

Timor-Leste

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

Timor-Leste is one of the youngest countries in Asia. It fills the eastern half of the island of Timor, plus the island of Atauro and the small exclave of Oecusse on the western side. Mountains cover most of the interior, and the coast has quiet beaches and coral reefs. Tourism is still small, so you will often have sights and dive sites almost to yourself.

The country was a Portuguese colony for centuries, then under Indonesian rule from 1975 to 1999. It restored its independence in **2002** and joined ASEAN in 2025. That history shows in the Portuguese churches, the memorials and the museums of Dili. Timor-Leste suits independent, patient travellers who like diving, hiking and history, and who are happy with simple roads and basic services outside the capital.

Money & payments

Timor-Leste has no banknotes of its own. It uses US notes, plus local centavo coins that are worthless outside the country. Bring clean, undamaged notes, because worn ones are often refused.

Currency

CURRENCY

USD

1 USD

0.9073 EUR

1 EUR = 1.102 USD

Cash preferred

- **Cash**: this is a cash economy. Only a few hotels, larger supermarkets and restaurants in Dili accept cards, often with a fee. Outside Dili, plan to pay for everything in cash.
- **ATMs**: there are ATMs in Dili and some district towns, but they are often out of order and charge high fees. Carry enough cash before you leave the capital.
- **Costs**: prices are higher than in much of Southeast Asia, because most goods are imported. Budget travellers can keep costs down with guesthouses, local buses and warung meals. A hotel in Dili, a private driver and diving trips quickly raise the daily cost.

Typical costs

Rough prices in touristic areas, per person

Hotel (double room, per night) mid-range hotel in Dili, double room	60 – 130 USD €54 – €118
Dinner (mid-range restaurant) restaurant meal for one in Dili	15 – 35 USD €14 – €32
Inexpensive meal local warung meal	3 – 7 USD €3 – €6
Local beer	2 – 4 USD €2 – €4
Coffee	1 – 3 USD €1 – €3
Water 1.5 l bottle	0.5 – 1 USD €0 – €1

Tipping

Tipping is not a strong tradition in Timor-Leste. In restaurants aimed at visitors, rounding up or leaving about 10 % is appreciated. Local cafés and market stalls do not expect a tip. For a guide or driver on a multi-day trip, a small tip at the end is a kind gesture.

Restaurant round up, or about 10 % in upmarket places	Optional
Bar	Not customary
Taxi	Not customary
Hotel small tip for porters or cleaning staff	Optional
Tour guide a few dollars per day	Optional

Electricity

Most sockets take European round-pin plugs, and some take Australian-style plugs; power cuts happen, especially outside Dili.

ELECTRICITY



Type C

ELECTRICITY



Type E

ELECTRICITY



Type F

ELECTRICITY



Type I

220 V · 50 Hz

Language

Tetum and Portuguese are the official languages. Tetum is the everyday language for most people, and many older people also speak Portuguese. Indonesian is widely understood, and dozens of local languages are spoken in the districts. English is spoken in Dili hotels, dive shops and restaurants, but less in rural areas. Learning a few words of Tetum is much appreciated.

Useful phrases

Hello	Olá
Thank you	Obrigado / Obrigada
Please	Por favor
Yes	Sim
No	Não
Goodbye	Adeus

Staying connected

- **SIM cards**: three operators sell prepaid SIM cards: Timor Telecom, Telkomcel and Telemor. You can buy them at the airport or at shops in Dili.
- **Coverage**: mobile data works well in Dili and most district towns. It is weak or absent in many mountain areas and on parts of the south coast, so download offline maps before you travel.

Safety & emergencies

Most visits to Timor-Leste are trouble-free, but take normal care. Petty theft and robbery happen in Dili, and assaults have been reported on Beach Road after dark. Do not walk alone at night, and keep valuables out of sight.

- **Unrest**: tensions can rise around elections. Avoid demonstrations and large crowds.
- **Crocodiles**: saltwater crocodiles live in rivers and along the south and east coasts. Ask locally before you swim.
- **Natural hazards**: the rainy season, roughly **November to April**, brings flash floods and landslides that can cut mountain roads. Earthquakes are also possible.
- **Emergencies**: emergency numbers are not always reliable, and response times outside Dili can be long.

