

Javanese / Bahasa Jowo

[In]Expert Travel Insight

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Indonesia is a colossal country, home to many thousands of islands, of which Java is the largest. Likewise, the archipelago has a huge number of dialects, tongues and lingos; at the last count, over 700. And the most widely spoken regional language is Javanese, which shares the same sense of scale and sway as its mother island.

Bahasa Umum is Indonesia's lingua franca, spoken or understood by the vast majority of the populace. When factoring in the number of first- and additional language speakers, Bahasa Umum claims over 200 million users.

But Javanese, or Bahasa Jowo, does not lag so far behind. Its speakers number more than 110 million people, or around 40 per cent of the country's population, making Bahasa Jowo a linguistic titan of great reach and size.

While Bahasa Umum may act as the shared tongue, it is

languages like Bahasa Jowo that reign in Indonesia's quiet corners. In the kampungs and the desas, and softly lilting over the pantais and sungais, tongues like these link a vast diaspora.

Most folk will speak Bahasa Umum, but not all know Bahasa Jowo, making the language a Very Useful Thing Indeed for the visitor to know.

Where is Bahasa Jowo spoken?

It comes as no shock that Java is home to the world's largest number of Bahasa Jowo speakers. Most of the language's users live in Jawa Tengah and Jawa Wétan, or Central and East Java.

Javanese, for instance, is an official language in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Visitors can also find speakers of Bahasa Jowo in Jawa Kulon, on the island's west side.

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But Bahasa Jowo is not limited to Java. Wherever people of Javanese descent reside, their regional language often hovers not far behind. Over the years, the government's transmigration programme has deposited Javanese people throughout the archipelago, in places such as Lampung and Jambi in Sumatra. With them went their mode of speaking, which settled across the nation.

An observant listener will also find speakers of Bahasa Jowo in other Southeast Asian nations, as well as on other continents.

Countries with strong ties to Indonesia, such as the Netherlands and Suriname, have Javanese enclaves. So, too, does New Caledonia in the South Pacific. This link 'twixt language and place has its roots in the nineteenth century, when Javanese people worked on the territory's fields and plantations. They stayed in New Caledonia, which allowed their language to proliferate far from its origins.

The lesson here is that the spark of Bahasa Jowo glows bright across the globe, never content to stay in one place.

Formal and informal Bahasa Jowo

The wise reader, meaning you, will note that this language primer possibly probably definitely comprises a mix of formal and informal terms. Such a muddle reflects the slapshot way EitM gathered these words.

The primer came from passing sources: chats with bus conductors, mostly, but also friendly patrons in warungs and passers-by in alun-aluns. Each conversation had its own tone, and saw one stranger share a snippet of Bahasa Jowo with an outsider, sometimes formally, sometimes less so. As such, parts of this guide may well elicit friendly confusion.

Oftentimes, outsiders tend to receive some leeway if their use of a clearly foreign language is a bit clumsy. The best way to minimise issues is to mirror the ways, words and tones of naturalised speakers. Hoping for the best works well, too.

Bahasa Jowo is no different. It is a deep language with many layers, where tone, grammar and

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vocabulary reflect the status of the speaker and the listener. In other words, Bahasa Jowo is formal or informal based on why, when and where it's used, and who's involved in the dialogue.

Bahasa Jowo falls into four categories:

- **Ngoko [casual, low tone]** is the direct, informal type. Friends, social equals and family members of the same age tend to use it, as would someone of higher status speaking to a person of lower status. Ngoko is simple and relaxed, but it can come across as glib or rude if used to elders or strangers
- **Kromo [high, polite tone]** is more formal and refined. It lacks the directness of ngoko, and its use conveys respect and humility when talking to older people, strangers or in formal settings, such as giving a speech
- **Kromo Madya [middle tone]** blends ngoko and kromo, polite and casual. It's often used by strangers who don't know the other's status and don't want to seem too formal

- **Krama Inggil/Krama Andhap [very high tone]** comes into play when talking or referring to a person of very high status. It is a sign of total respect, used when talking to venerated folk such as royal personages, revered elders and high-ranking officials. This type has a specific vocabulary, which EitM totally failed to learn on any level

The complexity does not end there, however. Bahasa Jowo has many regional variants, where the Surabaya version differs from Surakarta/Solo Javanese, which in turn diverges from the type spoken in Yogyakarta, and so on. Magnify these differences across Java, and it soon becomes apparent that the language resembles an intricate spiderweb, with strands that connect and divide at a dizzying rate.



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It seems that the best way to master Bahasa Jowo is to forget about mastering Bahasa Jowo. The language is a complicated beast that befuddles non-polyglots.

