

# Aceh, Indonesia

## NOTE ON THIS UPDATE

In light of the earthquake and tsunami disaster, this document updates the Aceh section, pages 467–80, of Lonely Planet's 7th-edition *Indonesia* guidebook. Information is presented in the same order as that found in the book, except for some extra notes on Pulau Nias (pages 461–7) at the end of this brief. Some new places have been added.

Normal Indonesian visa rules will resume on March 26, and the free-for-all entry period for international emergency relief workers will end, causing some uncertainty among aid groups. Foreign troops have also been asked to leave by then. Aid agencies working on long-term relief hope to stay on for years. Contact your Indonesian embassy for details.

The situation is changing daily. For updated information, check media and embassy reports, the UN Humanitarian Information Centre at [www.humanitarianinfo.org/sumatra](http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/sumatra), the UN Joint Logistics Centre at [www.unjlc.org](http://www.unjlc.org), and [www.lonelyplanet.com/tsunami/indonesia](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/tsunami/indonesia).

## GENERAL CONDITIONS

The northern half of Banda Aceh, the provincial capital, and most of the 240km west-coast stretch to Meulaboh were completely devastated by the tsunami. Vast areas remain covered in blankets of mud, debris, wrecked cars and scattered palm trees. Some 300 bodies a day are still being recovered, and the cleanup and reconstruction will take years.

The seaside area of Banda Aceh and dozens of Indian Ocean coastal towns and villages have all but disappeared. The sea swept away most of the bodies and debris, and left only piles of bricks and the concrete foundations of buildings. Death rates of 80% to 90% are not uncommon in those places that were directly in the path of the enormous wave.

Hundreds of refugee camps have been set up in gardens, parks and fields in Banda Aceh, and on the sites of devastated villages and towns along the west coast, where transport for aid workers is restricted and is available by UN and military helicopter, plane and ship only. Construction crews are rebuilding the road and more than 100 bridges to open the road by late March 2005.

Those areas not directly hit by the tsunami function more or less normally, although there is some earthquake damage. The southeastern half of Banda Aceh has power and water services, open shops, markets, hotels, and restaurants. There are telephone services, Internet connections and ATMs. Daily flights and bus services connect the city of Banda Aceh with Medan.

Almost everyone here has lost family members. Many have lost everything except their lives. Despite the mass trauma, people have shown strong spirit and resilience in rebuilding their communities and homes. The thousands of foreigners have experienced great warmth and hospitality in an area previously cut off from the world by years of conflict.

## Conflict

Fighting in the 30-year-old conflict between the Indonesian military and the separatist Free Aceh Movement (GAM) has somewhat abated since the tsunami, and peace talks are ongoing. International aid workers have not been targeted by either faction, and their presence as 'eyes and ears on the ground' appears to have had a calming influence. This could change quickly, however. The Indonesian army has reported deadly clashes with rebel

groups in outlying areas. UN staff outside Banda Aceh are on the same security level as their colleagues in Iraq. Check travel advisories and media reports before going.

## **Earthquakes**

Aftershocks have hit the area and are expected to continue. A strength-6 quake triggered fears of another tsunami and sent people fleeing. Keep an eye on the structural security of any buildings, including those mentioned in the text below. For example, many rooms in the Sultan Hotel have cracked walls. Local relief agencies have been urged to consult structural engineers. To get an idea of the state of a building, walk around the back, too, and check the walls. If you're stuck inside a building during a quake, try to hide under a door frame or strong table. Leave doors open so they don't get jammed shut.

## **Health**

The epidemics initially feared after the disaster did not materialise, in large part thanks to the speedy efforts of relief agencies. Malaria, dengue fever and other tropical diseases, however, do exist here, especially on the islands, so check government health advisories, such as the US Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), and ask your doctor which medicines and immunisations you need. City water supplies were polluted by sea water, debris and human remains, and experts say purification techniques are not very sophisticated. Therefore all the usual precautions about water (such as taking care with ice in drinks etc) apply.

