



## Welcome To The Most Biodiverse Marine Area In The World

Bajo Komodo Eco Lodge at Pede Beach, Labuan Bajo, is a visual feast even before you set foot inside. Either from the road or from the beach its shape and colour somehow suggests a lodge in Africa or perhaps in the Highlands of Malaysia. Verandahs, balconies and large, open windows, project cool airiness and colourful flowers provide a delicate charm. Inside, the charm is continued with cool white walls and mosquito nets over beds in capacious rooms which have air conditioning and saloa hot water.

Bajo Komodo Eco Lodge helps guests not only to have a pleasant stay but can arrange trips to Komodo or Rinca Islands to see the giant lizards and other wild life as well as river tours, bird watching and trips to the prehistoric Batu Cermin cave as well as trans-Flores safaris.

It will not at first be apparent that Eco Lodge, as its name suggests, is more than just accommodation but has some very special features welcome in this age of global climate threat.

For example, the design reduces the need for air conditioning; all water is recycled through reed bed units on to the gardens. Rainwater is collected as a main water source; two eco cottages have been designed to be self sufficient in water and recycling, rubbish is recycled where possible and all staff are local people. They follow Green Globe 21 principles.

Bajo Komodo Eco Lodge is the second in an Eco Lodge network in Indonesia which has the Udayana Eco Lodge in Bali, the Rimba Orangutan Eco Lodge at the Tanjung Puting National Park in Kalimantan and the Elephant Eco Lodge at Way Kambas National Park in Sumatra. The organization is dedicated to the protection of Indonesia's national parks and has more than 20 shareholders among whom the Wilson family are the largest, with more waiting to join.

Bajo Komodo Eco Lodge is often full and I asked owners Alan and Meryl Wilson why increasing numbers of people are visiting Labuan Bajo and Flores Island.

"The main reason why," Alan says, "is that it's increasingly easy to get there. There are 15 direct flights a week from Bali to Labuan Bajo."

"Secondly, Flores is a completely safe destination which has not experienced the kind of problems suffered by other parts of eastern Indonesia."

"Thirdly, there are the giant lizards of Komodo and Rinca Islands which only occur in that part of the world."

"Labuan Bajo and indeed Flores Island is part of what is known as the ring of fire of Eastern Indonesia which indicates that the diving and snorkeling there and the biodiversity of the

fish and corals are second to none on the globe. This area is reputed to be a divers' mecca because of its incredible biodiversity with many, many species of fish, corals and sponges which you don't find in other parts of the world such as the red Sea, the West Indies, the African Coast or Australia's Great Barrier Reef."

The 'Komodo' lizards are the largest in the world Meryl Wilson provides the fascinating titbit of information that in prehistoric times they lived by killing and eating pygmy elephants then also native to the islands. They seem to have dined well because none are left.

"The Komodo National Park, dragons, diving and snorkeling are major attractions around Labuan Bajo but a growing number of people are crossing Flores Island on trans-Flores safari which gives them access to superb scenery. Visitors charter a car at Labuan Bajo or Maumere and take three to five days to cross the island."

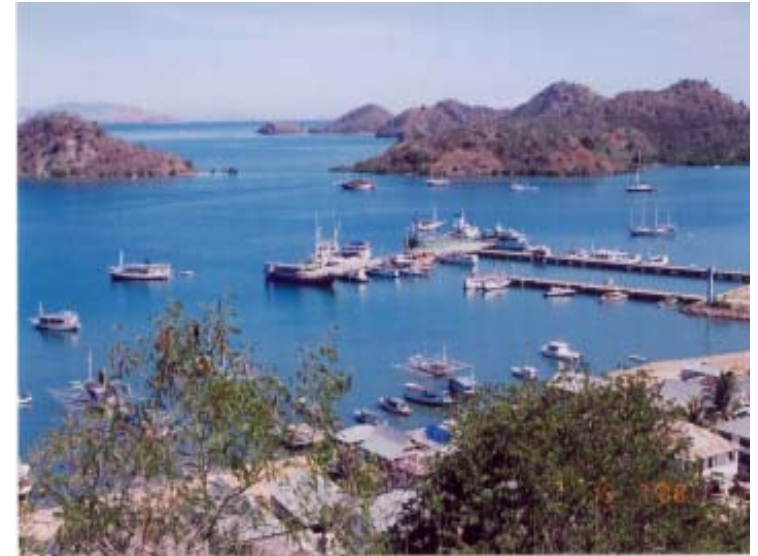
The extraordinary Kelimutu Lakes National Park with its three volcanic lakes, each with a different colour, is closer to Maumere. Flores has several very spectacular conical volcanoes, some of which are still smoking! Mount Mbeling, closer to Labuan Bajo, is a forest reserve fantastic for trekkers."

"On the other hand you can sail along the north coast or around the island and it's truly a sailor's paradise. The coast is very varied and at Ende unique blue pebbles are washed ashore which you can't find anywhere else. Local people use them for building and some are even exported to Japan."

Alan says that most of Eastern Indonesia is a genuine tourist paradise compared with more developed areas such as Bali but still relatively under visited.

"In the East you get a much more 'Indonesian' experience because life is generally more traditional and peaceful; it's not at all 'touristy.' Also, in parts of Eastern Indonesia, the culture is utterly unique."

"The further east you go in Indonesia the more the music resembles that of the pacific and this is true of Flores. There



*Beautiful Labuan Bajo harbour*

are many traditional dances in Flores in which the dancers wear clothes woven by hand and one special dance in Manggerai called Caci in which two men protected by shields use whips to inflict damage on each other. Apparently local maidens choose men with a lot of Caci marks on them!"

Alan and Meryl both believe strongly that with all its many assets the future of tourism in Labuan Bajo and other parts of Flores will be very bright indeed with Labuan Bajo emerging as a "significant tourist destination."

They also strongly believe that tourism revenues will benefit the largely poor people of Flores ranging from boat operators through drivers and shop keepers to gardeners, waiters and baggage boys.

The Wilsons and other local business people, supported by government, have been busy encouraging the International Cricket 20s and the game now has such a following that they are hopeful that people who like cricket may want to combine a holiday with a game!