

Islands weave their spell

Tropical paradises are hard to find, writes **John Aglionby**, but among Indonesia's 17,000 islands they are frequent enough to satisfy the growing millions of tourists who flock there every year

More and more people are choosing to spend their holidays in Indonesia. In 1967, 86,000 tourists spent US\$10.8 million holidaying in the country; last year's figure was 4.3 million people spending \$5.2 billion. And the figures for the first six months of this year show

a 21 per cent increase on the same period of 1995, well above the government's target of 10.5 per cent.

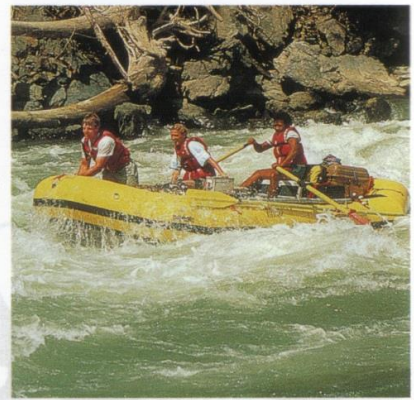
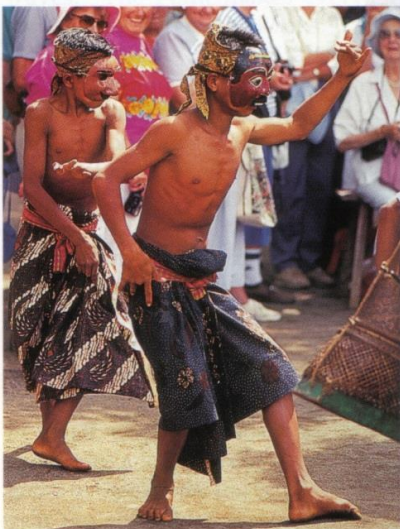
"The increase this year is fantastic, it shows that our product has really increased in quality and that visitors are recognising this," Luther Barrung, the director of marketing at the Department of Tourism, Post and Telecommunications said.

"Services have improved, there are many more tourist attractions offering a wider variety of things to see and do and they are being staffed by an ever more professional work force," he said.

This is not just empty rhetoric from a civil servant.

Ten years ago tourism was the sixth highest earner of foreign exchange behind oil and gas, timber, rubber, textiles and coffee. It is now

Visitors are now coming to Indonesia for adventure holidays such as white-water rafting (top) and trekking as well as for the fascinating cultural events



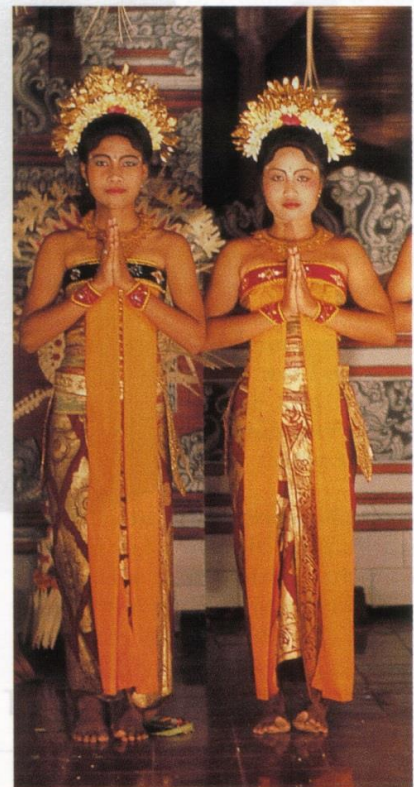
third, behind only oil and gas and textiles.

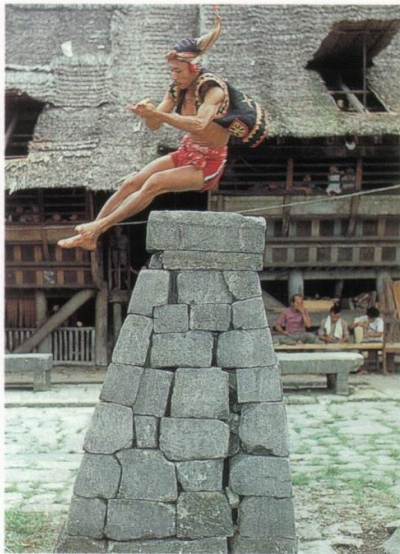
"By 2005 tourism will, hopefully, be the largest earner," Mr Barrung said. "The target is 11 million arrivals spending \$15 billion."

Expansion of the tourism industry is motivated partly by the expected decline in oil revenues and also the desire to cash in on a booming global business.

At a recent conference in Hong Kong, World Tourism Organisation Secretary-General Antonio Savignac said: "The travel industry is probably one of the fastest growing economic activities worldwide. It is now more important than the export of cars. It is more important than electronic goods.

"Asia and the Pacific has had in the last 15 years the highest rate of





growth," he continued. "And the projection into the future continues to make it the fastest growing region as a tourism destination in the world with an annual growth rate of 7.6 per cent from 1990 to 2010."