## **TRANSPORT**

### **Air**

Three airlines fly daily between Banda Aceh and Medan, a one-hour trip. Jataju Airlines and Adam Air make the loop from Medan every morning and charge 300,000Rp one way. Garuda has three daily flights and charges 454,000Rp between Banda Aceh and Medan, and 1,400,000Rp to Jakarta. The ominously named SMAC Airlines flies daily from Medan to Pulau Nias and Pulau Simeulue.

### **Boat**

Daily passenger and car ferries run from near Banda Aceh to Pulau Weh. On the west coast, the UN is considering contracting a passenger ferry to make a regular 4-day round trip from Banda Aceh to Meulaboh, stopping off at Simeulue island. A ferry also runs from Meulaboh to Simeulue island.

### **Road**

Regular buses connect Banda Aceh with Medan along the intact north-coast highway. Check the security situation locally. UN vehicles only travel in daytime convoys outside Banda Aceh. Inland roads are also open, although the security situation can change quickly, especially in the mountainous interior, where GAM rebels operate.

The 240km coastal road from Banda Aceh to Meulaboh has been severed in many places, and more than 100 bridges were destroyed. Local people are travelling along sections of what is now a dirt road by moped and in trucks. Often the road has been diverted and makeshift bridges built. Reconstruction work is ongoing to open a passable road by late March 2006.

The UN Joint Logistics Centre (UNJLC) reports:

The road south from Banda Aceh is open for about 80km to Lamno, where a bridge is still down. The 73km road from Lamno to Calang is due to open by late March. The 37km stretch from Calang to Teunom is now open. Between Teunom and Meulaboh, a 55km inland road is now passable for four-wheel-drive vehicles.

Meulaboh and coastal towns to the east can be accessed by asphalt road from Medan via Sidikalang and Blangpidie. The 637km trip takes 17 hours by car.

## **BANDA ACEH**

The provincial capital of Banda Aceh bore the full brunt of the disaster. The earthquake collapsed many buildings, especially those taller than three storeys, including two modern shopping centres and several hotels. The tsunami that followed utterly destroyed the seaside half of the city, levelling almost everything in its path, and leaving debris, twisted vehicles, fishing boats and a 500-tonne power barge strewn across devastated suburbs several

kilometres inland. The suburbs of Jaya Baru, Meuraxa, Kuta Raya and Kuta Alam are now rubble-strewn wastelands, though people are slowly returning to their homes where possible.

In the town centre, the landmark mosque, the Mesjid Raya Baiturrahman, sustained almost no damage, even though the surrounding area was flooded and modern buildings, such as the four-storey Pante Pirak shopping complex and several hotels and banks, collapsed with the quake. The Pasar Aceh Central, or central market, just a block to the west of the mosque, was badly hit by floods that turned its streets into rivers of black water, filled with debris, cars and people. Thousands died here.

However, even in the central market area many buildings appear to have structurally survived, and roads have been cleared. Shop owners and volunteers are cleaning out and fixing up their businesses, though most remain closed and boarded up. Across the Sungai Krueng Aceh, the river that bisects the town and that was filled with many corpses after the disaster, the area around Jl Panglima Polem is now cleaned up and commercial life has resumed.

The southeastern half of town was not flooded. The rough dividing line between those areas affected and those spared is the city's major diagonal thoroughfare, which runs southwest–northeast and changes names several times, from Jalan Cut Nyak Dhien to Jl Teuku Umar, Jl Mohammad Daud Beureueh and Jl Tengku Nyak Arief. The quieter, leafier suburbs southeast of here, Banda Raya, Baiturrahman, Lueng Bata and Ulee Kareng, were mostly unaffected. Many of the dozens of relief agencies in town have rented houses here.

