

# Lombok: An Island Paradise



Text and photos by Dr Jimmy Teo, Editorial Board member

Looking for a relaxing anniversary holiday, my spouse and I decided on a short trip to Lombok, Indonesia. Our direct Scoot flight took only two and a half hours. Getting through immigration at the Lombok International Airport was fairly quick, and ASEAN citizens travelling for leisure are granted a 30-day visa-free entry.

## Island stay and exploration

Our first stop was Gili Air, one of the three Gili Islands off the northwestern coast of Lombok. The hotel had arranged for us a car and powerboat transfer to the island costing two million IDR (about 177 SGD), and the ride from the airport towards the north passed by Mataram, the capital of Lombok. Along the way, we saw several cemeteries with tombstones inscribed with Chinese characters, indicating that we were passing through the town of Ampenan, which had been a significant port in the past with many groups of settlers. After

about an hour, we arrived at the Teluk Nare pier where our driver and boatman helped us to load our luggage on the powerboat for our 15-minute sea trip. Fortunately, it was high tide at two in the afternoon and the boat berthed in front of the PinkCoco Gili Air hotel on the northwestern shore of Gili Air. Removing my shoes and socks and rolling up the legs of my pants, I leapt off the boat and walked 20 metres to the reception.

Refreshing drinks were served to us as we checked in, and the hotel garden was well kept with a nice pool in the middle. We opted for a villa, which was basic but delightfully relaxing with a lounge chair on the terrace.

We headed out shortly after freshening up and walked around the island on foot. We arrived at the Warung Sunny restaurant for lunch, where I had nasi goreng served with chicken satay, fried eggs and crackers.

There are no motorised vehicles on the island so most people walked, cycled or rode electric bikes. The public transport of choice is the horse cart! We ended the day at the hotel's main restaurant for cocktails and dinner while watching the sunset. As the tides receded, one could walk out quite a distance into the shallow waters and enjoy a horse ride on the beach.

The evening passed quickly and it was soon time to shower. To our surprise, the shower water and tap water were salty. As it turns out, Gili Air is a small island where fresh water is not readily available, so the utilities may use salt water instead. The next day, we enjoyed breakfast on the upper floor of the beach restaurant. We had booked the hotel boat for three hours (2.4 million IDR) the evening before, and having the hotel boat to ourselves meant we did not have to stick to a fixed timing.





We cycled to the port where a pink boat picked us up (the hotel's theme colour is pink!). We went to the first snorkelling spot near Gili Meno (the island next to Gili Air), and I was thoroughly prepared. Having bought a full-face snorkelling mask from Decathlon and corrective lenses from Shopee, I was able to enjoy seeing the different corals and fish underwater. We then went to see the underwater statues where there were many other snorkellers. Finally, at our last snorkelling spot, we fed the fishes swarming around us. I was glad we booked the boat as the boatman joined us in the water and used the GoPro camera (I got it while flying out of Changi Airport!) more adeptly than me.

Feeling tired after snorkelling, we decided to go for a spa back at Gili Air but the PinkCoco hotel spa (50,000 IDR for hotel guests) was unavailable even though we tried to book it on the day we arrived! We decided to walk over to Jasmine Spa which offered simpler options but had a great price for its service. That evening, we walked about 300 metres south along the beach to beachside bars and restaurants, where we had a delightful grilled white snapper.

After dinner, we walked over to the Cheeky Monkey beachside bar where a guitarist-cum-singer was playing my kind of country music! We enjoyed cocktails and mocktails, and we chatted with an Australian by the name of Dobby who was on holiday with his friends. They danced on the sand and

sang songs with the guitarist. What an enjoyable final night on Gili Air. Alas, that we were to miss the next night when a bigger event was to be held at the bar! One tip is to check with the locals to see whether there are some bar parties with live music, as it appears that events are frequently held around the Gili Islands.

