

Madurese / Bahasa Madura

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Madurese, or Bahasa Madura, is a language mainly spoken in, on and around the island of **Madura** in **East Java, Indonesia**.

The language has millions of speakers. It crops up locally as far north as **Bawean** and the **Masalembu** islands and as far south as **Banyuwangi, Pasuruan, Jember** and other places on the rump of **Java**.

But Bahasa Madura has a far larger reach than that. Many Madurese have settled in other parts of the archipelago over the years. Some moved to **Kalimantan**, others to **Papua**. Yet more went to **Sumatra** and others ended up elsewhere.

All had one thing in common: their language. Travellers have reported meeting and talking to Orang Madura as far away as **Jambi**, seeing Madurese signage in **Kalimantan** and hearing Bahasa Madura spoken in **Kapuas**.

One traveller even received stern words and a hard stare from a satay seller in **Tegal**, but that's a story for another time.



Cultural Context

Indonesia has more than 700 languages. Madurese ranks among the most spoken of its dialects, alongside Balinese, Javanese and Sundanese. And like many of its brethren, Madurese abides by many rules.

Firstly, Madurese works on three levels: formal, polite and relaxed. A teacher, older people, parents or community leaders - in other words, people in authority - can expect formality.

Everyday interactions, meanwhile, tend to use more relaxed and familiar phrasing. But in practice, getting used to different kinds of formality is a complex thing.

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Since using the wrong form can rankle people, it's best for a speaker to use their words wisely. EitM once heard, on a bus between **Semarang** and **Salatiga**, that wrongly using 'datang' and 'pergi' ('come' and 'go') could cause serious issues on account of sounding impolite and dismissive.

The result of said mis-speaking was not made clear, but the teller's tone suggested that the wrong word can lead to a volatile reception or offence taken.

Luckily, an outsider has a fair bit of leeway. They're not expected to know the rules of a dialect, especially when new to a place. Instead, they can take a bit of time to find their feet and learn from their mistakes.



This is notably useful for Bahasa Madura, which has a reputation, even amongst the Madurese, for being tough to learn. Madurese has many unusual sounds and stress patterns, for instance.

These elements make speaking the language tricky. Moreover, Madurese heads in many dialectical directions (**Bangkalan**, **Sampang**, **Pamekasan** and **Sumenep** have their own dialects, plus variations thereof). At these times, unfamiliar phrasing can take on different forms depending on where you are.

In the same way that Madura seems to emanate a sense of distance, so too are its languages tricky to pin down.

While internet searches can bring up many useful Madurese language guides, these resources come from different places and require piecing together. It's hard to find standard spellings and written forms.

Madurese does its own thing, in other words. This feeling chimes with the idea that **Madura** and the rest of **Indonesia** don't really get on. In some places, in fact, **Madura** and her sons and daughters have an unfavourable reputation for coarseness, aggression and disrespect.

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EitM has experienced nothing of the kind, save for glimpses of the type of strength that brings to mind a bull, a symbol of **Madura**, that will go where it wants to go, not where it's told to.

If anything, Orang Madura err on the side of extreme kindness, but that's besides the point.



Making the Effort

Madura is a difficult place to reach. No airport on the island accepts commercial flights, so for most people, getting to the island requires taking a cramped bus from **Surabaya** or a boat from **Banyuwangi**.

And since most visitors to **East Java** focus their efforts on **Bromo, Ijen, Malang** and so forth, **Madura** ends up being ignored pretty much most of the time. It thus makes perfect sense that learning Madurese requires a bit of extra effort.

EitM's top tip: talk to a bus conductor, especially when on Madura itself. These kind souls often take on the role of language guru and teach receptive newcomers a few key words in Madurese. And from then, things pick up.

Clichéd as it sounds, just trying to use Bahasa Madura goes down well. EitM, well-meaning and keen to learn but firmly non-polyglot, has caused jaws to drop and eyes to widen with our basic Madurese skills; on one occasion, a lady in a **Sumenep** warung nearly imploded with excited shock when we said 'sakalangkong' / 'thank you' for our food. This humble, kind-hearted response to what really should be the bare minimum for anyone who goes abroad bred our deep affection for **Madura**.

And thus came into being this guide. We compiled it from simply walking around the island and paying attention to the chats we had along the way. As such, it's probably a bit slipshod with mishearings, wrong spellings and so on.

But if the reader has made it to **Madura**, not a place to end up on by mistake, they've probably got the basics of Bahasa Umum and can get by talking to people.

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And in turn, this openness means they're more than capable of picking up a smattering of Bahasa Madura too.

Places to Use Madurese

Working east, as most visitors will likely do, a trip to **Madura** starts in **Bangkalan**. This town is the closest to mainland **Java**, and it presents the distinct nature of **Madura**. Expect an arid climate, a lack of mountainous peaks and a feeling of dryness, even during the rainy season. The landscape has its own character too.

