

Mentawai

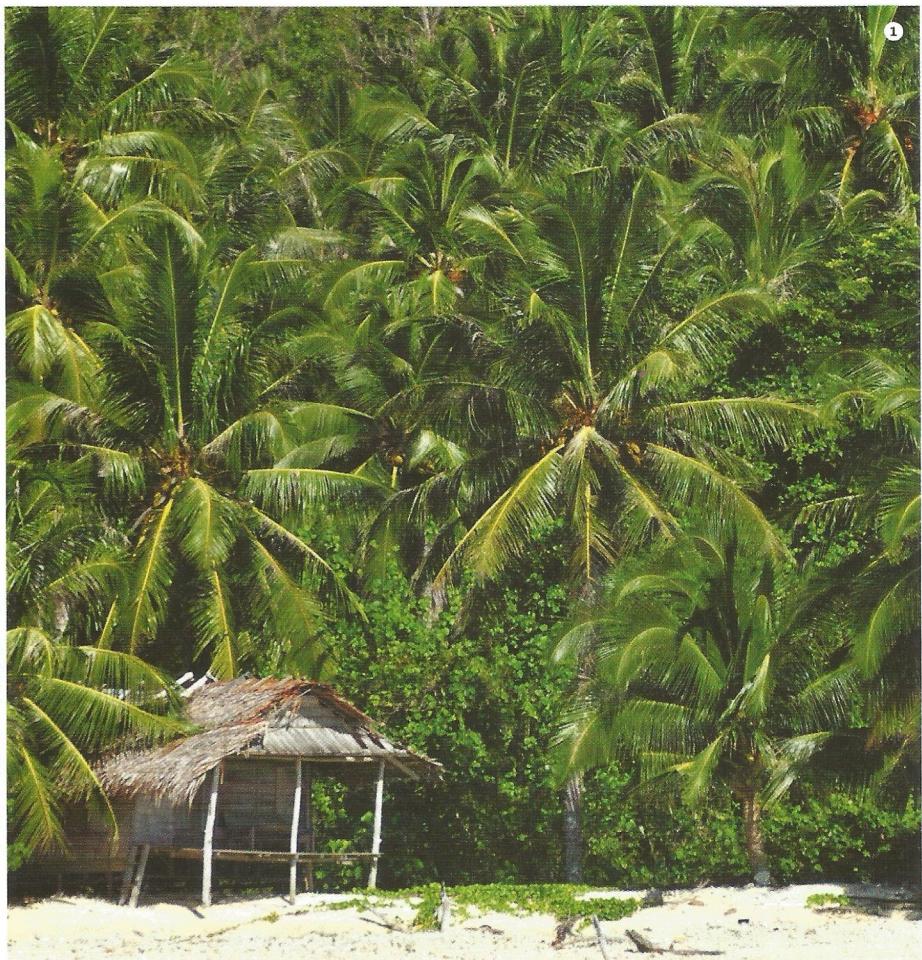
Words and photography
by David Burden

 4 hours from Padang by fast boat

As with many off-the-beaten-track corners of Indonesia, the Mentawai Islands – some 150km off the western coast of **Sumatra** – were first put on the map by a bunch of intrepid surfers over 30 years ago, looking to find the best waves beyond Bali. Ask any surfer which breaks are on their bucket list, and you can bet that most of them will be found somewhere out here.

Such is the high concentration of world-class waves. Innumerable jungle-clad atolls cluster around the four main islands of **Siberut**, **Sipura**, **Pagai Utara** and **Pagai Selatan**, housing an all-star cast of left and right reef breaks, most of which are tailored perfectly for the intermediate to advanced surfer. Waves such as **Lance's Right**, **Telescopes** and **Macaronis** are lodged firmly in surfing folklore as the kind of places where dream sessions go down almost every day; but for every named spot there are still plenty more just waiting to be chanced upon.

