

Banda Neira

For many visitors to Indonesia, the Banda Islands, historically renowned as a global centre of the spice trade, represent something of an unknown entity. This is certainly true of Banda Neira, and we hope this guide can lessen or increase the mystery as required.

With all the classic getaway tropes in place - deserted beaches, a warm welcome, clear water and, in **Gunung Api**, a resident volcano – this corner of southern **Maluku** caters perfectly for those with no real plans.

The first port of call for many will be sleepy **Bandaneira/Banda Neira** (also known as **Banda**). Visitors should not be surprised to find themselves wooed into a soporific daze as the flower-filled streets and easy-going pace work their woozy charms.

Famed as a source of nutmeg and other spices, the **Banda Islands** were colonised by the Portuguese and then the Dutch. This colonial influence still lingers in the form of buildings and evidence of brutal violence against the islanders.

Why go to Banda

Many arrivals head straight for nearby islands **Ai** and **Hatta** – a fine choice thanks to their excellent snorkelling, diving and undeveloped beaches. For others, though, the real magic lies in absorbing **Banda Neira's** unique atmosphere, where nothing works as it should.

Plans are at the mercy of the weather or, in some cases, the language barrier. As such, this unpredictability facilitates a



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looser, more relaxed attitude. The news of a cancelled boat, for instance, will bring a smile and a shrug rather than a moan. Even better, such news prompts a sudden yearning for delicious cookies from the marketplace. Washing down a couple of these biscuits with a kopi susu while marvelling at the beauty of **Banda** is one of **Indonesia's** greatest treats.

After a few days of walking around, visitors will find that many islanders greet them like old friends. If they're lucky, the visitors will learn a new Bahasa Indonesia phrase or two from their hosts.

At such points, '**Banda Neira** time' takes hold. The warm welcome and total lack of cynicism make it impossible to feel stressed. Instead, visitors feel compelled to see more of the daily comings and goings of a genuine Indonesian outpost.

A walk down the charmingly rundown streets may lead to a street party. Or equally, a conversation on the sidelines of a volleyball tournament could well bring an invitation to a residential committee meeting.

These are disparate examples, but they all point to the same thing. As **Banda's** gentle form of

chaos begins to take hold, visitors will discover the island has etched its way onto their hearts.

What to do on Banda

The best way to see **Banda Neira** is to walk around the peninsula. There, visitors can see dilapidated villas and museums that outline the area's colonial past, sometimes in graphic and gory detail.

The colonial-era church, **Gereja Tua Banda**, on **Jl. Gereja Tua**, is a very pretty building defined by its sturdy Doric columns and VOC markings that remind everyone of the Dutch occupation of **Banda**.

Beach fans and sun-worshippers in search of golden sand and clear blue sea are also in luck. They should head straight for **Pantai Malole** to the island's north. Those who delve further into the surrounding jungle can expect to find hidden, isolated stretches of beach, perfect for enjoying a cooling dip in the shadow of **Gunung Api**.

No walking tour would be complete without a detour around **Tanah Rata** village. Here, visitors will not only gain an insight into the island's tranquil pace but there's a good chance

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they'll also make some new friends. There have been reports from this part of **Banda** of inquisitive youngsters, who appear from nowhere and quickly adopt newcomers. These children excitedly show off the area, demonstrate their secret handshakes and lead an impromptu spice tour before receding into the island's ebb and flow, never to be seen again.

Back in town, the pair of forts – **Benteng Belgica** and **Benteng Nassau** – present great views and highlight the violent extent of the Dutch occupation. In keeping with the island's laissez-faire nature, they seem to open sporadically. Expect to pay a 10,000 IDR donation in lieu of an entrance fee.

Rumah Badaya, Banda's little museum (9 am – 5 pm, 20,000 IDR), is also worth a visit with historic artefacts on display that help show how much influence the **Banda Islands** once held.

