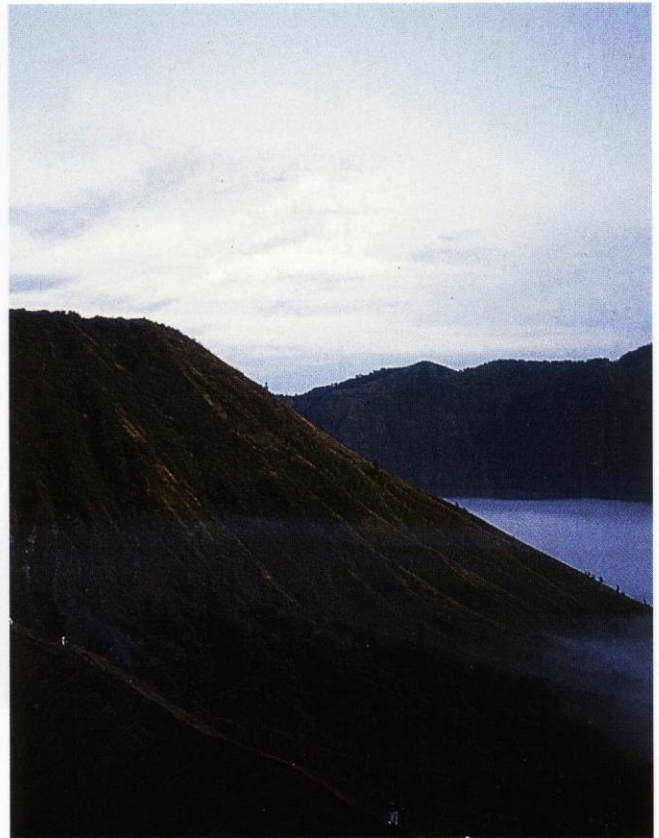
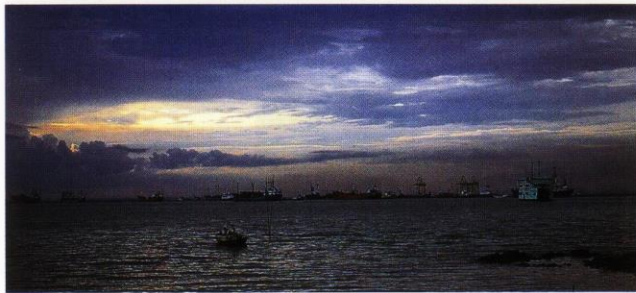


East Java



Watching the sunrise over the smoky crater rim of Mt Bromo is without doubt one of the most memorable experiences of any visit to Indonesia. And while Mt Bromo is the most renowned of East Java's attractions, there remains a treasure trove of undiscovered wonders to explore besides this mystical volcano. East Java is a paradise for unorthodox travellers and for those who relish antiquities or breathtaking views. Geographically and historically the province can be divided into three regions: the north coast (including the island of Madura); the Brantas River Valley; and eastern mountains with spectacular volcanoes, nature reserves and stunning scenery. East Java was the focus of Javanese civilization for several centuries when the Majapahit eclipsed the Mataram empire and ruins are scattered throughout the Brantas valley. East Java's most famous attraction, however, is Mt. Bromo, the desolate volcanic massif offering the most spectacular sunrise in SE Asia. Sugar and coffee plantations blanketed East Java during the colonial era. Many of these are still producing and a few accept overnight guests. The highlands around Surabaya and Malang are dotted with hill resorts, including Tretes and Selecta, offering a cool and picturesque escape from the lowland heat. The arid savannah lands at East Java's north-east tip have been declared a nature reserve. Baluran National Park is home to dozens of animal species along with over 150 types of bird. One of the best surfing spots in the world can be found in the Banyuwangi Selatan Reserve. Nature lovers should also visit the Meru Betiri Reserve and Sukamande Turtle Beach. Another exciting spectacle to be seen during August and September is the annual bull race on the island of Madura.



Surabaya

Surabaya, provincial capital of East Java and Indonesia's second-largest city, served for over half a millennium as trading port for the inland empires of Java. Situated at the mouth of the Brantas River, the city was officially founded in 1293 when Raden Widjaja established Majapahit, Indonesia's most glorious empire on the site of a legendary battle between a shark (sura) and crocodile (baya).

