

ISLAND ECO PARADISE

It is home to the second highest mountain peak in Indonesia and the scene of some of the largest surf breaks on the planet, but Australians are discovering there is much more to Lombok than meets the eye, as Unique Luxury reveals.

The stunning view from Selong Selo

Depending on who you believe, Lombok is an island of many faces. With descriptors ranging from the “Phuket of 30 years ago” to Bali’s “better looking sister”, the island that lies east of Indonesia’s most populous tourist spot is rapidly gaining a reputation as the go-to destination for unspoiled tropical beauty.

Covering around 4,725 km² in the middle of the Indian Ocean, Lombok is a small island that spans 80 kilometres from its northern point to its most southern point. Its most prominent feature is Mt Rinjani, an active volcano that dominates the landscape, rising 3,726 metres above sea level.

Just three hours and 40 minutes flying time from Perth, two hours 30 minutes from Singapore, or just 30 minutes from Bali, Lombok boasts a climate that seldom sees temperatures above 33C or below 21C.

Which perhaps goes some of the way to explaining why around 3.1 million Indonesians and an increasing number of ex-pat Australians now call it home.

Despite an increasingly modern society, Lombok is one of the few places frequented by tourists that has managed to retain much of its authentic history and indigenous culture. About 85 percent of the 3.1 million population of Lombok are Sasak, a people closely related to the Balinese.

Famed for its beautiful, largely deserted, white sandy beaches, unspoiled rainforest, rich biodiversity, diverse marine life, enviable diving, surfing and snorkelling spots and cascading waterfalls, Lombok is also home to Namada Park. Lying just 10km east of the capital, Mataram, the park was originally a relaxation compound for the king but is now open to the public. Featuring a traditional Hindu temple and swimming pool, it’s biggest drawcard is a unique water feature known as the ‘youth fountain’ which is said to grant long life to anyone who drinks the water.

There is, however, much more to Lombok than initial impressions would suggest.

As most fly-in fly-out Western Australian workers can attest, the most developed tourism area of the island is on the west coast of where it is centred around the township of Senggigi – along an area which stretches out along several kilometres of the beachfront just to the north of Mataram.

The site was the scene of a building frenzy in the late 1990s when Lombok was being heavily touted as the next big Indonesian destination. However, race riots, together with the 2002 and 2005 Bali bombings and the 2007/08 global financial crisis dealt Senggigi a severe blow, with many construction projects halted and tourists severely impacted.

In recent years things have once again started to take off.

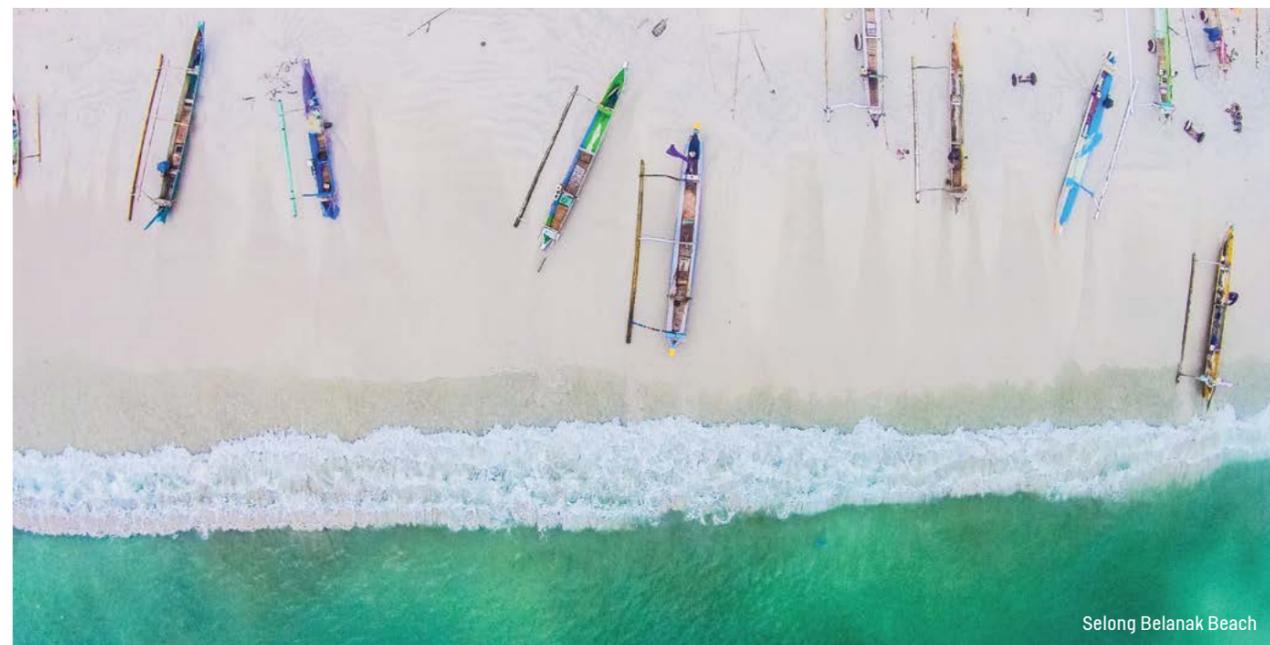
A 2015 report produced by Horwath Hotel Tourism & Leisure showed that, overall, the growth in tourism arrivals to Lombok has been solid, from a low of under 400,000 in 2004 to about 1.6 million in 2014. The same report noted that together with Malaysia, Australia was among the top feeder markets for Lombok, accounting for 25 percent of all guest arrivals on the island.