For a long time, nutmeg and mace only grew in this corner of **Maluku**, which eventually drew the attention of the wider world. By the seventeenth century, nutmeg held more value, by weight, than gold in **Europe**. People used the spice to preserve food and show off their status,

and the health-conscious even wore pouches of it around their necks, thinking nutmeg's strong odour would purify the air and ward off the then-raging Black Death.

In other words, the **Banda Islands** once had a huge, if unwitting, say in world affairs. Such clout is hard to fathom these days. In fact, some visitors have struggled to reconcile this faraway, unassuming place with the worldwide attention it provoked. Others try not to think about it too much. They simply lie back and let the **Banda** mood wash over them. Luckily, there are places to do exactly that.

Stargazing

For those interested in celestial affairs, **Banda Neira** offers an ideal spot to watch the skies. Head to the **airstrip**, which has wide-open spaces and is a great place to stare into infinity (**PRO-TIP:** bring a rug, and watch out for motorbikes - people seem to ride up and down the airstrip at night to clear their heads). The jetty outside **Delfika 2** guest house offers equally cosmic views. **Tita Lama** is a nice place to watch the sunrise, too.

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Where to stay on Banda

Delfika 2 guest house enjoys an ideal location down an alley between the market and the jetty. Balcony rooms (300,000 IDR) in particular showcase **Gunung Api** in all its glory. Downstairs rooms (275,000 IDR), meanwhile, share a spacious common area. Contact delfika1@yahoo.com for more information. Remember, these are 2017 prices and contact details and they've probably changed.

2026 update: Looks like Delfika 2's still open [booking.com].

Check for current prices.

Weather

Banda has two seasons, dry and wet. There are two dry seasons, with the first covering March and April. Nobody seems to know what happens between May and August, but we'd hazard a guess that it's sometimes hot and sometimes wet.

After that, the dry season resumes from September to November. The rainy season then takes over. It lasts from December until February, and brings high rainfall, wind and rough seas. The temperature stays consistent all year round.

EitM spent a couple of weeks on **Banda** over Christmas and New Year (i.e., December) during the height of the rainy season. Yes, the rain fell heavily each day, and we were glad to have an umbrella. The rainfall, though, wasn't constant, and it didn't ruin the holiday.

If you're in and around **Banda** during the rainy season, prepare to lose at least a couple of hours to the musim hujan every day. The heavy weather and rough seas can also affect ferries and flights, so consider that during the planning process.

We're not diving folk, and we don't really know the best time to go diving, or how the weather might affect that. There's bound to be some excellent **Banda** diving content floating around, however, so finding out that kind of info won't be hard.



Getting there and away

Flights and ferries

2026 update: Visitors planning passage to **Banda** would do well to visit **Getting to Banda** [www.dive-bluemotion.com/getting-here]. This great resource provides up-to-date and on-the-ground info.

A trip to the islands will most likely call for patience and flexibility. This is especially true during wet periods, when boats and flights face regular cancellations.

2026 update: Supposedly, **Susi Air** [www.susiair.com] and **Alternative Airlines** [www.alternativeairlines.com] offer flights from **Ambon** to **Banda Neira** and back again. However, a quick search didn't find any flights, so flying doesn't seem like a reliable option. You could try driving to **Banda**, but EitM can't guarantee you'd get far.

Boats seem like the best bet for most visitors, although that's not necessarily saying much. In 2017, we used the Express Bahari 2B boat, which left from Tulehu harbour in **Ambon** for **Banda Tulehu's** about an hour from **Ambon** by car.



However, trips can fall victim to the weather, with crossings often cancelled – the harbour office, guest houses or restaurants can all provide updates. The trip was six hours, with VIP tickets costing 650,000 IDR and economy seats available for 400,000 IDR.