Surabaya, known as the "City of Heroes" because of its role in the nation's independence struggle, has grown into an elegant city of large, colonnaded buildings bordering broad, tree shaded avenues. It serves as the commercial centre of a thriving industrial and agricultural hinterland. The city's historical sites include Kali Mas harbour with its tall-masted trading schooners and, nearby, the narrow alleyways and shops of the Arab quarter, redolent of the Middle East. The historic Hotel Majapahit, where Indonesia's war of Independence was begun, and the elegant Grahadi State Buildings, an 18th century mansion, have been restored as monuments to an era of colonial grace.

Surabaya is also home to one of southeast Asia's oldest and largest zoos. For travellers in East Java, Surabaya serves as a convenient base for exploring the region's many charms, including Mt. Bromo, the cool mountain retreats of Tretes and Malang and the natural wonders of several nature reserves.

Because of the scattered nature of East Java's antiquities and the remoteness of locations, the best way to see them is in a rented car or minivan with a driver who will also act as a guide. These can be hired on a daily rate and can be arranged at most hotels in the bigger towns or cities.



Bromo sunrise

Located in the impressively beautiful Tengger highlands, the Mt. Bromo National Park is a major drawcard for visitors to East Java. Home of the fire god Betoro Bromo, Mt. Bromo itself is an active volcano, which lies in the middle of the huge Tengger Caldera or "sea of sand". The pre-dawn climb to the rim of Bromo to watch a spectacular sunrise is an experience not to be missed. Bromo is one hour from Surabaya by rental car. All Surabaya-based tour operators offer Bromo packages. There are now two upmarket properties, Grand Bromo Hotel and Bromo Cottages, located in the vicinity of the volcano. Very basic guesthouses in villages near the crater are also available. Depending on distance, the hotels will organize transport to the crater by automobile or horseback. For those with a moderate degree of fitness the hike across the sea of sand and climb to the rim of the active cone takes about 45 minutes. The less active can make the trip on horseback with a guide.

Madura

Thirty minutes by ferry from Surabaya's Tanjung Perak harbour lies the large, arid island of Madura. With sun-baked cliffs, blinding white-sand beaches, turquoise sea and proud people ready to defend their honour at the drop of a hat, Madura seems more an East Mediterranean island than Java's closest neighbour. Harvest-season bull races (August & September) are Madura's feature attraction. At the crack of a whip, teams of two 600kg oxen, linked with a wooden yoke with a driver perched precariously on a trailing sled, hit speeds of 50k/ph as they race along a 100m grass field. Begun as a method to improve the breeding stock, the races (karapan sapi in Indonesia) have evolved into a gaudy and exciting show with the bulls arrayed in colourful headdresses and sashes. Today's bulls are especially bred for this event and are fed on a strengthening diet of beer, eggs and chili peppers.



Malang

With European restaurants and pastry shops, neo-classical mansions and parks, Malang is a refreshing respite from the remoteness of rural East Java. It is one hour from Surabaya by car and a picturesque ride through a rural landscape dotted with volcanoes, orchards and flower gardens. Train and bus connections are frequent and comfortable. Malang is relatively compact and centres around the alun-alun or town square. The cool highland climate permits walking to most areas of interest. Otherwise, tour the town in a becak (pedicab) or bring a rental car from Surabaya.

Tretes

The mountain resort of Tretes, just 60km south of Surabaya,



is one of the most beautiful in East Java. Waterfalls, hot springs, breathtaking scenery and clean, cool air lure visitors from throughout Java and a regular flock of weekenders escaping the bustle of Surabaya. Spas, bathing pools and resort hotels line the steep, wooded hillsides, along with traditional houses and elegant villas dating from the colonial era when Dutch residents of Surabaya established Tretes as their mountain retreat. Trekking and horseriding are among the many attractions of Tretes and for history enthusiasts there are almost one hundred temple sites in the area. Classical Ramayana ballet performances are held during the full moon in the huge Candra Wilwatika open air theatre on the slopes of the sacred Mt. Penanggungan.

