of the highest recorded reef-fish diversity on Earth, Mount Ramelau offers sunrise above the clouds, and Jaco Island's white sands are sacred and uninhabited. Tourism is in its infancy, so come for adventure rather than polish.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Timor-Leste and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 10 December 2025.

 CAPITAL Dili	 CURRENCY US dollar (USD) £1 ≈ US\$1.34	 LANGUAGE Tetum, Indonesian Portuguese, English	 BEST TIME Jun–Oct
 DAILY BUDGET £40–£170 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type C, E, F, I 220V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 24h via Singapore and Bali, or Darwin ~£1,000–£1,700 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+9 standard time

Timor-Leste occupies the eastern half of Timor island plus the Oecusse enclave and Atauro Island, and became independent in 2002 after Portuguese rule and a brutal Indonesian occupation. Dili, the small seaside capital, is the base for everything: dive and snorkel trips, the boat to Atauro, and road journeys east along the coast to Baucau and the Nino Konis Santana National Park around Jaco Island, or south into the coffee-growing mountains of Maubisse and up Mount Ramelau, at 2,986 metres the country's highest peak.

Travel is rewarding but basic once you leave Dili. Roads are mountainous and slow, public transport is a mix of crowded minibuses and trucks, and accommodation outside the capital ranges from simple guesthouses to homestays. Costs are higher than in neighbouring Indonesia because everything is priced in US dollars and much is imported. Visitors are struck by the uncrowded reefs, the resilience and humour of a young population, and the Catholic, Portuguese-tinged culture. It suits divers, hikers and curious independent travellers.

Top 5 highlights

1

NATURE

Atauro Island

A mountainous island a short boat ride north of Dili, fringed by reefs where surveys have recorded exceptional numbers of reef-fish species. Snorkel straight off the beach at Beloi, dive steep walls and stay in eco-lodges.

2

BEACH

Jaco Island

A sacred, uninhabited island off Timor's eastern tip in Nino Konis Santana National Park, with blinding white sand and clear water. Fishermen ferry day-trippers across from Valu beach, where simple huts offer overnight stays.

3

ADVENTURE

Mount Ramelau

Timor-Leste's highest peak, topped by a statue of the Virgin Mary. Start before dawn from the village of Hatubuilico for a two- to three-hour climb and sunrise views over both coasts on clear days.

4

SACRED SITE

Cristo Rei of Dili

A 27-metre statue of Christ on a globe, standing on a headland east of Dili, reached by around 570 steps lined with Stations of the Cross. Come late afternoon, then swim at the beaches below.

5

CULTURE

Maubisse

A cool hill town ringed by coffee plantations, about three hours south of Dili, with a Portuguese-era pousada on the hilltop and a lively Sunday market; most Ramelau climbers stay here or at Hatubuilico.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Dili

≈ 268,000 people

A low-rise seaside capital with the Resistance Museum, the sombre Chega! exhibition in the former Comarca prison, Tais Market's handwoven textiles and sunset drinks along the waterfront.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Baucau

≈ 19,000 people

The second town, on a limestone plateau above the sea, has a crumbling Portuguese-era old town with a grand colonial market hall, a spring-fed pool and the Osolata beach below.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Pante Macassar

≈ 15,000 people

Capital of the Oecusse enclave, surrounded by Indonesian West Timor: a quiet coastal town of wide streets and beaches, reached by ferry from Dili, near Lifau, where the Portuguese first landed.

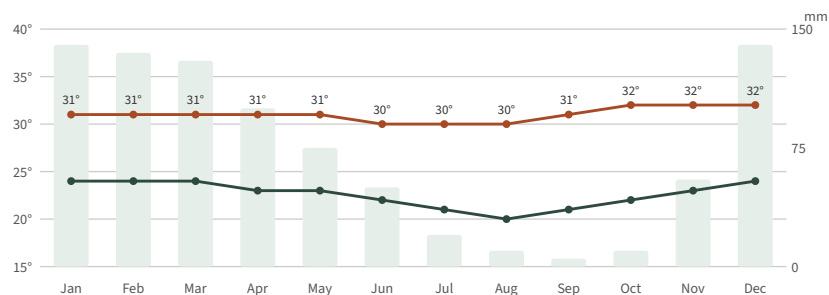
Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Timor-Leste

Best time: **Jun–Oct**.

**Average climate in Dili**

— High °C — Low °C — Rain (mm)

**Festivals & events**

May

Restoration of Independence Day

On 20 May, Dili marks the 2002 restoration of independence with flag ceremonies, parades, concerts and celebrations along the waterfront.

