

From Lombok with love

When you're next-door to Bali, it can be hard to get attention. But while the island of Lombok attracts fewer travellers than its neighbour, its miles of unspoilt white-sand beaches, majestic Mount Rinjani, verdant rice terraces, local Sasak culture and cuisine, and easy beach life of the Gili Islands are starting to get the destination noticed even with such stiff competition.

With an increase in flights to Indonesia, the archipelago is becoming more familiar to UK travellers. Tourism Indonesia reported an increase of 8.9% in UK arrivals to the country year-on-year for 2014, compared with 7.8% the year before. Garuda Indonesia and Oman Air launched routes to Jakarta from the UK last year, and Royal Brunei Airlines launched a Heathrow-Bali service.

Regional airlines such as Tiger Air, AirAsia and many others offer numerous connections between southeast Asian hubs and Indonesia, including Lombok's Bandara International airport, making it easy to get around, while fast boats and ferries also connect Bali with Lombok.

Lombok is certainly proving a good seller for some. G Adventures innovations manager Rachel Wasser says: "Lombok is growing for us as we've put a heavier focus on Indonesia as a growth region. Sales of our eight-day Classic Lombok trip, which visits the Gili islands, Sasak villages and beach stays, are up 188% year on year."

At Intrepid Travel, head of trade sales Spencer Neal also notes Lombok's popularity, with the operator's eight-day Discover Lombok itinerary almost fully booked from April until November last year, and strong sales so far for 2015.

"Our clients seem to love this corner of Indonesia, especially the Gili Islands, the views from Mount Rinjani and fascinating Sasak culture," he says.

Intrepid's eight-day Discover Lombok tour, visiting Ubud in Bali, the Gili islands, Sasak villages, Mount Rinjani and Senggigi, starts from £555 excluding flights.

Hayes & Jarvis is also building its Lombok portfolio. Destinations manager Emma Mitchell says: "We're looking at extra hotels to add next year. Over the last few months, we've seen an increase in demand for Indonesia, with more people looking at combining Bali with Lombok."

● **SELL: UNSPOILT ISLE**

For clients looking to get away from crowds, Lombok holds huge appeal. Premier Holidays reports a significant increase in 2015 bookings. Head of Faraway product

Meera Dattani falls for Indonesia's most idyllic island


Sudamala Suites & Villas

Hotel Tugu Lombok

Gili Meno beach

Mount Rinjani

David Carlaw says: “Lombok is how Bali was 30 years ago, and its lesser-known reputation leaves it unspoilt and relatively untouched by mass tourism.”

Gold Medal’s Far East product manager Rebecca Turner agrees. “Lombok offers something entirely different, but equally exciting, to Bali and is just 20 minutes across the Lombok Strait,” she says. “It’s quieter and still relatively undiscovered.”

Many of Lombok’s beaches are unspoilt, including the traffic-free trio of the Gili Islands off the northwest coast, and in the south the Sekotong peninsula and its offshore islands. The miles of white sand along the south coast around Kuta are especially popular

with surfers. The resort town of Senggigi on the west coast can feel dated but remains a popular base for beach holidays and for exploring inland Lombok and the Gili Islands.

While Lombok is a natural partner to Bali holidays, excellent flight links also make it ideal to twin with breaks in Bangkok, Hong Kong, Singapore or Kuala Lumpur.

● **SEE: SHORE TO SUMMIT**
Lombok’s most visible highlight is Gunung Rinjani, Indonesia’s second-highest volcano, complete with a spectacular crater lake. Experienced hikers can do the two or three-night trek to the summit but easier, shorter hikes are also on offer. In nearby Bayan village

is Lombok’s oldest mosque, while in the surrounding foothills, the town of Tetebatu makes a good base. Surrounded by rice fields, waterfalls and traditional villages specialising in pottery-making, woven fabrics, bamboo products and other crafts, it’s a chance to explore the culture of the Muslim Sasak population and ‘sade’ houses traditionally made from dung, clay and straw.

For many, Lombok is about beach life. The Gili Islands are firmly on the map, and with each one slightly different, there’s a Gili for everyone. Nightlife thrives on more developed Gili Trawangan, while quiet Gili Meno’s stunning beaches and laidback vibe makes it particularly popular with couples and honeymooners. Gili Air is a halfway-house, with good beaches, beach bars, a more visible local population and plenty of restaurants.

Snorkellers and divers are also in their element, with turtles and manta rays thriving in Lombok’s waters. For surfers and sunseekers alike, Desert Point on the southwestern Sekotong Peninsula, and the spectacular beaches near Kuta, such as Mawun, Selong Blanak and Mawi, are a must.

● **STAY: BRAND OR BOUTIQUE**

An all-time favourite for top-end accommodation is the five-star Oberoi on Lombok’s north coast. Spread over 24 acres of landscaped gardens, this super-luxurious hotel has an infinity pool, spa, open-air restaurants, villas with private pools and sunset views across to Bali’s Mount Agung.

There’s also an amphitheatre where guests can watch traditional Sasak dance. The location on a pristine stretch of Medana Beach makes it especially popular with clients looking for remoteness and tranquillity.

A more Indonesian take on luxury, packed with local artworks and antiques, is the Hotel Tugu Lombok on Sire Beach in the northwest. Rooms feature plenty of natural wood and bamboo, but aren’t lacking mod-cons including flatscreen TVs and rainshowers. Gold Medal offers a Bali twin centre staying three nights here and four at the Bali Dynasty Indonesia flights from Gatwick.

West-coast resort Senggigi has plenty of four-star options, from a Sheraton to the small and chic Sudamala Suites & Villas, which is privately owned by an art collector. Hayes & Jarvis offers seven nights with breakfast at the bright and spacious Quinci Villas Senggigi from £849 including Garuda Indonesia flights from Gatwick.

In Kuta, the Novotel Lombok’s Sasak design, with its thatched villas and private stretch of beach, makes it one of the best properties on that coastline.

When it comes to hotels on the islands, the larger Hotel Ombak Sunset suits the more vibrant vibe of Gili Trawangan, whereas on laidback Gili Meno, the 18-room Mahamaya is more tranquil. **TW**

Find out more:
indonesia.travel

