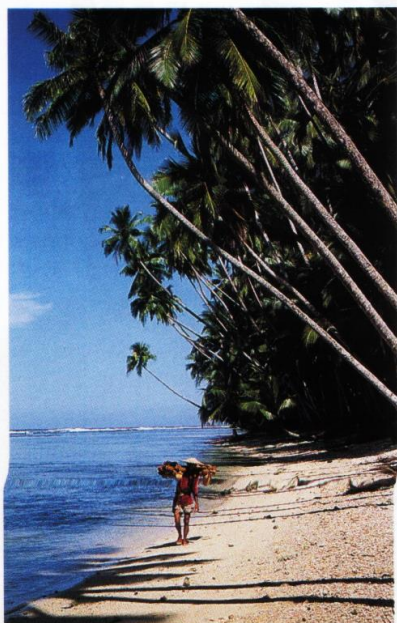




# Indonesia rides on the crest of a wave

Surfers the world over travel to Indonesia in search of the perfect wave. Now, writes **Neil Ridgway**, the professionals are coming in great numbers. Photographs by **Jason Childs**



Former world champion Derek Ho (top) of Hawaii, in the G-land quarter-finals; gathering coconuts (above) at Nias

**W**hen journalists from Medan asked top-ranked pro surfer Vetea David why he had taken a detour from the elite World Championship Tour to compete in the Nias Indonesian Open the big Tahitian answered straight from the heart. "Because it is a dream. Since I was a little kid in Tahiti I wanted to surf this wave."

The wave at Lagundri Bay, Nias, holds immense allure for surfers the world over. It has been described by aficionados as "the best seven seconds of your life" and the promise of riding inside the deep round belly of its *tubes* draws wave-riders further than the wildest winds of travel would normally ever blow them.

Professional surfing runs on two basic levels: the World Championship Tour (WCT) at top tier; the World Qualifying Series (WQS) underneath. To gain access to the WCT surfers must be in the top 16 of the WQS by

season's end. The three-year-old Nias Indonesian Open is one of those all-important "qualifiers" and the warm waters of Indonesia are fast becoming proving grounds.

Since its inception, the Nias Indonesian Open has been won by three up and coming Australians: Paul Paterson, Jye Gofton and Brenden Margieson respectively.

Due mainly to a growing relationship between the Indonesian Surfing Association, Surfing Australia and the ASP's own quest for top quality waves, the nation of uncountable surfing locations has developed rapidly on the pro surfing scene. As a result the pros find themselves enjoying everything associated with surfing in this region, from spectacular opening ceremonies to exotic cuisine.

"The key to pro surfing succeeding as a professional sport is the need to re-create the dream of what surfing is for all surfers—which is travelling





to remote places in search of perfect waves," claims 1988 world champion Barton Lynch.

It is believed the perfect rights of Nias were first surfed by three Australians—Kevin Lovett, John Giesel and Peter Troy—back in June 1975. Lovett, who was in Nias during this season's Indonesian Open, doesn't claim to be the first to ride the place, but consistent research and popular surf legend indicates he was.

Kevin was in Lagundri Bay recently to be part of a documentary film, *The Golden Cow*, being made by Oracle Pictures, Australia. The film is loosely based on black magic, the legendary Niasian commercial sense and

the effect surfers have had on the island. When asked if he was proud of his pioneering 70s and the initial Lagundri experience in particular he gave a piercing stare and said, "I'm just glad I survived."

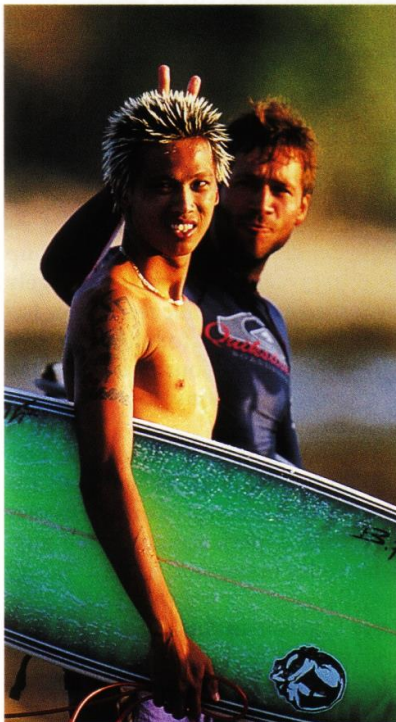
His partner in time, John, didn't, perishing nine months after their Nias discovery in Teheran from a malaria-related disease; adventurer Peter Troy, who surfed with them for a couple of days, now lives on Queensland's Sunshine Coast.