### **Information**

Staff at the tourist office (Jalan Chik Kuta Karang 3) speak English and have maps and bilingual booklets on Banda Aceh, Pulau Weh and other places. There are functioning ATMs all over town, including at the BII and BCA banks on the central Jl Panglima Polem. The large, white Bank Mandiri at Jl Daud Beureueh 15 changes foreign currencies and cashes travellers cheques. The nearby post office is open and provides Internet and photocopying services. A good travel agent for air tickets, with professional English-speaking staff, is BP Travel at Jl Polem 75. The nearby Garuda Airlines office is also open. There are many Internet cafés, including Jambo Internet, on the corner of Jl Polem and Jl Nyak Arief. For international phone services, there are wartels across town. The Wartel Palapa on Jl Sulaiman Daud 36 offers crisp lines and fair rates. You can usually buy city maps from a vendor outside the Pendopo, or Governor's House, where foreign aid workers register with the national police. For household goods, there are busy markets (pasar) at Ulee Kareng, Lambaru and Neusu, where you'll also find the new Pante Pirak supermarket. For medical services, head to the Rumah Sakit Dr Zainal Abidur, which was rebuilt after the tsunami with help from German and Australian troops.

(Information for aid workers: the UN agencies, ICRC and many other relief groups and foreign governments have set up shop on or around Jl Jendral Sudirman and Jl Fatahillah in the city's southwest. The very useful UN Humanitarian Information Centre (HIC) is on Jl Sudirman 15. The UN also runs situational briefings on Tuesday and Friday at 5pm across town at the Hotel Regina on Jl Beureueh, now the base for Oxfam.)

### **Things to See**

The Mesjid Raya Baiturrahman, the Gunongan and the Museum Negeri Banda Aceh are all fine and open to visitors. The Kherkof (Dutch Cemetery) was flooded and is now an expanse of sun-baked, cracked mud, though the historic graves are largely in place.

### **Places to Stay**

In the city centre, a number of listed hotels have reopened, though the current favourites, Hotel Sultan and Hotel Medan, are still packed out with aid workers and relief agencies. South of the centre, a few blocks from the Pendopo, Hotel Kartika (also known as the Wisma Iskandar Muda) on Jl Nyak Adam Kamil I has become a favourite with Indonesian relief groups, one of which has pitched a large army tent in the courtyard.

## Budget

Hotel Raya – closed  
Losmen Palembang – closed  
Losmen Sri Budaya - closed  
Hotel Lading – closed  
Hotel Wisata – closed  
Hotel Prapat – open  
Hotel Medan – open (new phone ☎21501)

## Midrange

Hotel Cakradonya – open  
Hotel Sulthan – open (temporary phone ☎081269 84806)  
Kuala Tripa – closed

## Places to Eat

The Acehese breakfast staple is *nasi gurih* (rice cooked in coconut milk) sold in coffee shops everywhere. Food stalls and Padang restaurants are open across the undamaged part of town, and fruit carts are ubiquitous. On Jl Panglima Polem 125, the recommended Banda Seafood Restaurant also offers fine chicken, meat and vegetable dishes. Near the Kartika Hotel, on Jl Nyak Adam Kamil IV 41-VII, the Warung Ibu Pocut, in a traditional stilted wooden house with open sides, offers great local fare and a fresh breeze. Across the road, the more upmarket Big Top cooks up Chinese and Indonesian dishes. The Sultan Hotel has a popular café that serves good French fries, while the chef at the hotel's Koetaradja Restaurant boldly tries his hand at a Sultan Burger. The Niagara Café on Jalan Hasandek 8-9 has every fruit juice imaginable and a satay stand outside. There are some nice coffee houses with soothing rice-paddy views around Ulee Kareng, along Jl Tengku Iskander on the town's western outskirts.

## Getting There & Away

### Air

The airport, about 20km from the town centre, was not affected by the floods. Three airlines fly daily from Banda Aceh to Medan and on to Jakarta (see the Transport section above).

### Bus

Inquire about security before making any long-distance overland trip in Aceh. The north-coast highway from Banda Aceh to Sigli, Lhokseumawe and Medan was not damaged by the tsunami. Buses leave Banda Aceh's Terminal Bus Setuy, south of the centre on Jl Teuku Umar. Operator Kurnia has 11 air-conditioned buses per day making the nine-hour trip to Medan, leaving from 8am to 8pm. Night travel is not recommended. The ticket office on Jl Mohammed Jam remains closed because of flood damage, so buy tickets at the bus terminal.