Emergency numbers

POLICE	AMBULANCE	FIRE BRIGADE
112	110	115

Health

Do not drink tap water. Use bottled or filtered water, including for brushing teeth.

- **Mosquitoes**: dengue fever is common, especially in the rainy season. Use repellent during the day as well as at night. The WHO certified Timor-Leste as malaria-free in 2025.
- **Rabies**: rabies is present in some areas, including Oecusse, Bobonaro and Covalima. Avoid contact with dogs and other animals.
- **Medical care**: health services are limited, even in Dili. Serious cases usually need evacuation to Australia or Singapore, so buy travel insurance that covers medical evacuation.
- **Pharmacies**: Dili has several pharmacies. Bring enough of any regular medicine for your whole trip.

See a travel health clinic at least 8 weeks before you leave to check which vaccines you need.

Visas & entry

Your passport must be valid for at least six months after you arrive.

- **Visa-free**: citizens of Schengen-area countries can stay up to 90 days in any 180-day period without a visa. Citizens of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand can stay up to 30 days for tourism.
- **Visa on arrival**: most other nationalities, including British, Australian and US citizens, can get a 30-day tourist visa on arrival at Dili airport or Dili seaport. It costs **US$30 in cash**. You can apply in Dili to extend it by another 30 days.
- **Land border**: a visa on entry has been available at the Batugade crossing from Indonesia, but the rules change often, so it is safer to get a visa in advance from a Timor-Leste embassy or consulate. Travelling overland to Oecusse needs a separate visa, available at the Wini checkpoint or in advance.

More detail: Timor-Leste Immigration – visa exemptions

> Visa and entry requirements change frequently. Verify current requirements with the official immigration authority or your country's embassy before travel.

Etiquette

Timor-Leste is a very Catholic country, and people are generally polite and reserved.

- **Dress**: dress modestly away from the beach. Cover shoulders and knees in churches and in villages.
- **Greetings**: a handshake and a smile are normal. Greet people with "bondia" (good morning) or "botarde" (good afternoon).
- **Photos**: ask before you photograph people, especially at ceremonies and in villages.
- **Sacred places**: traditional sacred houses (*uma lulik*) and some sacred sites are off-limits to visitors. Ask before you enter or touch anything.
- **History**: the independence struggle is recent and personal for many families. Show respect at memorials and in conversation.
- **Bargaining**: light bargaining is normal at markets and for crafts such as *tais* woven cloth, but keep it friendly.

Holidays & opening hours

On public holidays and important Catholic feast days, government offices, banks and many shops close, and transport can be reduced.

Public holidays

Jan 1	New Year's Day
Mar 3	Veterans Day
May 1	World Labour Day
May 20	Restoration of Independence Day
Aug 30	Popular Consultation Day
Nov 1	All Saints Day
Nov 2	All Souls Day
Nov 3	National Women's Day
Nov 12	National Youth Day
Nov 28	Proclamation of Independence Day
Dec 7	Memorial Day
Dec 8	Day of Our Lady of Immaculate Conception and Timor-Leste Patroness
Dec 25	Christmas Day
Dec 31	National Heroes Day
movable — Mar/Apr (Good Friday)	Holy Friday
movable — May/Jun	Corpus Christi
movable — Islamic calendar (end of Ramadan)	Idul Fitri
movable — Islamic calendar	Idul Adha

Many shops close on Sunday or open only for a short time after Mass. Offices and some shops close for a long lunch break in the early afternoon. Outside Dili, small shops keep irregular hours.

Getting around

There are no railways in Timor-Leste, and roads are the main way to travel. Distances are short, but mountain roads are slow and rough, so allow plenty of time.