The Indonesia Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) credits the opening of Lombok International Airport in 2011 as the reason the island has registered a 200 percent average increase in visitors. Inhabitants of the island have also benefited from the influx through the creation of jobs while the development has also prompted new infrastructure in the form of roads and power plants.

In order to put this effort into meeting its goal of attracting around 20 million foreign holiday makers by the year 2020, the Indonesian government also introduced a visa-free tourism policy which covered inbound travellers coming from more than 100 different countries. Clearance approval was also eliminated for yachts entering the Indonesian territory and the cabotage policy was deregulated for international cruise ships.

Interior Designer Ros Hemley, the creative director of Burleigh Heads headquartered design firm The Interior Space is a regular visitor to Lombok.

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She first began visiting for design projects several years ago and was eventually prompted to open an Indonesian arm of her business and attained ex-pat status.

Ros says when she first visited Lombok she found herself captivated by the raw beauty of the island.

“Colours have such clarity and the views are breath-taking. Having spent a lot of time in Bali, I immediately felt like I had stepped back in time.”

Ros says while Lombok is as equally beautiful as Bali, it is less developed, which many feel is a refreshing change, she says.

“The architecture comes alive with the gilding and colours of the mosques, traditional fabrics in rich weaves and prints adorn the outfits of the women as they pass by. Market places are seen by the roadside with all on offer from fruits to Ikat or woven baskets. It is common to witness locals travelling in horse and cart.

“I have been impressed with the way in which people in third world cultures have a sense of happiness and their strong belief system seems to give them a depth that is difficult to conceptualise. It is better to experience this and I am sure that is why Lombok is fast becoming an important destination on the experiential travel calendar of those in the know.”

But it seems it's not just tourists who are being lured by the island's

natural beauty and the customary hospitality of its residents.

Already home to an expansive community of affluent ex-pat Australians, investment on the island, particularly on the more affluent southern tip is booming.

Wary of the mistakes made by Bali in opening the doors to tourist hordes but conscious that the same growth potential exists for Lombok, the Indonesian government has been open about the fact it is determined to handle progress carefully.

Viewing sustainable tourism as the way forward, it has developed an eco-economy master plan and promised funding to market it.

As a result, there are a number of both private and government-backed resort projects being constructed in Lombok.

By far the largest and most impressive is the development of the new US\$3 billion Mandalika Resort in Kuta Bay, South Lombok which the ITDC head of investment and marketing Ricky Baheramsjah says is a major driving in increasing land values on the island. The project, thought to be the largest of its kind in South East Asia, will see the development of a number of luxury hotels, a yacht marina, golf courses, water theme parks and a Moto GP race track. More than 10,000 hotel rooms and 1,500 residential units will be built, the vast majority of which are expected to be operational by the end of 2018.

Construction of the Pullman Hotel is already underway with Club Med, Royal Tulip, Paramount Hotels and X2 Resorts all due to start building before the end of the year.

Supporting infrastructure planned for the Mandalika Resort area includes facilities for reverse osmosis, solar cells, water and waste treatment plan, accessibility support, ports and a marina, tourism school, places of worship, offices, roads and bridges, water irrigation, electricity, gas, and ICT.

To support the vision of the Mandalika development, an internal transportation system is also being touted. The electric train will be the alternative for an eco-friendly transportation solution. Embracing the natural setting, there will be a cable car for public recreational transport.

Another new addition to South Lombok is Selong Selo Residences, a premium residential villa community being built 30 minutes' drive from Kuta.

Located on a hillside overlooking Selong Belanak Bay in a more remote part of the island, it is the brainchild of two Australians – investment bankers Andrew Corkery and James Nash - and offers residents a complete resort-style experience with access to high-end facilities including a gym, kid's club, restaurants, spa, swimming pool and tennis court as well as 24-hour security, an in-house chef, butler and activity centre.

Comprising 65 private residential villas, investors can choose to purchase sub-divided plots or fully-furnished turnkey villas that come with two or three-bedrooms and around 2,443 square feet of living space.

Due for completion in 2020, the developers are taking the property's green credentials seriously, employing the head of green infrastructure developer IDPM, to oversee how best to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In line with its sustainable development model, the development will use green building materials, including European-engineered timber. In fact, the Selong Selo Group is implementing the integration of advanced solar and water treatment technologies across all aspects of the development, enabling the entire complex to subsist on a microgrid. When complete, the resort will include high-efficiency air-conditioning, LED lighting and smart whitegoods that can be controlled remotely.

In addition to this, the project founders have also put their money where their mouth is, making a commitment to partner with the local South Lombok community to improve the living conditions of locals, preserve the environment, employ locally and aid the education of local children.

Text 'LOMBOK' to +61 428 295 774 for more information