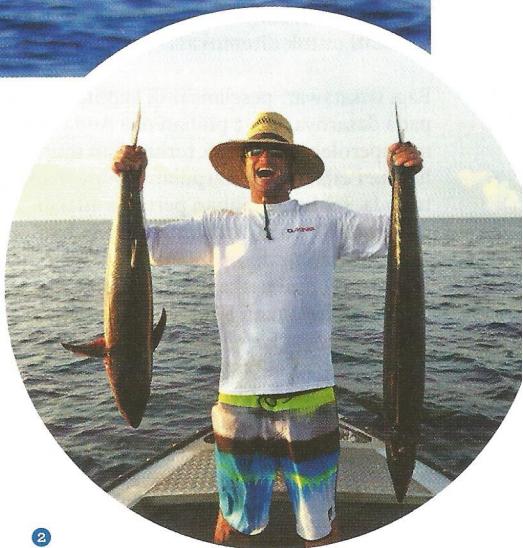
For surfing visitors to the islands, there are essentially two choices if you're looking to score the waves of your life. Inter-island travel is close to non-existent, so the first option is to stay on land at one of the land camps that are mushrooming all over the archipelago. The biggest concentration of these is off the southern tip of Siberut in what's known as the **Playground** region, but the beaches around **Tua Pajet** – Mentawai's administrative capital town – are catching up fast with boutique-style castaway accommodation like Aloita Resort (www.aloitaresort.com) and Nusa Togat Retreat (www.togatnusaretreat.com).



① One hundred nautical miles off the coast of West Sumatra, the Mentawai Islands are as far off the beaten track as a surfer can go.

② Surf charter guests are always astonished by the bounty of the sea in the Mentawai.

The second option is to jump on one of the many charter boats that ply the route out of **Padang** on the Sumatran mainland, and provide an all-inclusive full-board two-week trip. Both carry their advantages and disadvantages, with prices generally more expensive for the liveaboard charter boats. Floating palaces like the *Indies Trader* (www.indiestrader.com) and the *Ratu Motu* (www.ratumotu.com) might prove too pricey for most, although budget options like the *Kuda Laut* (www.kudalaut.com) and *Raja Elang* (www.tonyeltheringtonsurfcharters.com) combine basic comfort with a dash of adventure on the high seas. One thing that remains the same either way is the surf, and for a country that is as wave-riddled as Indonesia, the Mentawai Islands stand out as the hidden jewel in the crown.



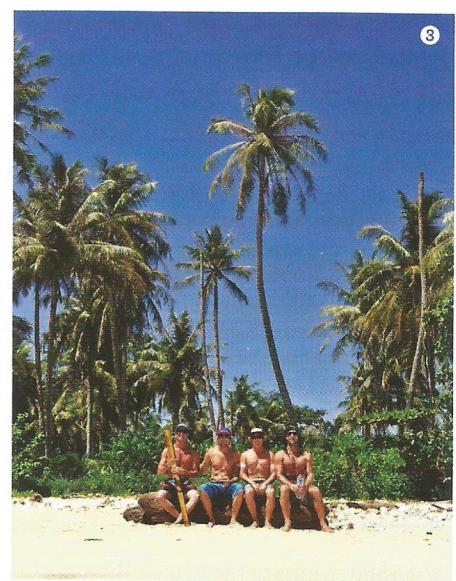
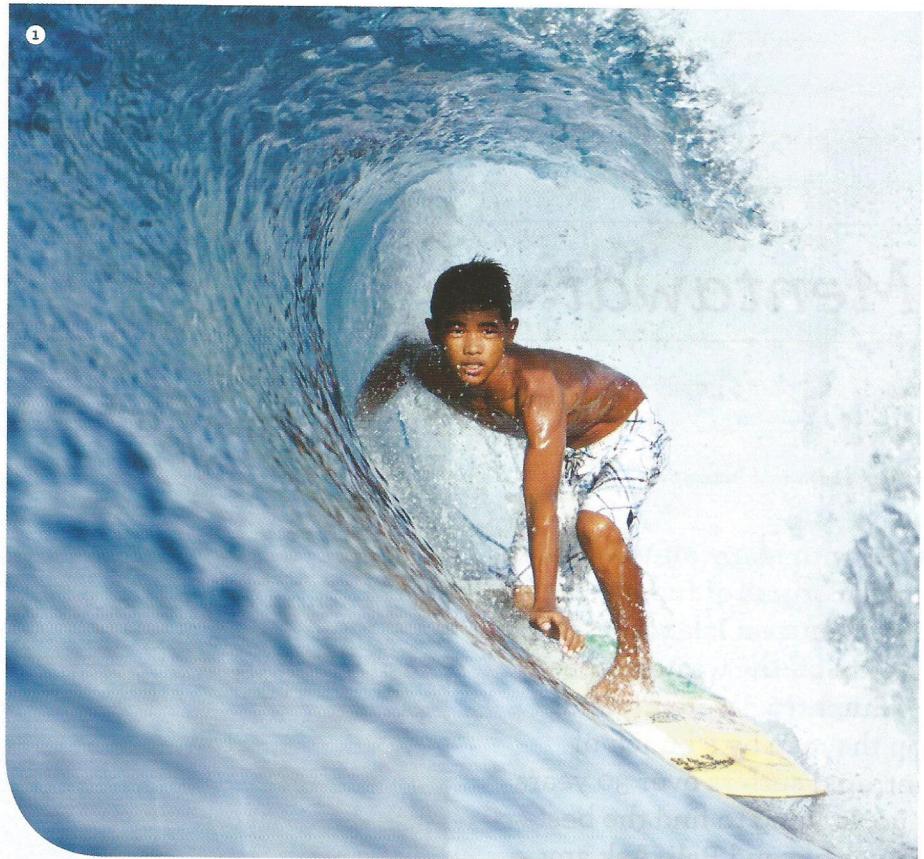
③