- **By minibus**: in Dili, small minibuses called *microlets* run fixed routes for a cheap flat fare paid in cash. Local buses and open trucks connect Dili with district towns. They are cheap but crowded and slow, and most leave early in the morning.
- **By taxi**: taxis in Dili have no meters, so agree the fare before you get in. Ride-hailing apps do not operate here.
- **By car with a driver**: hiring a 4WD with a driver is the easiest way to reach the mountains and the east. Many tour companies in Dili arrange this.
- **By boat**: a public ferry and private fast boats link Dili with Atauro Island. A ferry also runs from Dili to Oecusse.

Visitor information: Timor-Leste official tourism site

Driving

Timor-Leste drives on the **left**.

- **Licence**: bring an International Driving Permit together with your home licence.
- **Road conditions**: roads are often narrow, winding and damaged, and landslides are common in the rainy season. A 4WD is needed for most routes outside the main coastal roads.
- **Hazards**: watch for motorbikes, animals, children and potholes. Avoid driving outside Dili after dark.
- **Tolls**: there are no road tolls or vignettes.
- **Fuel**: petrol stations are found in Dili and district towns. In rural areas, fuel is often sold by roadside vendors in bottles, so fill up whenever you can.
- **Electric vehicles**: there is no public charging network.
- **Local help**: many visitors hire a local driver instead of driving themselves. This is often safer and not much more expensive.

Drive on the left

No motorway vignette needed

There are no road tolls or vignettes.

Food & drink

Timorese food is simple and filling. Rice or corn is the base of most meals, served with vegetables, beans, fish or meat. Portuguese and Indonesian influences are strong. You will find bread rolls and Portuguese-style stews next to Indonesian dishes. In the countryside, meals often include cassava, pumpkin and corn from the family garden.

In Dili, most people eat at small local eateries called *warungs*, at markets or at roadside grills. Fresh fish grilled on the Dili seafront in the evening is a local favourite. Dili also has cafés and restaurants serving Portuguese, Indonesian, Chinese and international food.

Coffee is the country's main export after oil and gas. Mild arabica from the highlands around Ermera is served everywhere, and good cafés in Dili sell it. Palm wine is a traditional drink in villages, and imported beer is widely available.

What to eat & drink

SNACKS & STREET FOOD

Katupa
Rice cooked in woven palm-leaf pouches.

Budu
Fresh relish of tomato, chilli, lime and mint served with meals.

DRINKS

Timor coffee
Mild arabica grown in the highlands, mostly around Ermera.

Tua mutin
Palm wine made from the sap of palm trees.

SIGNATURE DISHES

Ikan sabuko
Grilled Spanish mackerel, often served with rice and chilli.

Batar da'an
Stew of corn, beans and pumpkin.

Tukir
Meat marinated with spices and cooked slowly inside bamboo.

Feijoada
Portuguese-style bean stew with pork or sausage.

Timor-Leste – Plan Your Trip
Turn the places from this guide into a real itinerary, with smart routing, time estimates, and everything you need for a perfect trip.
3M+ downloads · 4.6 stars · 15 years of trip planning
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Scan to download the app

Where to explore

Dili and around
The capital, Dili, is the base for most trips. It has the country's main airport, most hotels, and sights such as Cristo Rei of Dili on its headland and Centro Nacional Chega in a former prison. Atauro Island, a boat ride north of Dili, is known for clear water, coral reefs and simple guesthouses.

The mountains

Maubisse is a cool hill town surrounded by coffee farms. From Hatu-Builico, walkers start the pre-dawn climb up Mount Ramelau, the country's highest mountain, to watch the sunrise. Same and Ainaro, south of the peak, are quiet mountain towns.

The east

Baucau, the second-largest town, has Portuguese-era buildings and a spring-fed swimming pool. Further east, Com is a small beach town, and Lospalos is the gateway to Ira Lalaro. Near Tutuala, boats cross to Jaco Island, an uninhabited white-sand island in Nino Konis Santana National Park.

The west and Oecusse

Balibo, near the Indonesian border, has an old fort and a museum about five foreign journalists killed there in 1975. Maliana sits in a wide valley of rice fields. The exclave of Oecusse, with its main town Pante Macassar, is the site of the first Portuguese settlement on Timor.

DATA SOURCES

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