## Getting Around

For transport within the city, a short *labi-labi* minibus ride or a trip in a motorised trishaw will cost 5000Rp to 10,000Rp.

## AROUND BANDA ACEH

### Uleh-leh

This fishing port northwest of the centre was completely destroyed. A battered mosque and a few isolated ruins are all that is left amid the rubble here and in the nearby district of Meuraxa. Fishing boats, police launches and larger ships that were docked here on December 26 ended up several kilometres away in town. The bulky, 500-tonne PLTD Apung 1 came to rest some 2km inland from the seafront, where it now sits amid badly damaged homes, still looking seaworthy and taking up an entire city block. Its generator has been used to power the neighbourhood. There are plans to turn it into a memorial to the tsunami.

### Lhok Nga & Lampu'uk

These seaside villages and former weekend spots beyond the wooded hills west of town were also completely levelled. In Lampu'uk, a badly damaged mosque is now the centre of a tent

city for the 10% of residents who survived the disaster. Former US presidents George HW Bush and Bill Clinton visited in February. South from here, a huge barge and the small tug boat that was attached to it have come to rest on either side of what is left of the road. Beyond, a large concrete factory has been partly destroyed. Around a road bend lies what used to be Lhok Nga, once a popular picnic and beach-hut spot 17km from Banda Aceh. Today, nothing is left of the village or the guesthouses and cottages.

## **PULAU WEH**

This laid-back and postcard-pretty tropical island, with its steep and green hillsides, fared much better than the mainland when the tsunami hit. Fewer than 20 people died here, according to locals. Only a small part of the island's infrastructure is at sea level. Unfortunately, this included some of the beachside tourist facilities. However, those guesthouses that survived are eager to bring back tourists to the island. For some, the influx of aid workers on weekend R and R trips may actually bring salvation after the years of martial law, which reduced tourism to a trickle. For up-to-date information, check out [www.lumbalumba.com](http://www.lumbalumba.com) and [www.pulauhweh.com](http://www.pulauhweh.com).

## **Sabang**

The main drag in the island's only town, lively Jalan Perdagangan, was not damaged by the tsunami, and the places here mentioned in the book's Information section are all still open, except for the Stingray Dive Centre. The Internet café Online.com is at Jl Perdagangan 1.

## **Places to Stay**

Losmen Irama – open

Losmen Pulau Jaya – open

Losmen Sabang Merauke – open

Holiday Losmen – open (go up the lane between Jl Perdagangan 25 and 27)

Samudera Hotel – open

## **Places to Eat**

Dynasty Restaurant – open

Restaurant Sabang – closed

Harry's Cafe – open

## **Iboih**

This relaxed beachside hideaway was long a favourite on the SEA backpacker circuit but suffered badly from the dearth of travellers in the one and a half years before the tsunami. Now it is hoping to become a weekend destination with aid workers. There is still debris on the beach, but all the bungalows built slightly up the slope survived the tsunami. Most charge 30,000Rp a room. Food is basic while demand remains low, but the Arina Restaurant is still in business. The Fajar Restaurant plans to reopen when demand goes up. Eric Homestay, O'ong bungalows, Yulia Bungalows and Fatima bungalows are all open.

## **Gapang**

This is another great hideaway, even after the tsunami, with rooms from 50,000Rp. A slightly more upmarket place than Iboih, here the bungalows are larger, and some have A/C. The Laguna Resort, which sustained some damage, is open. It has a terrace with a terrific view of the bay, and the kitchen is due to reopen soon. The Gapang Resort, also open for business, plans to build a new beachside restaurant shortly. At the end of Gapang beach, the Suykur Bungalows and the somewhat older Ramadilla Bungalows/Barracuda Restaurant are good value at 30,000Rp for a beach hut.