The precise awareness of when to use which type of Bahasa Jowo requires intimate knowledge of Javanese culture. Many outsiders, no matter their good intentions, will lack this know-how. Not even all Javanese master the system.

Instead, many people use the informal ngoko and a simple version of the formal krama, and visitors would do well to follow this lead. Rely on instinct, basic politeness and situational awareness, and hopefully any slip-ups will keep to a minimum. Alternately, learn to say ‘hello’, ‘please’, ‘goodbye’ and ‘thank you’ a couple of hundred different ways and see what happens.

Dialects

EitM have found that in Indonesia, making even the slightest effort with any form of Bahasa can draw nods, looks of surprise and agreeable noises from the listener. It stands to reason, then, that learning the host language can open many



doors and forge new friendships.

Once upon a time in Sumenep, we went to a warung and, upon paying, thanked the cashier in Madurese [‘sakalangkong’]. She almost imploded in excited shock and blurted out, ‘Mister! Anda bisa berbicara Bahasa Madura!’ A bit dazed by the wholesome reaction, we nodded vaguely and felt somehow guilty. We never worked out why.

Point being, polite greetings and small talk help break the ice. The same applies in Java, but with an added dose of bewilderment. Knowing your way around one language doesn’t magically mean you’ll make yourself understood in the next town along.

Fear not, though. In our experience of such disconnect, a guardian angel tends to appear from nowhere in the guise of a well-meaning stranger. This passer-by, smiling, teaches us a few helpful words and vanishes soon after, never to be seen again. Perhaps that’s a common occurrence for outsiders in Java. It certainly makes life a bit easier.

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The following inexhaustive, possibly inconsistent, list shows [some of] the different types of Bahasa Jowo:

Standard

- The basis of modern Javanese, developed at the courts of Yogyakarta and Surakarta/Solo

Central [Jawa Tengah]

- Used throughout the eastern side of Jawa Tengah, the Special Region of Yogyakarta, and the western and southern part of East Java
- ***deep breath*** Yogyakarta, Surakarta/Solo, Madiun, Ponorogo, Ngawi, Magetan, Pacitan, Tulungagung, Trenggalek, Tegal, Pemalang, Pekalongan, Semarang, Banyumas, Cilacap, Purwokerto, Kebumen, Salatiga, Grobogan, Demak, Kendal, Klaten, Karanganyar, Wonogiri, Sukoharjo, Sragen, Boyolali, Magelang, Temanggung, Kebumen, Magelang, Wonosobo, Jepara, Rembang, Kudus, Pati, Tuban, Bojonegoro, Blora, Grobogan, Ngawi, Kediri, Blitar, Nganjuk

Western [Jawa Kulon]

- Used in the western part of Jawa Tengah and across Jawa Kulon and Banten province

- ***deeper breath*** Serang, Cilegon, Tangerang, Cirebon, Indramayu, Losari, Tegal, Brebes, Pemalang, Banyumas, Cilacap, Purbalingga, Banjarnegara, Bumiayu

Eastern [Jawa Wétan]

- Used from Banyuwangi to Jombang and the eastern banks of Kertosono's Sungai Brantas
- ***pass out through lack of oxygen*** **Areken dialect:** Surabaya, Malang, Gresik, Mojokerto, Pasuruan, Lumajang, Jember, Lamongan, Sidoarjo; **Pasisir Lor Wétan/Suraya dialect:** Surabaya, Sidoarjo, Gresik, Mojokerto Lamongan; **Malang-Pasuruhan dialect:** Malang, Pasuruan; **Lumajangan dialect:** Lumajang, Jember, Kencong, Jombang, Umbulsari, Gumukmas, Jombang; **Gresik dialect:** Gresik; **Tengger dialect:** Pasuruan, Probolinggo, Malang, Lumajang; **Osing/Blambangan dialect:** Banyuwangi



Javanese / Bahasa Jowo glossary

Basics Dhasar

Hello Dhewe

Goodbye Dadah (informal) /
Sugeng tindak (formal)

Good morning Sugeng enjing

Good afternoon Sugeng siang
(11am - 3pm) / Sugeng sonteng
(3pm - 7pm)

Good evening Sugeng ndalu

See you later Sampai ketemu

Yes Iya (informal) / Nggih (formal)

No Ora (informal) / mboten
(formal)

How are you? Piye kabareh?
(informal) / Pripun kabaripun?
(formal)

I Aku

You Koweh

He / She / It / Them Dhewekeh

What is your name? Cenengmu
sapa?