"The surf was six foot (1.8m) for

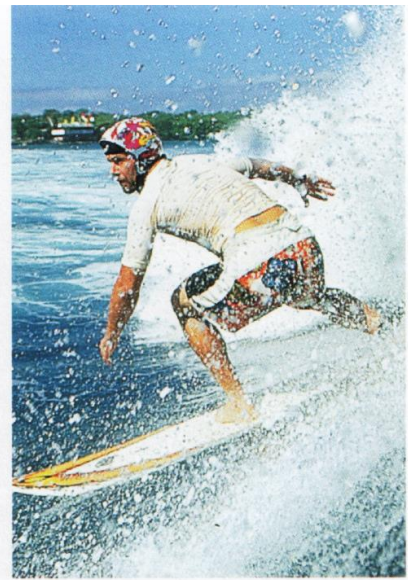
two weeks, but we never ate for the first six days," recalled Kevin. "He told me this, mind you, just before I whistled up one of the local fishermen and purchased four nice crayfish for my lunch for the princely sum of 9000 rupiah—a little under four US dollars."

Lagundri is a surfing Utopia. You can paddle out through the keyhole in a six-foot (1.8m) swell without get-

**Aussie Mark Richardson (top) at Nias; the Indonesian media (right) took to the water to get footage of G-land; culture (below) is a big draw; Rizal Tanjung (left), top Indonesian surfer, with American Jeff Booth, 1995 G-land runner-up**







ting your hair wet and catch straight lines of swell as they march in at you.

The take off is easy, the barrel almond on the smaller ones, down-right keggish on the top to bottom sets, and it brings to mind a turn of phrase true of many of the world's great waves: "The Point makes everyone look good . . . Even the kooks."

Towering as flagship above the Nias event and the World Grommet International (a teams contest for juniors held on Bali's Kuta Beach) is the WCT-rated Quiksilver Pro held at Grajagan, part of the Baluran National Park in East Java.

The long freight-train walls of G-land, as Grajagan has become known, are the ideal canvas for the world's best to carve an individual mark upon and the quality of the wave is not lost on them. All too often contests are held in small, sloppy, almost demeaning conditions and given these Indonesian gems to work with the boys (and this year the girls) push the performance envelope.

The Quiksilver Pro heads into its third year of life in 1997 and has been covered by every major surfing publication on the planet. Other media organisations to syndicate footage globally are Action Photographics, Worldwide Television News and AAP Reuters.

So moved was one Reuters cameraman during 1995's inaugural Quiksilver Pro that he considered tossing in his "straight job" for a life filming the waves. "I spend half my life jetting about covering war and famine. To see something like this makes my job really special," he said.

The Quiksilver Pro was first won in epic conditions by Floridian and

**Kelly Slater (above), G-land semi-finalist; Gary Elkerton (above right), G-land finalist; and (right) Slater in action again**

three times world champion, Kelly Slater, and this year in more brilliant surf by the Californian, Shane Beschen.

Grajagan is a real surfer's paradise. Flanked by dense jungle alive with wildlife, the reef could not be better for surfing. Surfers stay in one of two camps—the long standing "Bobby's" or the more recently opened "Djojo's Jungle Camp".

Unlike many surfing stops in Indonesia where you cut your own deal for accommodation a lump sum is paid prior to departing Bali and that's the last time you put your hand in

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your pocket: meals, beer and waves are on tap and this adds to the tremendous feeling of isolation experienced in Grajagan.

Legendary Hawaiian surfer, Gerry Lopez, who resides alternately on Maui and in Oregon for the waves and snowboarding, has been linked with the break since it was first surfed in the 70s. "Peter McCabe (from Newcastle) and I probably spent more time than almost anyone there in the early days and I'm pretty familiar with the break," Lopez said prior to this year's Quiksilver Pro.

"G-land is definitely my favourite



spot in the world. It's about as perfect a wave for a goofyfoot (right foot forward) as there is, I think. It's a real challenging wave, it holds a large variety of swell directions and it usually has great prevailing trade winds and you can get some of the longest barrels, I think, of anywhere that I've surfed."

It is worth noting that Lopez is perhaps the greatest surfer to tackle the notorious Banzai Pipeline on Oahu's North Shore. Pipeline is a vicious wave which holds swell of up to 15 feet (4.5m) and breaks savagely over a shallow volcanic reef. Lopez has mastered it and for him to call Grajagan "my favourite spot in the world" is testimony to the wave's quality.

Indonesia is for surfers what Disneyland is for kids. It holds all the thrills of the greatest of fun parks plus a cultural experience not found anywhere else in the world. G

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