



TIPS FOR RECEIVING VISITORS FROM INDONESIA

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INDONESIA: A BRIEF PROFILE

The Indonesian archipelago of more than 17,000 islands (6,000 inhabited) and covers about 1,010,000 square kilometres and has a population of over 220 million, the fourth largest in the world.

The literacy rate in 2005 is about 87.9% (defined as people over the age of 15, who can read and write), due to strong emphasis on education by the government since independence. During the 1980s and the early 1990s, there was an increase in general economic standards. However, the economic crisis in the second half of the 1990s had a very negative effect on the economy and on school-retention rates, which may result in problems with literacy in the future. The tiny elite class, however, remain extremely wealthy by international standards.

Major industries include oil, coal, textiles, garments, vehicle assembly, cement and plywood, while rice, soybeans and cassava are still the most important crops. Indonesia has recently become a major world producer of chocolate and palm oil. The effects of the financial crisis were evident when comparing the expected GDP growth rate of 7% in 1994 with the real GDP growth of -13.6% in 1998 and 0.1% in 1999. This has now turned around and in 2005 the expected GDP growth is 5.4%.

Every major world religion is represented in Indonesia, but the majority of population is Muslim (many nominally). Bali remains strongly Hindu. There is a significant Christian population, especially in Eastern Indonesia and among ethnic Chinese. Over the last decade many people who were previously nominal Muslims have adopted a more public practice of their faith (observing the fast month and the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca). Religious tolerance has been highly valued in Indonesia, however, the last decade has seen a rise in religious tensions and violence.

MODERN HISTORY

Indonesia is a young nation with an old culture, which had to grapple with European colonial forces for nearly 400 years. Its modern history has been turbulent. As Japan's military empire in Southeast Asia collapsed in 1945, Indonesia declared its independence. Holland, the dominant colonial power since the late 1600s, then attempted to recover its lost Asian possessions and a traumatic revolutionary war followed, resulting in a formal transfer of sovereignty to Indonesia under UN auspices in late 1949. Soekarno, the radical nationalist leader who had led the struggle against Dutch colonial rule, was confirmed as Indonesia's first president.

After almost a decade marked by unstable parliamentary rule and regional rebellions, Soekarno assumed direct rule by declaring a return to Indonesia's original revolutionary constitution. Under this constitution, which continues to apply (although significantly amended post-Soeharto), Indonesia is a unitary republic, ruled by a Presidential executive with wide powers. The legislative, or DPR, now contains only elected members. The MPR, the highest source of laws below the constitution, comprises a joint sitting of the DPR with the new DPD (Council of Regional Representatives), also an elected body.

The period of 'Guided Democracy' was marked by a swing to the political left, the proliferation of Soekarno's idiosyncratic political ideology, international isolation and increasing economic disintegration. Eventually, rivalry between the PKI (Indonesia's communist party, then the third largest in the world) and the armed forces (who have always claimed a right of socio-political intervention by reason of their role in the revolution against the Dutch) led to a violent confrontation on the night of 30 September 1965, the circumstances of which remain unclear. In the

aftermath, the military, in partnership with Islamic political groups, was able to destroy the PKI and hundreds of thousands of its supporters were killed. General Soeharto emerged as the leader of the right and, by 1968, toppled Soekarno, who died under house arrest in 1970.

Soeharto's government became known as the 'New Order', to contrast with Soekarno's 'Old Order'. The state ideology, the 'Pancasila', five broad ideas originally devised by Soekarno to reconcile diverse political groupings, was used by the New Order as a part of a programme of de-politicisation to enhance governmental control. Soeharto's rule was marked by a commitment to the Western alliance, enormous economic development and a dramatic general rise in living standards. Increasingly, however, the New Order faced criticism internationally in relation to human rights abuses (especially in relation to East Timor which it annexed in 1975). Human rights abuses were also criticised domestically, as was the large-scale corruption seen as arising from elite and military domination of big business. President Soeharto resigned in May 1998, after he found himself unable to form a cabinet by reason of riots (caused in part by the downturn in the economy and the stringent measures imposed by the IMF), large scale student demonstrations, demanding democratisation and the end of Soeharto's Presidency and tensions within the military.