### Beautiful sights of Lombok

The next day, after a morning beach walk and breakfast, the hotel staff arranged for us boat and road transport to Kalandara Resort at Senggigi Beach on the main Lombok island (800,000 IDR). This time, we took a horse cart to the pier with our luggage (it cost us 150,000 IDR for a horse cart ride from the hotel to the pier with luggage for two persons), climbed into the boat with our water shoes, then travelled from Bangsal port to the resort by road. Our driver Azwar provided full-day driving services for 650,000 IDR plus gasoline, and we booked him for the next two days, inclusive of our ride to the airport (250,000 IDR). You can find him on Facebook under the account Lombok Tour and Taxi.

I had previously read about the 2018 Lombok earthquake and the resulting damaged facilities and evacuation of many tourists. Azwar used to work in the Santosa Villas and Resort at Senggigi Beach but the resort closed after the earthquake, as well as during the pandemic. The northern and western parts of Lombok were severely affected

and the area – including Senggigi Beach – is still recovering today and remains a shadow of its former self. After checking in for the second and last stretch of our trip, I was surprised by the grandeur of the resort, which had just opened in March 2023. The villa was beautifully laid out with a fantastic infinity pool, and it was gorgeous to soak in the pool at dusk. We walked over for lunch at The Sail Restaurant in Katamaran Hotel and Resort located on Senggigi Beach, after which we took a long walk down the beach and back by the road.





The next day, we went to the Tiu Kelep and Sendang Gile waterfalls near the Mount Rinjani volcano. After a 20-minute trek between the two waterfalls, we went into the water at the larger Sendang Gile waterfall. What an experience! Do wear trekking shoes or swim shoes for this hike. I was glad we paid for the local guide (150,000 IDR, including an entrance fee of 20,000 IDR per person) who helped us with high steps and wading across the brook. We had lunch at the restaurant near the entrance to the waterfall park where we could see the Tiu Kelep waterfall.

On our last day in Lombok, we went to the Lombok Wildlife Park. The entrance fee was 200,000 IDR per person and 50,000 IDR for a fruit basket to feed the animals. We enjoyed seeing all sorts of animals and feeding the elephants, monkeys and pygmy hippopotamuses. We had a zookeeper-cum-guide to bring us around the park. There were also other packages available, some of which included meals and pictures with an orangutan up close.

After the park, we went for a lunch of Taliwang chicken in the village of Taliwang, the origin of this dish which is featured on the menus of many Lombok restaurants. Its flavour is very good but I felt that the *kampung* chicken was too fibrous, and I preferred the version we had at The Sail Restaurant. We stopped by the Lombok pottery centre where there were many interesting pieces and I found out that the symbol of Lombok is the gecko. For those who collect larger items of pottery, the pottery factory also ships to Singapore and its pieces are very good value by Singapore's rates. You can

also try your hand at pottery-making at the factory.

After purchasing some small pottery souvenirs, we gawked at villas as Azwar showed us the areas where many foreigners have holiday villas or stay at in Lombok for their retirement. Following our short property viewing trip, we were back at the resort for our spa appointment. It was a relaxing two hours of massage and facial treatment, and the day drew to a close. We visited the Tanjung Bias beach at sunset where more locals frequent the beachside restaurants and bars. We ended the evening by having dinner at the Happy Cafe bar, where live music played from 9 pm onwards.

### Home sweet home

The next morning after breakfast, we left for Lombok International Airport and began our journey home. After clearing immigration, we found that the international departure hall has only a few gates and no shops or lounges to unload your unspent IDR.

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It was a wonderful anniversary trip for my spouse and me. There are also many other parts of Lombok to explore and see. The eastern and southern parts of Lombok were less affected by the 2018 earthquake. Remember to pack for minor emergencies when visiting places with unpredictable weather conditions and natural phenomena such as earthquakes, volcanic activity and tsunamis. Always be aware of exits and evacuation routes, and enjoy your holiday safely! ♦



### Legend

1. Feeding fish while snorkelling off Gili Meno
2. Nasi Goreng at Warung Sunny on Gili Air
3. PinkCoco beach restaurant sunset view
4. Snorkelling around Gili Meno
5. Feeding fish while snorkelling
6. Kalandara Resort infinity pool
7. Sendang Gile waterfall
8. Lombok Wildlife Park
9. Lombok pottery factory
10. Happy Cafe in Senggigi