

Maciej Popiński

THE MOST FASCINATING ASPECTS OF INDONESIA

The country of thousands islands

Indonesia is located in South-East Asia on 13 thousand islands. Over 260 million people live there; half of them outside big cities, in conditions close to natural habitats. The eagle in the national emblem holds a ribbon with the motto "Unity in Diversity". More than 360 ethnic groups are divided into subgroups, clans, families. Their cultural traditions, *adat*, make up an unusual mosaic.

Diversity

Let's go on a trip on southern islands of Indonesia to find out more about the diversity of Indonesia.

The Minangkabau people from Sumatra, living in the vicinity of the Christian Bataks, are fully Muslim, and on the top of their social hierarchy are women. The cities of the Bataks and the Minangs can be distinguished by the shape of the roof of their houses. The first ones have a sail, the other ones have buffalo horns.

Under the volcanic ashes on Java, you can see the largest all over the world Buddhist temple, Borobudur, preserved from the 8th century. A few dozen kilometers away, there's a Hindu temple compound, Prambanan, dating back to the 9th century with the 47-metre high main building.

In Bali, the Hindu enclave, there are 200 thousand temples, so a place of worship is attributable to 500 persons. Balinese day begins and ends with making an offering to the gods; over 200 holidays a year are celebrated. The Balinese worship the sun god - Surya, the Hindu Trinity - Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, and also sacred trees or sacred rice fields.

At the Catholic Flores, the farther from the coast, the less chapels with crosses, and more megalithic stones, ritual slaughter, the stronger position have witch doctors who treat diseases. Although officially Flores is Christian, animistic beliefs haven't been eradicated.

Religious affiliation is mentioned in your ID. The most common is Islam, but you can choose from Hinduism, Buddhism, Protestantism, Catholicism and Confucianism. Animism permeates every religion. While chatting with an Indonesian, apart from the usual greeting *Dari mana?* - "Where are you from?" you'll be asked about your religious faith.

Unity

The simple Indonesian language bonds the nation that uses more than 700 languages. There are no tenses, and the plural form is formed by repeating a single form.

Cooking divides and unites Indonesia. Divides, because culinary habits depend on ethnicity and religion. Unites, because in Indonesia there are standardized eateries. Let's take the *nasi Padang* cuisine, created by the Minangkabau tribe. Padang restaurants can be recognized by the roof in the shape of horns, which refers to the Minangs' houses. You can eat there *rendang* – stewed beef with coconut milk, cassava leaves, breadfruit. Fried tofu franchising is dominated by chefs from Java, and the coconut water sold from portable stalls by the Sasaks.

Many ethnic monopolies unify Indonesia. Men from Madura take up hairdressing, women from Java sell herbal medicines, ships are built by the Bugis.

In the shade of volcanoes

Indonesia owes its natural wealth to volcanoes, 127 of them are active. Their ashes have created the most fertile soil on Earth, tuffs that enable triple-sets of rice per year. Indonesia belongs to the world leaders in the production of agricultural products.

The country stretches along the Ring of Fire – the contact of 4 tectonic plates. Thus, the inhabitants have been plagued by frequent earthquakes that cause tsunamis and activate volcanoes.

Nowhere in the world do so many people live near active volcanoes. The people of Tengger of Java bring offerings to the volcano by throwing into the crater vegetables, chickens, money. The Sasak people from Lombok throw jewellery to the lake at the foot of the volcano and believe that it is the seat of the gods. On Flores, there are villages where houses are built in the shape of volcanoes.

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It fascinates me that in Indonesia all the major religions of the world coexist, and their followers live in relative peace. It's due to the extraordinary fertility of the country, the dispersion of islands, tolerance for diversity, the laziness of the tropics.

I'm fascinated by the fact that Indonesians despite the dangers live near volcanoes, being at their mercy and worshipping them.

It is surprising that such a diverse country retains its integrity, and the Indonesian language and state education are present all over the country.

You can see the frontrunners of the 21st century along with the primary social forms.

Thinking of Indonesia, I can feel how it throbs with diversity and attracts with the mosaic of contrasts.