Vice-President, B.J. Habibie, then became Acting President. Despite his short term of office, Habibie instituted a number of reforms, not the least of which was the granting of a referendum to the East Timorese, which led to a vote for independence of the forcibly-annexed province. In 1999 there was a general election, with a strong emphasis on openness and credibility.

This was followed later in the year by a Presidential election (the President was, at that point, still elected by MPR members) in November 1999.

The next President, KH Abdurrahman Wahid (commonly known as 'Gus Dur') was impeached and was replaced by his Vice-President, Megawati Soekarnoputri in July 2001.

At the following elections in 2004, a new voting system was introduced with the President no longer being voted for by the MPR, but directly by the people in two rounds of voting.

Head of State (President): Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono

Vice-President: Jusuf Kalla

Minister of Foreign Affairs: Hassan Wirajuda

Indonesia is now finding its way through a complex and difficult process of democratisation and accompanying social and political reform.

BAHASA INDONESIA

The national language is 'Bahasa Indonesia', which nearly everyone speaks as a second language. Indonesian does not use a special script and is a relatively simple language to learn. It is a variant of Malay, which has been widely spoken in Southeast Asia for centuries as a *lingua franca*. Nationalist politicians hoping to bridge ethnic differences as they attempted to create a unified state in an archipelago where at least 300 distinct languages are spoken, deliberately chose it as the national language well before the Second World War.

This means that most Indonesians speak Bahasa Indonesia as their second language, although it is gradually displacing other regional languages as people's first language, due to education in Bahasa Indonesia from primary school. English is frequently used in business circles and older, upper class Indonesians educated before 1945 often speak Dutch.

NAMES AND FORMAL TITLES

Many Indonesians have only one name, although it is becoming more common to adopt a second name, especially among business people, who find it easier to operate internationally with two names. The 'main' name may be either the first or the second - there is no consistency because of the great variety of traditions - so it is important to try to find out which name to use with Mr (*Bapak/Pak*) or Ms (*Ibu/Bu*), especially because while some Indonesians adopt a family name, most do not and family links usually cannot be identified simply from a name. *Bapak* also means 'father' and *ibu* means 'mother', however as terms of address, these are used for adults of a mature age and status irrespective of whether they are married or have children. Indonesians usually ask each other, upon meeting for the first time, which name is the appropriate one to address a person by.

Bapak/Pak Mr/Sir
Ibu/Bu Mrs/Ms/Madam

Some Academic Titles:

Dekan Dean
Direktur Director
Dosen Lecturer
Drs Doctorandus
Dra Doctorandra - female of *Drs*
(Doctorandus was a five-year degree, derived from the Dutch academic system. The system has changed recently to one like Australia's.)
Ins *Insinyur* (Engineer - a qualification loosely equivalent to BSc)
Kepala Head
Ketua Chairperson
Rektor Rector, Vice-Chancellor, Chancellor
Sekretaris Secretary
SH *Sarjana Hukum* (Bachelor of Laws - a common qualification in government circles)
SM *Sarjana Muda* (Bachelor, not including an Honours year)
Wakil Deputy, also *Muda*

GENERAL ADVICE ON BEHAVIOUR

Please bear in mind that the following observations are generalisations only, and not every Indonesian will fit our descriptions. Indonesians are, of course, individuals, and they vary just as much as do individuals within any other group. It is difficult to give advice on things like behaviour without getting into cultural stereotypes that can actually become barriers to developing a genuine relationship. Nevertheless, a little pre-knowledge may avoid some common pitfalls, and so our aim in this is to help people understand the reasons why their visitors may sometimes behave in a way that may seem puzzling to them.

It is important to realise, when you are in a cross-cultural situation, that behaviour that you find strange is usually perfectly sensible and logical *from the point of view of the other culture*. Much of *our* own behaviour that we take for granted seems equally unusual to people from other cultures, because they don't know the underlying reasons for it.

