

## **Indonesia**

### **Facts and Statistics**

**Location:** South-eastern Asia, archipelago between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean

**Capital:** Jakarta

**Population:** 241,973,879 (July 2005 est.)

**Ethnic Groups:** Javanese 45%, Sundanese 14%, Madurese 7.5%, coastal Malays 7.5%, other 26%

**Religions:** Muslim 88%, Protestant 5%, Roman Catholic 3%, Hindu 2%, Buddhist 1%, other 1%

### **Language**

The official language of Indonesia is known as Indonesian or 'Bahasa Indonesian'. Indonesian is a standardised dialect of the Malay language and was formulated at the time of the declaration of Indonesian independence in 1945. Malay and Indonesian remain very similar.

Although the official language, in reality it is most of the population's second language. Due to the sheer size and fractured, island make-up of the country most people speak regional dialects such as Minangkabau or Javanese. These will usually be spoken at home and in the local community but at work or at school Indonesian is used.

### **Indonesian Society & Culture**

#### **Diversity**

- . Indonesia is a hugely diverse nation.
  - . It is made up of over 17,500 islands (6,000 of which are inhabited) which are home to over 300 ethnic groups.
  - . Each province has its own language, ethnic make-up, religions and history.
  - . Most people will define themselves locally before nationally.
  - . In addition there are many cultural influences stemming back from difference in heritage. Indonesians are a mix of Chinese, European, Indian, and Malay.
  - . Although Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world it also has a large number of Christian Protestants, Catholics, Hindus and Buddhists.
  - . This great diversity has needed a great deal of attention from the government to maintain a cohesion.
  - . As a result the national motto is "Unity in Diversity", the language has been standardized and a national philosophy has been devised known as "Pancasila" which stresses universal justice for all Indonesians.
- Group Thinking
- . Due to the diverse nature of Indonesian society there exists a strong pull towards the group, whether family, village or island.
  - . People will define themselves according to their ethnic group, family and place of birth.
  - . The family is still very traditional in structure.
  - . Family members have clearly defined roles and a great sense of interdependence.

#### **Hierarchy**

- . As with most group orientated cultures, hierarchy plays a great role in Indonesian culture.
- . Hierarchical relationships are respected, emphasized and maintained.
- . Respect is usually shown to those with status, power, position, and age.
- . This can be seen in both the village and the office where the most senior is expected to make group decisions.
- . Superiors are often called "bapak" or "ibu", which means the equivalent of father or mother, sir or madam.

. Although those higher up the hierarchy make decisions Indonesians are advocates of group discussion and consensus. This ties back to the idea of maintaining strong group cohesiveness and harmonious relationships.

### **Face**

- . Due to the need to maintain group harmony the concept of 'face' is important to understand.
- . In Indonesia the concept is about avoiding the cause of shame ("malu").
- . Consequently, people are very careful how they interact and speak.
- . Although a foreigner can not be expected to understand the nuances of the concept it is crucial to keep an eye on one's behavior.
- . One should never ridicule, shout at or offend anyone. Imperfections should always be hidden and addressed privately. Similarly blame should never be aimed at any individual/group publicly.
- . One manifestation of the concept of face/shame is that Indonesians communicate quite indirectly, i.e. they would never wish to cause anyone shame by giving them a negative answer so would phrase it a way where you would be expected to realise what they truly want to say.
- . Bahasa Indonesian actually has 12 ways of saying "No" and several other ways of saying "Yes" when the actual meaning is "No" !!