2026 update: It seems that the Express Bahari 2B boat no longer runs. As of 2024, the Bahtera Nusantara 02 car ferry looks to be the main budget-ish option from **Tulehu**. **Wikitravel** suggests making inquiries/bookings through Pak Jery, +62 852 9959 1075 (WhatsApp). Verify in **Ambon** before setting off, and remember that all this contradictory, unclear information is all part of the fun of reaching a faraway place like the **Banda Islands**.

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PELNI ferries

PELNI ferries (approx. 110,000 IDR) are a surer way to reach and leave **Banda**. Journeys are 8 to 15 hours, and they take place every two weeks or so. That fact on its own tells you all you need to know about how out of the way **Banda** is.

Check the [PELNI website](http://www.pelni.co.id) [www.pelni.co.id] or the PELNI office on **Banda** for timetables. Boats leave from **Ambon** harbour.

There's also a PELNI app, but we never used it and can't vouch for it.

Boats to the other Banda islands

It's possible to reach the other islands in the **Banda** chain from **Banda Neira**. For example, boats – usually of the long, thin ketinting variety – leave the jetty outside **Delfika 2** for passage to **Ai** and **Hatta**, Monday to Saturday, typically in the mornings.

Presumably, people can organise boats to **Api**, **Run/Rhun**, **Besar/Lonthor**, **Pisang/Syahrir** or elsewhere from this jetty. And if not, somebody will point them in the right direction. Trips cost about 50,000 IDR.

Ask around, and make sure to confirm with the captain when the boat will leave. It will help to know a bit of Bahasa Indonesia – at the time, we didn't understand the word 'sekarang', which means 'now'. As a result, we ended up delaying ourselves because, asking when a boat was leaving, the captain would say 'sekarang' and we, none the wiser, would nod vaguely and wander off. The boat, naturally, would then leave without us. It took a couple of failed attempts – and a few days – for us to work out what was going on.

Visitors can also charter boats at an inflated rate (up to 1,000,000 IDR per vessel per trip). As of 2026, these costs have likely risen, but since the visitor has made it to **Banda**, we trust they know how to budget and recognise the need to charter transport as, when and if their plans call for it.

RI	BERANGKAT TGL	BERANGKAT JAM	TUJUAN
BONA	22-12-17	06.00	TUAL - DOBO - ...
AL	25-12-17	06.00	AMBON - SORONG - ...
ON			SAUMLAKI - LARAT - AGATS - MERAUKE

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Language suggestion

It'll probably be a good idea to have a working knowledge of **Indonesian numbers** when organising trips, because you can't be sure who speaks what language. Most bookstores or book stalls will have a language section where you can find a kamus kantong pocket dictionary.

For instance, look in **Maluku City Mall** in **Ambon**, which has a **Gramedia MCM** store that sells stationery, books, and the like. We would always recommend that a visitor, especially if they're new to a place, buy a suitable dictionary as soon as they arrive.

Banks and money

There's a **BRI Bank** with an ATM to the west of **Fort Nassau** and opposite **Rumah Makan Abhy**. However, the ATM's not the most reliable thing in the world and doesn't always work.

The best bet is to stock up on money in **Ambon** or **Tual** or wherever you're coming from. **Banda** has money changers, but we didn't use any and wouldn't know the best place to go. The general chatter seemed to suggest that people who wanted

to exchange money this way shouldn't expect good rates.

Food and drink

Many warung and vendors offer no-frills, classic fare. Those looking for tasty dining should look no further than **Delfika Guesthouse & Cafe** on **Rumah Badaya Banda**. There, they will find fruit juices, pancakes and all manner of sweet treats that complement Indonesian classics.

Cookies and doughnuts – both fiendishly addictive – are available from street sellers, while nutmeg jam, a **Banda** staple, crops up in many eateries and tastes particularly fine when mixed with sambal and spread over egg on toast.

2026 updates

This article was conceived and written in 2017/8. Whilst the general stuff about ambience and atmosphere probably still holds, we've added updates where possible to reflect changes in logistics, prices and so on.

As with all EitM content, consider this guide non-definitive but vaguely useful, possibly.