Halus and kasar: Although Indonesia is a nation with literally hundreds of different ethnic groups, and Indonesian cultures vary markedly from island to island and from group to group, nevertheless the Javanese dominate by virtue of

sheer numbers (60%) and many visitors are likely to be Javanese. It would be unusual for a visiting group *not* to include a Javanese, unless representing a particular or non-Javanese region.

Java is the world's most densely populated island and a culture has developed which emphasises politeness, reticence, toleration and good humour - for obvious reasons. Qualities of deference, humility, elegance, subtlety and refinement are much valued and often seen as signs of authority and power, by contrast to their standing in many Western cultures. A person who displays these qualities is '*halus*'. One who appears rough, aggressive and 'uncultured' is '*kasar*' and should be afforded less respect.

Negotiations: Accordingly, you should always try to be as courteous and sensitive as possible when dealing with Indonesians. Behaving with restraint and politeness is particularly important in a business context. Speak softly. When Indonesians get serious, they may drop their voices. Indonesians regard a personal relationship as a necessary precursor to a business relationship. Relationships take time and effort. There is no substitute for genuine interest. Accordingly, you cannot expect to cement a business negotiation without first completing several visits.

Start from the top: Indonesians like to deal with the top people in organisations - or at least to be introduced to them. This gives them confidence that whatever they and you decide to do will not be out of line or later reversed. When they visit an institution and are not introduced to a figure of authority they may well think something is wrong. If you have visitors from Indonesia, be sure to introduce them to someone as important as possible. That confirms you have access to the decision-makers and that you have their approval and that the negotiation is therefore worthwhile for your visitors.

Business cards: An exchange of business cards is expected - be *sure* to have some with you. It is an Indonesian tradition to exchange gifts, even at personal meetings. See advice on gifts in the section 'formal meetings' below.

Conversational issues: Indonesians will often wait quite a long time to respond to a remark because they want to be sure they are not interrupting, so it's a good idea to wait longer for someone to respond than you normally would. If you do this, you may find that they have been waiting for an opportunity to ask a pertinent question and that they will speak up with confidence.

Indonesians like to discuss family details and like being asked whether they are married, have children, where they live, etc. Such 'personal' questions can be a polite way of 'breaking the ice' by showing interest in your visitors, and will be very well received.

Hospitality: Visitors to Indonesia are usually treated with very generous hospitality, so Indonesians visiting us will naturally appreciate being treated by their hosts with hospitality that at least approaches what they themselves would give visitors to their country.

The airport: First impressions are always important, and Indonesians often feel very hurt when they are not met at the airport. This is a courtesy that means a lot to them, because often they find it as difficult to negotiate things like transport arrangements in our environment as we would in Indonesia. This is the most important thing that we can do to make them feel that they are welcome guests. If they are already at a hotel, someone should fetch them from the hotel. *The importance of making arrangements to meet and escort visitors cannot be overemphasised.*

Likewise, taking them back to the hotel or to the airport is also an extremely worthwhile investment in goodwill. They will appreciate this sort of attention much more than lavish entertainment, because it demonstrates genuine concern for their comfort and safety.

Shopping: Many Indonesian visitors, especially if they are from outlying areas, will be very keen to go shopping while in Australia, and they will genuinely appreciate an offer to be accompanied into town for this purpose. Like meeting at the airport or escorting back to the hotel, this is an action that will be valued because of the personal consideration that it demonstrates.

GENERAL BODY LANGUAGE

If you walk in front of someone, it is polite to turn towards them and to bend forward as you walk, to show respect - especially at meetings.

The right hand is regarded as the 'nice' or 'sweet' hand, so avoid using your left hand in general, but especially when eating, shaking hands or handing anything to anyone.

Avoid standing with your hands on your hips or crossing your arms, as either can be seen as a sign of aggression.

Avoid blowing your nose if possible (unless you have a bad cold). Sniffing is acceptable.

The way we normally point looks rude and arrogant in Indonesian body language. If you need to indicate direction, point with your thumb.