## **Diving & Snorkelling**

The coral reefs survived the tsunami largely intact, preserving the island's status as one of the top dive sites in Southeast Asia. The Stingray Dive Centre had no plans to reopen, but there are two other shops, both recommended by divers. The Lumba-lumba diving centre ([www.lumbalumba.com](http://www.lumbalumba.com)) in Gapang is open and due to fix its compressor by mid-March. The friendly Dutch couple who own it are a great source of information on the island, their home for the past decade. They have an office in Sabang that doubles as a tourist information

centre. A day out with two dives and full equipment hire costs €45. An open-water diving course costs €225. Rubiah Tirta Divers ([www.rubiahdivers.com](http://www.rubiahdivers.com)) on Iboih Beach is also open for business, even if its building on Iboih took a beating by the tsunami. A dive with full equipment hire costs US\$99 per day. Contact Dodent on @ 08153 402 0050.

### **Getting There & Away**

A fast passenger ferry (35,000Rp), the Pulo Rondo, leaves the mainland daily at 1pm and makes the trip to Sabang harbour in one to 1½ hours. The boat leaves from Malahayati port at Krueng Raya, a 45-minute drive east of Banda Aceh, 10,000Rp by bemo. Get there early to ensure you get a ticket. The fast boat leaves Sabang the next morning at 8.15am. A slower and larger vehicle ferry (8150Rp) leaves the mainland's Malahayati port daily at 2pm and takes at least two hours. It returns from Sabang at 8am.

### **Getting Around**

From the island's southeastern port of Balohan, minivans run to Sabang, 20 minutes away, and on to Gapang and Iboih, a one-hour drive across the mountainous island, past hordes of monkeys. The bus ride is 30,000Rp to 40,000Rp. Chartering your own taxi to Iboih or Gapang will cost anywhere from 100,000Rp. Guesthouses may rent out mopeds with petrol for 50,000Rp to 80,000Rp a day.

### **BANDA ACEH TO SINGKIL**

The west coast of Aceh is a vast disaster area, where the swath of destruction often reaches several kilometres inland. The killer wave took away entire villages and swept the bodies and most of the rubble out to sea. Even palm trees, the only things left standing in other areas, here often toppled like match sticks. The road between Banda Aceh and Meulaboh is cut in countless places, though rebuilding continues. For now, relief workers get around by aircraft. Roads are open south of Meulaboh. Check the security situation before travelling.

### **Calang & Teunom**

These towns are isolated disaster areas, and only people who can bring professional help should go there now. Only the foundations of homes and hundreds of refugee tents are visible from the air. In Calang, almost 100% of structures were destroyed. Now a vast tent city, it's the central hub for civilian and military relief efforts between Banda Aceh and Meulaboh. In Teunom at least 8,000 of 18,000 people died. The coastal road is destroyed, but a more difficult inland road is being repaired to connect the town with Meulaboh.

### **Meulaboh**

This once sleepy town, 240km by road from Banda Aceh, was almost completely destroyed by the tsunami. The town's centre has now shifted to a northern suburb that was spared from destruction. By some accounts, a third of Meulaboh's population of 120,000 died. The giant wave swept right across the peninsula that was previously the town centre and port. Only some concrete structures and a radio tower remain standing among the rubble. The airport, 20km south of town, is open to relief flights. Many UN, Red Cross and private NGOs have set up base in Meulaboh. Food and supplies are being trucked in from Medan, a 17-hour drive along asphalt roads through the central mountains. Petrol is being rationed, and there are long lines of mopeds at the service station. South of Meulaboh, the extent of the damage slowly diminishes, and the road to Singkil is open.

In Meulaboh, the new town centre is at the intersection of Jl Gajah Mada and Jl Manek Ro, where a hospital operates. Small restaurants and food stalls are open around here, but there are no hotels. A bank with ATM is on nearby Jl Nasional. The bus terminal is at Jl Singgah Mata, and the police post is at Jl Swadya.