Although the growth of Indonesia's tourism industry exceeds Mr Savignac's analysis, it has not, and will not in the future, expand haphazardly, according to Andi Sammeng, the Director General of Tourism. "We have a national tourism strategy mapped out. In 1980 a master plan was produced; this is now under review and the new plan will reflect the experiences of the 1990s and the growing importance of thinking on a much larger scale than just nationally."

This last point is demonstrated by the increasing emphasis being placed on growth triangles in the region and co-operation with neighbouring countries. Links exist with Papua New Guinea and Australia, and Indonesia is now strengthening its ties with its Association of South East Nations (ASEAN) neighbours in the north.

On June 18 President Soeharto and Singapore's Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, inaugurated the Bintan Beach International Resort, a 23,000-hectare plot along a 70-kilometre white sand beach on the island of Bintan, part of Riau province. By the year 2000 planners hope the site will attract one million visitors annually. Total development costs will be in the re-

Stone-jumping at Nias (left) is one of the country's most unusual sights but such a vast and varied nation never runs short of people and places to see

gion of \$150 million. Bintan's development is based on an accord signed by Indonesia and Singapore in 1990 and is included as part of the co-operation programme associated with the Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore growth triangle.

Attention is now shifting slightly farther north, to develop ties between Indonesia's north Sumatran provinces and Malaysia and Thailand in a new growth triangle.

Mr Barrung said: "As Indonesia is

such a large country, we are learning that co-operation between some of our provinces and other countries helps to develop the whole country as a tour-

ism destination.

"We are still waiting for the results of developing the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand growth triangle, but if the marketing and promotion side is anything to go by it should prove to be very successful".

Promoting growth triangles is just one of the areas the tourism industry needs to focus on if it is to achieve its 11 million arrivals target by 2005, according to Mr Sammeng.

"We need to increase our share of the Asian tourist market. More and more Asians are travelling abroad for their holidays and we should be do-



ing our best to attract these people."

Asians already make up more than 60 per cent of all visitors to Indonesia. Mr Sammeng's target is to push this figure up to 70 per cent, "without neglecting the rest of the world market, of course."

The second area he is concentrating on is to increase the number of local-level businesses involved in the tourism industry. "These could be providing accommodation, tour guides, renting out vehicles or any other enterprise that caters to the needs of visitors," he said.

Such expansion would only prove successful, Mr Sammeng believes, if more resources were put towards expanding the number of tourism desti-

"People are now coming to Indonesia for the culture just as much as the beaches, and those on the beaches are starting to move inland."



A volcanic lake in northern Sulawesi. Indonesia has 400 known volcanoes

nations in Indonesia. "We have 17,508 beautiful islands; we should be encouraging people to go to more of them."

Daisy Hadmoko, Editor of Travel Indonesia magazine, believes this is already starting to happen. "People are now coming to Indonesia for the culture just as much as the beaches," she said. "And those on the beaches are starting to move inland as well."

"The development of niche markets, such as rafting and jungle trekking are helping to promote this trend and so more tourism destinations should open up across the country."

The most popular areas are still Bali, Java and parts of Sumatra but Sulawesi and Nusa Tenggara are also witnessing expansion, most noticeably in the form of more hotels being built. According to figures from the Indonesia Tourism Promotion Board (ITPB) there are 44 new hotel projects under development in Nusa Tenggara and 22 in North and South Sulawesi.

ITPB Chairman Tanri Abeng sees the key to success as close co-operation between the private and public sectors. "Tourism must be expanded within the government's overall policy for national development but it is up to the private sector to lead the way."

Mr Barrung agrees. "How to develop a particular area, for example on a large or small scale, must be left to the private sector. Our policy is not to push anyone to certain locations but let them decide for themselves."

This means that no province should become overdeveloped. "Some people are worried that maybe there

are too many facilities in places such as Bali but investors conduct feasibility studies before they develop anything and they would not go ahead with a project if there was not a market for it," Mr Barrung said.

The final area Mr Sammeng is concentrating on is investing in human resources. "We must remain competitive with our neighbours Malaysia and Thailand and in order to do so more effort must be given to human resources, from basic education to management training and policy making."

Mr Abeng has a similar opinion. "In order to develop the tourism industry and exploit natural resources without damaging the environment we have to move into knowledge-based industries and this means improving the quality of our human resources, particularly women."

"In neighbouring countries women are in charge of many areas of the tourism industry, on every level. And they are very successful. We can learn from that and help support women here."

Some commentators feel the government is a little ambitious in its target of being able to attract 11 million tourists by 2005 but if current trends continue there appears to be little reason why more people will not echo what one French tourist said recently after a visit to Sulawesi.

"In many parts of the world, the old traditions can be seen only in museums but in Indonesia, and particularly Sulawesi, a vast array of old traditions still exist, they are still lived. They are just waiting there to be discovered."

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