1 Seperti banyak wilayah terpencil di Indonesia, Kepulauan Mentawai—sekitar 150 kilometer dari pantai Sumatera—diperkenalkan pertama kali lebih dari 30 tahun lalu oleh sekelompok peselancar tangguh yang mencari ombak terbaik, melebihi besarnya ombak Bali.

Tanyakan pada setiap peselancar, ombak pantai mana yang masuk dalam daftar keinginan mereka. Sebagian besar pantai dalam daftar tersebut dapat ditemukan di sini, di mana ombak kelas dunia bisa ditemukan. Atol-atol yang dikelilingi hutan belantara di empat pulau utama, **Siberut**, **Sipora**, **Pagai Utara**, dan **Pagai Selatan**, memiliki pelbagai *left reef breaks* dan *right reef breaks*, yang terkenal, hampir semuanya cocok untuk peselancar tingkat menengah hingga mahir. Ombak seperti *Lance's Right*, *Telescopes*, dan *Macaronis* sudah sangat mengakar dalam legenda selancar sebagai arena untuk sesi selancar impian setiap harinya. Namun, meski cukup banyak titik yang telah dikenali, lebih banyak lagi yang masih menanti untuk ditemukan.

Bagi wisatawan-peselancar di kepulauan ini, pada dasarnya, ada 2 pilihan jika Anda ingin memperoleh ombak tak terlupakan seumur hidup. Perjalanan antarpulau hampir-hampir tak ada, sehingga pilihan pertama adalah menginap di pulau, di bumi perkemahan yang menjamur di sepanjang kepulauan ini. Mayoritas bumi perkemahan terletak di ujung selatan Pulau Siberut, di area yang dikenal sebagai Playground. Meskipun demikian, pantai-pantai di sekitar **Tua Pajet**—ibu kota administratif Mentawai—ikut berkembang cepat dengan pembangunan penginapan mewah bergaya *castaway*, seperti Aloita Resort (aloitaresort.com) dan Nusa Togat Retreat (togatnusaretreat.com).

Pilihan kedua adalah menumpangi salah satu dari banyak kapal carteran yang berangkat dari Padang, Pulau Sumatera,



dan menyediakan perjalanan *full board* lengkap selama 2 minggu. Kedua pilihan ini mempunyai kelebihan dan kekurangan masing-masing, namun biaya kapal carteran biasanya lebih mahal. Istana apung seperti Indies Trader 3 (indiestrader.com) dan Ratu Motu (ratumotu.com) kemungkinan terlalu mahal untuk sebagian besar wisatawan, meskipun pilihan ekonomis seperti Kuda Laut (kudalaut.com) dan Raja Elang (tonyeltheringtonsurfcharters.com) sudah cukup memenuhi kenyamanan dasar dengan paduan sepercik petualangan di laut lepas. Satu hal yang tak berubah adalah pengalaman selancar, dan untuk sebuah negeri yang dipenuhi ombak seperti Indonesia, Kepulauan Mentawai terkenal sebagai kekayaan tersembunyi yang paling berharga.