### **Places to Stay**

Mestika – only a pile of bricks indicates where this losmen once stood

Hotel Nova – closed

Meuligo Hotel – closed, but damage appears moderate

### **Pulau Simeulue**

Ancestral knowledge about tsunami, passed down orally through the generations, saved thousands of lives on this remote island. When the earthquake came, people knew to run for the hills. The giant wave completely destroyed many north-coast villages, but the known toll of nine deaths and 1,600 injured is comparatively low.

Some 20,000 people are now living in displaced people's camps. In the badly-hit northern Alafan province, people have lost their homes, fishing boats, buffalo, other livestock and rice paddies. In the early days many survived on coconuts only. Some coral reefs here now stick 2m out of the water, barring future access for fishing boats.

The main town and ferry port of Sinabang, sheltered in a bay, suffered comparatively little damage. Power, water, telephone and other services function. The airport on the western end of the island is operational.

CARE, Save the Children, Concern and Surf Aid International are among the aid groups operating on the island. Check [www.surfaidinternational.org](http://www.surfaidinternational.org) for regional updates.

### **Places to Stay**

On the main stretch of Sinabang, the Losmen Simeuleu has rooms starting at 30,000Rp. Nearby Losmen Lovya is also open. On the west coast, about 10km from the airport, Australian Brian Williamson (mobile @ 0815 34035820) and his wife Dewi (mobile @ 0813 6241 7692) run a surf camp called Willy's Place that was damaged but remains open.

### **Getting There & Away**

SMAC Airlines (in Medan @ 061 455 1888) flies daily to Simeuleu. A 12-hour ferry also operates from Sibolga, and a passenger ferry operates from Meulaboh. It ran three times a week before the tsunami, but the current schedule is not known. A ferry also runs from Labuan Tarok, a port south of Meulaboh, between Blangpidie and Tapaktuan, according to the UNJLC. Schedules are unknown.

### **SINGKIL & BANYAK ISLANDS**

Damage was minimal on the Banyak Islands, and at Singkil, a small departure port for the islands. On the island group, about 20 houses were damaged, but no-one was hurt. However, Surf Aid International says health and sanitation standards are very poor in this long-neglected region, which has malaria and other diseases, almost no medical services or other infrastructure, and poor drinking water and waste management.

### **BANDA ACEH TO MEDAN**

Although several north-coast towns sustained tsunami damage, services here operate normally. Buses run regularly along this road. Check the security situation before going.

### **PULAU NIAS**

As on Simeuleu island, people here knew to run for the hills when the earth rumbled. Still, some 500 people died, mostly on the directly exposed west coast. The main town and port, Gunung Sitoli, on the north coast was spared major damage. The southeastern tourist and surfers' resort of Teluk Lagundri, set in a horseshoe bay, was also reported to be largely undamaged. In nearby Teluk Dalam, one person was killed by the earthquake.

Worst hit were the west-coast town of Sirombu, where at least 60 people died, and the nearby village of Sisarahilly, 5km away, where 113 of the original 300 people died and all the homes were destroyed. Surf Aid International reports that on this exposed peninsula people had nowhere to run when the wave hit. The 68 people who sought refuge in a church about 1km inland were all killed by the tsunami.

Strangely enough, the tiny islands of Asu, Hinako and Bawa, situated off devastated Sirombu, fared much better. An Italian-run surf camp on Asu is reportedly open. However, the islands are suffering because their supply line to the main island has been cut by the destruction of Sirombu and its market, and food prices have sky-rocketed.

Aid groups working on Nias include Surf Aid International, Caritas and the Dutch Howu-Howu Foundation. Check [www.surfaidinternational.org](http://www.surfaidinternational.org) for regional updates.

### **Getting There & Away**

Regular ferries still service the island from Sibolga. SMAC Airlines (in Medan ☎061 455 1888, in Gunung Sitoli ☎0639 21400) flies every morning from Medan to Gunung Sitoli and back. The Medan office says flights (496,000Rp) leave Medan daily at 7.50am, except Wednesday and Saturday, when they leave at 10.50am. However, recent customers report delays of up to six hours and recommend you stay in regular contact with the airline office after buying your ticket.