

## Paving the Road for Sustainable Tourism in Lombok

When you think of home, what comes to mind? The snow-capped Cascade mountains? The lively atmosphere of Seattle? The rolling hills of the Palouse? My mind turns instead to fresh mango. Its sweetness lingers on my tongue when I think of home. My toes find coarse sand and my ears detect the evening call to prayer. These snapshots bring me back to Lombok, a small island in the nation of Indonesia. Amid rice fields and ocean live over three million people, and for almost half of my life, I have been one of them. With beautiful coral reefs, intoxicating ethnic food and even an active volcano, it is no surprise that tourists are flocking to Lombok, which aspires to become a sustainable tourist destination. I choose to travel to Lombok, back to a place I call home, and immerse myself in island life. I aim to show future tourists that conducting trips sustainably is not impossible – you can give back to local communities even as a tourist. For me, sustainably executing this trip means respecting the local culture, cleaning up the natural environment, giving back to the economy, and restoring marine life.

Growing up overseas, I've discovered that by listening to and imitating others you can learn to respect local people and their customs. According to the World Atlas, "more than 1 in every 8 Muslims live in the island nation of Indonesia." Lombok is majority Muslim and known as "the island of a thousand mosques." Knowing this, I plan to dress respectfully. Despite the tropical climate, my suitcase will not be filled with tank tops or mini-skirts. However, I will bring short-sleeved shirts, knee-length shorts and warmer clothes for mountain-trekking. Additionally, I'm going to avoid pork during my stay. Since pork is prohibited in Islam, Muslim people in Lombok find it very repulsive. I will also take special care to use only my right hand when in public, as in many traditional cultures the left hand is used for restroom duties. Throughout my trip, I will attempt to speak as much of the local language as possible. Living on

Lombok previously gave me the chance to learn both some Indonesian, the national language, and Sasak, the island's local language. It can be very useful to be able to squeak "*Permisi, dimana kamar kecil?*" when you need to find a restroom quickly. Speaking to people in the language they best understand helps me respect their country and their people group. Acting in a respectful way and realizing cultural differences will help remove barriers tourists often face because they are removed from local culture.

Furthermore, I want to devote my time to protecting Lombok's environment. Lombok is home to Mt. Rinjani, an active volcano hiked by thousands of tourists each year. Often, hikers leave garbage along the trails to the summit. If this carelessness continues, the beauty of the mountain will be further tainted by bits of colored plastic, water bottles, and other debris. I want to change that. Amidst the rugged scenery, I will join current cleanup efforts by picking up garbage that has been left behind by unthoughtful hikers and "packing out" my own trash. Equally important is the place I'll stay the night before I hike Rinjani. I have chosen the eco-friendly Rinjani Light House, where the German owners grow their own produce and employ local people. They have a biogas digester on their property, which turns cow manure into gas that "is used for lighting and cooking" (Light House). By staying somewhere devoted to the environment and well-being of Lombok, I will decrease the negative effects tourism often leaves on host countries and my cleanup efforts will help to protect the natural habitats found on Lombok.

In addition, I want to give something back to the people and culture of Lombok. Throughout my trip, I will support Lombok's economy by eating at *warungs*, the small restaurants that line the streets. Not only does this help fund family-run businesses, but I will certainly have many interesting conversations. Any souvenirs I buy during my stay will come

directly from local entrepreneurs, who work to support themselves and their families. I would rather avoid the island's one Starbucks and instead give back to the local economy and the ones who need it most – the people of Lombok.

For the rest of my trip, I will head to a nearby island called Gili Meno. While there, I will help restore the hurting marine life by participating in a reef regeneration project. All fresh water must be ferried to the island, so I will stay at Biru Meno, bungalows that address this by offering only salt water showers. After getting my diving certification at one of the island's schools, I will help Gili Meno with their building project: creating giant metal jungle gyms called Biorocks. Many Biorock structures already exist in areas of reef damage, and what once was broken coral now thrives on them. These metal structures have a low-voltage electric current running through them which stimulates coral and marine life growth. According to Gili Eco Trust, “[h]ard corals on a Biorock structure can grow 2-6 times faster than in natural conditions,” which is extremely beneficial to the entire reef. By helping to build one of these structures and learn more about coral reefs, I will impact an entire ecosystem and bring positive effects for generations to come.

All in all, sustainable tourism is not just possible, it is necessary. It requires tourists to think about what they will do to impact other places and expand their worldviews. In my trip to Lombok, I hope to pave the road for future tourists by respecting local customs and culture, taking care of the environment, giving back to the economy, and restoring marine life. Those who follow in my footsteps will find that sustainable tourism makes travelling more rewarding and is important to protect the culture, environment, and economy of the nations across the world.

## Citations

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