1 A new generation of Mentawai surfers is just emerging now, often on cast-off surfboards left behind by the many charter surfers that visit these islands.

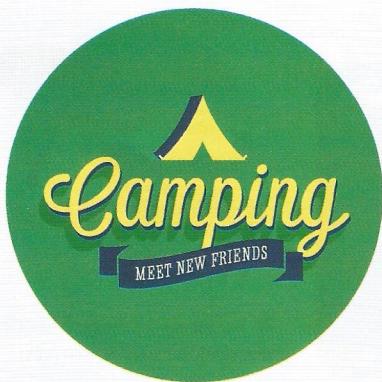
2 The specially outfitted surf charter boats often drop anchor where most would be running for their lives.

3 Global guests, friends and family, a rare respite on shore.

① On the surf charter boats, uniquely designed racks hold up to a hundred surfboards, like spears awaiting the hunt.



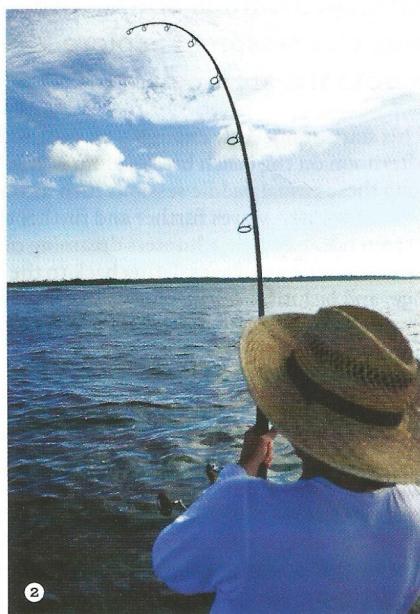
Travel Tips - Mentawai: Beyond the Surf



Although surfers have firmly staked their claim upon the Mentawai islands as a destination solely for waves, in recent years non-surfing travellers have begun trickling in, looking for a destination that still retains a remote 'edge-of-the-world' feel. Secluded land camps provide the ultimate dose of blissful solitude, with yoga, meditation and general island-style idling being the main drawcards. A stroll around the more accessible towns and villages is a great way to get an insight into the daily lives of the islands' people, most of whom seldom see tourists but who are friendly and welcoming nonetheless. Living deep upriver in the mysterious interior of the larger islands, Mentawai's indigenous tribes are thought to be descendants of the North Sumatran Batak people, and with a bit of patient organisation, those of a particularly adventurous disposition can venture into the jungles to experience this fascinating and isolated culture. Up until recently, disease, poverty and malaria had threatened to decimate the islands' native population, but non-government organisations like Surf Aid (surfaid.org) have been working hard to bring about positive change to these remote villages.

① Walaupun para peselancar telah mengukuhkan Mentawai sebagai tujuan utama untuk mencari ombak, belakangan ini, wisatawan non-peselancar mulai mengalir masuk, mencari destinasi yang masih mempertahankan nuansa terpencil. Bumi perkemahan yang tersembunyi menawarkan keheningan lengkap dengan fasilitas yoga, meditasi, dan kegiatan bersantai di pulau sebagai kartu utama. Berjalan-jalan di kota dan desa merupakan cara yang ideal untuk mengetahui kehidupan sehari-hari warga pulau yang jarang berjumpa wisatawan, namun tetap ramah dan terbuka. Bermukim di hulu sungai, di pedalaman misterius pulau-pulau yang lebih besar, suku-suku asli Mentawai diperkirakan adalah keturunan Suku Batak dari Sumatera Utara, dan dengan sedikit kesabaran untuk menjadwalkan perjalanan, para wisatawan petualang dapat menjelajahi belantara untuk merasakan sendiri budaya yang menarik namun terisolasi ini. Belakangan ini, penyakit, kemiskinan, dan malaria telah mengancam keberlanjutan hidup suku-suku asli di kepulauan ini, namun lembaga swadaya masyarakat seperti Surf Aid (surfaid.org) tengah berupaya keras membawa perubahan positif bagi desa-desa terpencil tersebut.

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② An abundant sea provides plenty of entertainment between surf sessions.

③ Catch your own dinner fresh from the sea, perfect protein for an athletic holiday.