Tousling the hair of a charming toddler is out. It is usually not considered culturally appropriate to touch another person's head.

People of the same sex will touch or hold each other in public quite unselfconsciously but you will seldom see physical contact between members of the opposite sex in public. Often in a formal context, an Indonesian of your sex will hold your hand, take your arm as you walk or put an arm around your waist. This is simply an expression of friendship - and a sign that the business relationship is progressing well. It is uncommon for members of the opposite sex (even married couples) to make affectionate or intimate physical contact in public.

A common formal handshake in Indonesia consists of extended hands placed between the extended hands of the other person, palm-to-palm, then drawn together over the other person's hands and the right hand is then drawn back to touch your chest. Many Muslims will quickly touch their hand to their heart after a conventional handshake. This is becoming standard in Jakarta. Ask a friend to demonstrate both forms.

FORMAL MEETINGS

Preliminaries: When a group of Australians meets with a group of Indonesian delegates, it is important for everyone involved to know whom they are meeting and for what purpose. Most meetings begin with an exchange of business cards and an explanation of who people are and their positions. Indonesians feel uncomfortable if they don't know your status and thus how to address you and how to behave towards you.

Choose a spokesperson to introduce your group. The spokesperson should spend a few minutes introducing each person individually - their names, their status (Professor, Director, Head etc), their field, their current projects. Each person should make him/herself known, for example by standing and perhaps making a slight bow or nod. The Indonesian visitors will do the same.

The spokesman may then make a short formal address, speaking about what we as a group representing an institution have to offer specifically or are interested in achieving. The visitors will reciprocate.

After these preliminaries the main part of the meeting can then take place.

Provide documentation: It is wise to provide print versions of all presentations, proposals - even lists of those involved in the meeting. Visitors whose English isn't good enough to catch every nuance at the time of the meeting will make up for it by studying these materials carefully afterwards. They will also use them as the basis for information sessions for their colleagues, on their return.

Presentations: At the beginning or end of the meeting a formal presentation of a gift to the head of the Indonesian group is appropriate. Normally photos are taken of handshakes and exchanging of gifts, for posterity/personal

souvenirs/newsletters/display on the wall etc. Your gift should be wrapped and be presented to the most senior person present with a brief word of thanks.

The most favoured gifts are ones that can be ‘put on display’, for example, plaques, ties, coasters, badges, testimonials, commemorative books, jewellery with insignia, etc. Don’t be disconcerted if the gift is not opened at the time it is given - your guests don’t want to seem greedy. They will open it and examine it with appreciation later.

Prepare an agenda: It is a good idea to have a carefully planned agenda for the visitors, which could include:

- rest after arrival (many Indonesians underestimate how tiring international travel will be)
- formal speeches, negotiations and gift giving
- a meal
- a tour of the university
- a program of individual meetings
- a lecture or seminar, if something of interest is scheduled during their visit
- attendance at a cultural performance (e.g. a lunchtime concert) or an art gallery would be appropriate
- a visit to the City
- time for shopping

EATING AND DRINKING

At a Restaurant

Indonesian culture is very ‘pro-food’. Indonesians love to eat and love to feed people. Food is a part of every social occasion. Offering meals to Indonesian visitors is a great way to make friends with them. (Not offering food is a way to make them feel that you aren’t interested in them.) So food should definitely be on the agenda for entertaining Indonesian visitors.

Avoid pork: As most Indonesians are Muslims, it is wise not to offer pork (including bacon and ham). Unless your visitor is ethnic Chinese, they may never have eaten pig products, even if they are not Muslim. If pork is offered at a large buffet-style meal, it should be identified as such with a label.

Alcohol: Do not be embarrassed to drink alcohol in front of your Indonesian guests unless they are very conservative Muslims. Strict Muslims do not drink any alcohol; however many Indonesian men do drink moderately. (Generally, Indonesian women do not drink beer or spirits – and sometimes not even coffee.) Beer is often liked better than wine, because it is freely available in Indonesia and your visitors may be at least are familiar with the flavour. When entertaining in a restaurant make sure that soft drinks and beer are offered to your guests as well as wine. Orange juice is often the drink of choice. Those who want to try wine are more likely to enjoy a light, sweet wine, rather than a dry one.