Aug

Popular Consultation Day

Every 30 August commemorates the 1999 UN-run referendum in which Timorese voted overwhelmingly for independence, with ceremonies, speeches and community events nationwide.

How much does Timor-Leste cost?

SHOESTRING

£40

per person / day

≈ US\$53.45

hostels, street food, buses

MID-RANGE

£90

per person / day

≈ US\$120

3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis

COMFORTABLE

£170

per person / day

≈ US\$227

4-star+, guided trips, private transfers

Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Batar da'an

Often called the national dish: corn, mung beans and pumpkin simmered together into a hearty, mildly sweet stew, eaten with rice.

Ikan sabuko

Spanish mackerel marinated in tamarind, chilli and garlic, then grilled or fried — a good seafood order along Dili's waterfront.

Timorese coffee

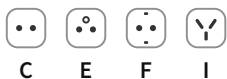
Organic arabica grown in the hills of Ermera and Maubisse is the country's biggest non-oil export; try it in Dili's cafés or on a farm visit.

Getting around

Dili's minibuses (microlets) run fixed routes cheaply, and taxis are plentiful but unmetered, so agree fares first. Buses and trucks connect towns, but most visitors hire a 4x4 with driver, as mountain roads are rough and landslides follow heavy rain. Fast boats and a slower ferry run to Atauro; the ferry also links Dili with Oecusse.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



220V — bring a UK-to-C/E/F/I adapter

DIALLING CODE

+670

TAP WATER

Not safe — drink bottled or treated water

TIPPING

Not traditional, but rounding up or leaving 10% in Dili's restaurants is appreciated, as is a tip for dive guides and drivers.

ETIQUETTE

Dress modestly, especially in churches and villages. Don't enter or photograph sacred houses (uma lulik) or sacred sites without permission, and greet elders first.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Presidente Nicolau Lobato International Airport (DIL), Dili

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Ambulance: **110** or **+670 331 1044**

Fire: **115** or **+670 331 0340**

Police: **112** or **+670 331 1380**

Source: FCDO "Getting help"

TIME ZONE

UTC+9 (standard time)

DRIVING

On the left

Visas & entry for Timor-Leste

Shown for a British passport.

Visa required — apply before you go

You must have a visa to visit Timor-Leste for tourism.

You will be issued a single-entry tourism visa, valid for up to 30 days, when you arrive at Presidente Nicolau Lobato International Airport in Dili, or Dili seaport. The visa costs 30 US dollars, payable only in cash.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A

Tetanus

Typhoid

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Chikungunya

Dengue

Hepatitis B

Japanese encephalitis

Rabies

Tuberculosis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Timor-Leste

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Sun 1 Nov 2026	All Saints' Day
Mon 2 Nov 2026	All Souls' Day
Tue 3 Nov 2026	National Women's Day
Thu 12 Nov 2026	National Youth Day
Sat 28 Nov 2026	Proclamation of Independence Day
Mon 7 Dec 2026	Memorial Day
Tue 8 Dec 2026	Day of Our Lady of Immaculate Conception and Timor-Leste Patroness
Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Thu 31 Dec 2026	National Heroes Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Wed 3 Mar 2027	Veteran's Day
Tue 9 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Fri 26 Mar 2027	Good Friday
Sat 1 May 2027	International Worker's Day
Sun 16 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Thu 20 May 2027	Restoration of Independence Day
Thu 27 May 2027	Corpus Christi
Mon 30 Aug 2027	Popular Consultation Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Tetum

ENGLISH	TETUM	SAY IT
Hello	Bondia	<i>bon-DEE-a</i>
Thank you	Obrigadu / Obrigada	<i>oh-bree-GAH-doo / oh-bree-GAH-da</i>
Please	Favór	<i>fa-VOR</i>
Excuse me	Kolisensa	<i>koh-lee-SEN-sa</i>
How much is this?	Ida-ne'e folin hira?	<i>EE-da neh fo-LEEN HEE-ra</i>

Know before you go

The US dollar is the currency, with local centavo coins for small change. Bring cash: ATMs are concentrated in Dili and cards are rarely accepted elsewhere.

Saltwater crocodiles live along parts of the coast and are revered locally; ask before swimming, especially near river mouths and along the south and east coasts.

From about October to November, migrating whales and dolphins pass close to Dili; book a boat trip with a local dive operator for the best chances.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.