My name is (Tom) Namine sinten
njenenkin (Tom)

Where are you from? Teko endi?

From there Teko kene

I am from (Dili) Aku saka (Dili)

Thank you Matur suwon

No problem Podo podo / Sami
sami / Ora popo / Ora popa

OK Apik apik wae

Sorry / Excuse me Sepurane

**Excuse me (seeking help - similar
to 'permisi')** Amit / Nuwon sewoo

Help me Njalok tolong

Why? Ngapa?

When? Kapan?

What? Opo?

Who? Sapa?

How? Kepriye?

How much? Pinten?

Don't know Wes eroh

Up to you Sak karepmu

Please Monggo

Directions Pituduh

Where is... Ing endi...

Where? Ndek endi?

(Over) there (Ning) ana

(Over) here (Ning) kene

In between Ing antarane

In front of Ing ngarepe

Behind Mburi

Stop Mandheg

Forwards Maju

Backwards Mundur

Turn around Nguripake

Left Ngiwa

Right Kanan

Keep going Terus maju

How far? Sepira adohe?

How long? Suwene?

Walking (similar to 'jalan jalan')

Mlaku mlaku

Where are you going? Jendingan
tindak pundi?

This way Ajeng ting mriku

Slowly Alon alon

North Lor

South Kidul

East Wétan

West Kulon

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Food / Drink / Miscellaneous

Pangan / Ngombe / Macem-macem

Eat / Drink Maem / Ngombe

Eat (formal) Dhahar

Hungry Luwe

Thirsty Ngombe / Ngelak

I want... Aku pengin...

Water Banyu

Milk Susu

Coffee Kopi

Chicken Pitik

Lamb Domba

Beef Daging sapi

Pork Daging babi

Duck Bebek / Itik

Fish Iwak

Crackers Krupuk

Cigarettes Rokok

Lighter Cocog

Fruit Woh

Vegetables Sayuran

How much? Piye?

How many? Pira?

Cheap Murah

Expensive Larang

Very (cheap) Banget (murah)

Do you have (...)? Sampeyan duwe (...)?

Bald Gundul

Tall Dhuwur

Thunder Guntur

Wind Angin

Storm Prahara

Four elements Papat unsur

Wait Ngenteni

Crazy Eden

I like your nose Aku seneng irungmu

A little Sithik

Beautiful Ayu

People / Person Wong

Javanese people are beautiful

Wong Jowo ayu ayu

Time Wektu

What is the time? Apa wektu?

What time? Jam pira?

When do we leave? Nalika kita mangkat?

When do we arrive? Kapan kita teka?

Second Detik

Hour Jam

Day Dina

Week Minggu

Month Wulan

Year Taun

Decade Dasawarsa

Century Abad

Today Dina iki

Yesterday Wingi

Tomorrow Sesuk

This (week) Iki (minggu)

Last (week) Pungkasan (minggu)

Next (week) Sabanjuré (minggu)

Weekend Akhir minggu

Someday Ing sawijining dina

Rainy season Mangsa udan

Dry season Mangsa kemarau

Sunrise Surya munggah

Sunset Surup

Later Mengko

Before Sadurunge

After Sawise

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Numbers

- 0 Das
- 1 Stungal
- 2 Kalay
- 3 Tikur
- 4 Sakawan
- 5 Kansal
- 6 Nam
- 7 Bitu
- 8 Waloo
- 9 Sonko
- 10 Sedasa
- 11 Setunggal welas
- 12 Kalay welas
- 13 Tikur welas
- 14 Sakawan welas
- 15 Kansal welas
- 16 Nam welas
- 17 Bitu welas
- 18 Waloo welas
- 19 Sonko welas
- 20 Kalih dasa
- 21 Selikur
- 22 Kalay likur
- 23 Tikur likur
- 24 Sakawan likur
- 25 Kansal likur
- 26 Nam likur
- 27 Bitu likur

- 28 Waloo likur
- 29 Sonko likur
- 30 Tikur dasa
- 40 Sakawan dasa
- 50 Kansal dasa
- 60 Nam dasa
- 70 Bitu dasa
- 80 Waloo dasa
- 90 Sonko dasa
- Hundred** Satus
- Thousand** Ewu
- Million** Yuta
- How old are you?** Pira umurmu?
- I am (30) years old** Aku (tikur dasa) taun

NB: These are the krama form of numbers, which means they're formal, for use with elders and strangers. Since everyone we met on Java was technically a stranger, and strangers taught us these numbers, it made sense to employ the polite form. There's a more informal variant known as ngkoko, the numbers of which we didn't learn but would probably use around people we knew a bit more, context permitting.