Entertaining at Home

Entertaining visitors at home is more trouble, but Indonesians will greatly enjoy an opportunity to have a meal with you in your home and meet your family. If you want to make friends with your Indonesian visitors, you might consider inviting them to your home for a meal. If they have family members with them, be sure to include the family as well.

What they are used to: In Indonesia, people normally eat using a fork and spoon, as most of the food is cooked in such a way as to break up easily. An Indonesian meal is always served with rice. Weak black tea, water or orange juice are the usual drinks. Meals are presented like a Chinese meal or buffet-style, with a number of dishes.

Accordingly, when entertaining Indonesians in your home, include dessertspoons as well as knives and forks in the place settings. It is kinder not to serve things like roast chicken that require skill with a knife. A buffet-style meal, or a meal with several dishes of the casserole, curry or stir-fry variety, will be easy for them. They will enjoy the meal more if it includes rice and chilli sauce. **It is safest not to serve pork or any pig products.**

Your guests will probably take surprisingly small first helpings, but that isn't because they are afraid of the food; it is good manners in Indonesia. They will take second (and even third!) helpings if you encourage them.

Clothing: Generally speaking, Indonesians are conservative dressers and do not like to expose large parts of their body. They will feel ill at ease in company if they or their hosts are in shorts and singlets (especially short shorts). If you want to make a good impression, dress conservatively.

Dogs: As a general rule, Indonesians do not like dogs, although there are certainly some who do (ethnic Chinese Indonesians, for example, often keep dogs). If you have Indonesian guests who are not ethnic Chinese, it is best to keep your dogs outside.

Bathrooms: Indonesian bathrooms are 'wet' bathrooms, i.e., they have tiled floors with drains. Some less sophisticated Indonesians don't realise that our bathrooms aren't so waterproof, and they may splash water about liberally. If this happens with a houseguest you can explain that the bathroom isn't meant to get really wet, but it's not usually feasible to instruct dinner guests in this way! About all you can do is place a mat near the door for them to wipe their feet and hope for the best.

Houseguests: Indonesians are a very social and gregarious people. They like being in crowds and are rarely alone. They regard being alone as threatening and find it very uncomfortable. For this reason they find silence equally unnerving, particularly at night. Many Indonesians would never in their lives sleep in a room alone. If you have visitors who have just come from Indonesia, particularly young people, they'll be happier sharing a room. If alone, they may want to sleep with the light on and the radio going at first (also the heater!). Try to be understanding. It's okay to explain tactfully, whilst bringing extra blankets, that the heating is turned off at night because it is expensive. Make sure to turn the bedclothes down so that they know to sleep in the bed. In Indonesia, beds are often made up with only a bottom sheet, and a blanket is folded at the foot of the bed. Many Indonesians have spent miserable first nights in foreign climes lying on the bedspread, wondering why their hosts didn't think of providing a blanket!

CONCLUSION

Indonesia is an extremely diverse society, of many different ethnic groups, religions and cultures. Most Indonesians are used to getting along with people of other cultures on a daily basis. Remember that many of the Indonesians you meet both formally and informally will be experienced travellers, so they may seem very much like Australians – they may display a relaxed, friendly nature that does not seem tied to a particular culture. Different Indonesian ethnic groups will often show very different cultures. Indonesians are not quick to take offence; in fact they are among the most warm, friendly and tolerant of people - so if you do commit a social faux pas, simply apologise. You do not have to abandon your own culture, simply understand what someone else's cultural rules are and, if necessary, explain your own, to avoid misunderstandings. Don't confuse cultural differences with underlying attitudinal differences. Indonesians and Australians have much in common and generally get along well together.

Enjoy your visitors!

Tim Lindsey & Julia Read, 1994
Revised by Helen Pausacker & Tim Lindsey, 2000 and 2005