At some point, most people will visit **Bukit Jaddih**. This former lime mine feels at once natural and artificial. Mining has carved the land into cuboid shapes, and towering white walls enclose ponds and sculptures. The whiteness of the mine contrasts nicely with the blue sky and confounds many visitors thanks to the resulting loss of perspective.

The next stop is **Sampang**. This is a social place. Many flock to the **Alun-Alun Trunojoyo**, a spectacular example of an Indonesian town square, which draws the gaze with its twin-tower monument and bull statue that pays homage to **Madura's** bovine horde.



But for our money, the main treat comes from simply walking around. It once took EitM two hours to walk a 50-metre stretch of road in **Sampang**. Every time we passed a house, its occupants would drag us indoors for food, coffee and chatter. It was a warm welcome made even warmer with our less-than-basic Madurese skills; a couple of phrases here and there, and the ice breaks very easily on **Madura**.

On, then, to **Pamekasan**. Here, a visitor may see many things: the unending fire of **Wisata Api Abadi**, **Jumiang Beach** and **Avalokitesvara Buddhist Temple**, to name but three. But most striking is **Arek Lancor**. This monument, which mimics the shape of Madurese sickles and rises flame-like to honour the island's spirit, leaves a mark on those who see it.

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The **Great Mosque of Asy Syuhada** sits with grace behind **Arek Lancor**, and some Islamic scholars like to share wisdom with those sitting in the square. Knowing some Madurese will at least make the lesson easier to understand and bat away if faith is not the audience's scene.

With that, the trip ends in **Sumenep**. **Sumenep** is a historic area, where the seeds of the Majapahit kingdom were first sewn.

And those who walks **Sumenep's** open streets, buffeted by a warm sea breeze, can bask in this historic grandeur.

In their walking, the visitor may see much of interest. A mini pilgrimage to the **Asta Tinggi Royal Tombs** from **Masjid Agung Sumenep** will show the regency's

character - a place at once splendid and understated.

Hypnotic Saronen music may float about the place, as might the smell of pisang goreng.

Upon reaching the tombs, careful to avoid rampaging trucks and bemo vans along the way, the visitor can look across **Sumenep**.

There, they will see a place where bulls race and oxygen reaches abnormally high levels, and much more lies in wait for those willing to seek out hidden things.

EitM would like to dedicate this language primer to our friend Ram. He was a good man: kind, generous and friendly. We will miss him and hope to honour his memory whenever we think, do or see anything in connection with Madura. Forza Ram.



Madurese / Bahasa Madura glossary

Basics Dasar

How are you? Baramah kabeh?

I Engkok

You Be'en

What is your name? Sapah nyamana banah?

My name is (Tom) Nyamana kaulah (Tom)

Where are you from? Dari dimah banah?

I am from (England) Kaulah dari (Inggris)

Thank you Sakalangkong

No problem Depadeh (artinya) / Sapalikuh / Lok rapah

Excuse me (*seeking help - similar to 'permisi'*) Ta'langkong / Takalong / Gelenon

Please (*greeting*) Tore lenggi

I want ... Kaule terro ...

What? Napah?

Who? Pasera?

Why? Arapah?

When? Nalehkana?

Where? Edimah?

How? Baramah?

How much? Sanapa arghena?

Ask Atanya ah

Directions Arah

Where is ... Edimah ...

School Sakola

Harbour Palabhuan

Sea / Beach Taseh

(Over) there Edissah

(Over) here Edinnah

Forwards Maju

Backwards Kahbuddhi

Turn around Abali

Left Kacer

Right Kangan

Keep going Teros ajhalan

How far? Baramma jaunah?

Food / Drink Kakanan / Enomman

Eat / Drink Ngakan / Ngenom

Water Aeng

Chicken Ajem

Lamb Embi kebhes

Beef Dhaging sapeh

Pork Dhaging babbih

Fish Jhuko

Crackers Kerupuk

Miscellaneous Cem-macem

Hour Pokol

Day Areh

Month Bulen

Year Taon

Bald Bhutak

Tall Tengghi

Thunder Galutuh

Wind Angin

Storm Kelap

Four elements Empah unsur

Cigar Cerutu

Just sit (*as in wait*) Tinggal dudu

I like your nose Sengko' seneng ka elongnga banah*

*long story

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Numbers Angka

0 Kosong

1 Settong

2 Duwah

3 Telloh

4 Empah

5 Lemmah

6 Ennem

7 Pettoh

8 Balluh

9 Sangah

10 Sa polo

11 Sa bellas

12 Duwah bellas

13 Telloh bellas

14 Pah bellas

15 Lemmah bellas

16 Nem bellas

17 Pettoh bellas

18 Balluh bellas

19 Sangah bellas

20 Duwah poloh

30 Telloh poloh

40 Pah poloh

50 Lemmah poloh / Saèket

60 Nem poloh / Sabidhak

70 Pettong poloh

80 Ballung poloh

90 Sangang poloh

100 Saratos

Hundred Atosen

Thousand Ebu

Million Juta

How old are you? Berempa omora banah?

I am (30) years old Omor kaulah tello polo taon



