

People *of the* Coral Triangle

Known as the world's epicentre of marine life, the Coral Triangle spans thousands of islands across Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Within it lie parts of Indonesia's vast archipelago — a nation made up of more than 17,000 islands — where daily life remains closely intertwined with the ocean. At dawn, fishing boats glide across glassy waters, nets brimming with the day's catch for markets and neighbouring villages, while Bajau divers — often called 'sea gypsies' — slip beneath the surface, free-diving for octopus, shellfish and sea cucumbers. Inland, the sea's influence persists: weavers echo the curves of waves in their textiles, carpenters craft boats and tools for life at sea and artisans practice techniques passed down through the generations.

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: LYNN GAIL





All across Indonesia, communities have developed distinct identities, shaped by isolation, environment and centuries of history. On Flores Island, in the Lesser Sunda chain, this heritage takes the form of Caci — an ancestral whip-fighting tradition in which men, dressed in traditional ikat cloth and cattle bells, step into a ceremonial arena (left). Today, it's performed to mark life's milestones, from births and marriages to burials and national celebrations.

Further east, in the mist-softened Iwang Gete Highlands, the village of Watublapi preserves a quieter craft. Women dye cotton using pigments drawn from indigo, turmeric and jackfruit, separating fibre from seed before weaving on traditional looms (right). The process is slow and communal, binding generations through techniques refined over centuries. Beyond the villages, aquamarine seas trace the edges of forested islands — a reminder that here, life continues in constant dialogue with the waves.





For three months a year, Bajau fisherfolk live in stilted homes built above shallow waters off the coast of Central Sulawesi (above). Every day, they set out into the ocean, diving repeatedly with little more than wooden goggles, weights and spears (right). Octopus, shellfish and sea cucumbers form the bulk of the catch, which is then traded with nearby island communities. Scientists have found that generations of free-diving have even shaped their bodies, with enlarged spleens that allow them to hold their breath for up to 13 minutes — a striking example of human adaptation to this ocean-bound way of life.

Back on firm land, life in Bajau villages continues. Families tend small gardens of tubers and coconuts, while children move easily between sand and shallows, learning the moods of the ocean almost as soon as they can walk. Along the shore, carpenters and boat-builders shape hulls and repair nets, their skills passed down through generations.





Rising from the Banda Sea, Alor Island forms part of the historic Spice Islands. For centuries, nutmeg, mace and cloves were traded across the oceans for fortunes higher than gold. Today, the island is home to the Abui people, whose age-old traditions remain woven into daily life. The community is led by village chief Abner Yetimau (above), who presides over gatherings and rituals, including the trance-like lego-lego dance that brings the whole village together. He also leads a council of eight elders on matters as diverse as marriages and disputes, finances and sacred responsibilities. Elsewhere across the Coral Triangle, coastal life unfolds in quieter rhythms (left). At first and last light, fisherfolk work along the shore, sorting their catch, cleaning hulls and mending nets, their routines framed by the ever shifting tides. □ *SeaTrek Sailing Adventures offers cruises reaching various islands throughout the Coral Triangle. seatrekbali.com*

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