

Hiking to Mt  
Abendudatoi.



GREAT TROPICAL  
WALKS  
TIMOR-LESTE

# FINAL FRONTIERS

Discover incredible hiking in one of the newest and least visited countries – Australia's northern neighbour, Timor-Leste.

WORDS AND PHOTOS [JONTY CRANE](#)



**MANY** Australians may not know much about Timor-Leste (East Timor), other than its history of struggle and independence, but having spent the best part of a year exploring the country, I can confidently say that the hiking here is some of the best in the world.

Upon arriving in Timor-Leste, I was struck by the diversity of its scenery, with near 3,000m-high peaks, picturesque waterfalls, rejuvenating hot springs, and idyllic beaches. For a country 20% of the size of Tasmania, the range of landscapes is quite incredible, and not what you may imagine from a small island in Southeast Asia.

Trails, while largely unmarked, cross the entire country. While hiking, you're almost certain to encounter only locals, who are among the friendliest and most welcoming people in the world. For those who enjoy venturing off the beaten path and discovering new frontiers, Timor-Leste is a great adventure destination.

### Summit fever

The literal highpoint is Mt Ramelau (2,986m), a relatively easy five-hour round hike from the village of Hatu Builico, the highest settlement

in the country. The summit is marked with a statue of the Virgin Mary, known as Nain Feto Ramelau (Our Lady of Ramelau). The hike is most popular during March and October when Timorese make pilgrimages for religious ceremonies, but for the rest of the year, it's likely you'll have the mountain mostly to yourself. On a clear day, hikers can enjoy breathtaking views of the entire country, from coast to coast, a unique experience in Southeast Asia.

For those looking for a greater challenge, Mt Matebian (2,376m), the second highest peak, provides a more difficult and logistical challenge. With waist-high grass, unclear paths, and a steep ascent, this climb is not for the faint-hearted. The summit is marked by a statue of Jesus and is a popular pilgrimage site for locals. Before heading to the summit you can stay at Baguia Fort, one of a number built during Portuguese colonial times, which have been turned into atmospheric accommodation.

For thrill seekers, Timor-Leste's fourth highest peak, Mt Kablaki (2,062m) combines steep, rocky terrain, shoulder high grass, and challenging paths with exposure. It rewards though with magnificent vistas, reminiscent of the European Alps, and you're almost

guaranteed to be the only non-local on the mountainside.

The highest point of Mundo Perdido may only be 1,763m, but Timor-Leste's largest remaining rainforest is home to a diversity of bird and plant life, in particular orchids, and is an atmospheric place to explore on foot. It was named the "Lost World" by the Portuguese as it so often hidden in mist, with August to October the best time of year to visit for clear views.

### Multi-day adventures

The mountainous central spine of the country, which runs through the municipalities of Bobonaro, Ermera, Aileu, Ainaro, and Manufahi, offers spectacular multi-day hiking experiences. Here, coffee plantations – Timor-Leste's second-largest export after oil and gas – are common, as well as terraced fields and remote villages, adding to the cultural richness of the journey. Guest houses are rare in these areas, so you'll likely be camping, perhaps at a local school or by a hot spring.

Tapo to Atsabe is a challenging three-day hike (but four-day trip with 5 hour drives at the start and end), including natural hot springs at

**“YOU WILL SEE WHAT LIFE IS LIKE IN REMOTE TIMORESE COMMUNITIES”**

Marobo and Ilat-Laun, the highest waterfall (200m) in the country at Bandeira Falls, and huge views from Mt Abendudatoi. The scenery varies from lichen filled forest, reminding me of home in New Zealand, through to terraced rice fields shaded by palm trees.

Mt Saboria to Mindelu is another spectacular three-day hike, offering visits to the shrine at the summit of Mt Rabilau, the lush landscapes of Manufahi, and the remote site where Timorese hero Nicolau Lobato was killed by Indonesian forces in 1978. You will see what life is like in remote Timorese communities, plenty of traditional thatched buildings, and lush landscapes. For the ultimate hiking



**Above:** Rabilu

**Top:** Tasi Tolu, Dili.

**Above left:** It's a tough 3-day hike to Atsabe.

## OTHER INFO

### Getting there

There are regular flights with Qantas and AirNorth between Darwin and Dili.

### Safety

Timor-Leste has one of the lowest crime rates in Southeast Asia. While it has a reputation based on its turbulent past, it has been stable and democratic for decades, though the usual common sense rules should be applied.

### Climate

Coastal hikes are hot year-round, with temperatures in the low 30°Cs, while mountain temperatures are more comfortable in the 20°Cs. It feels hotter than this though, and hikers need to be prepared for heat and humidity. The dry season between June-November is the best time for hiking, with July and July particularly good as the landscape is still lush from the wet season.

### Terrain

Hiking is mostly on rough tracks used by locals, with some dirt road walking in places. There aren't really any managed hiking tracks in Timor-Leste like you may find in other countries. There is almost no signage either, and often a multitude of tracks make it easy to get lost without closely following a detailed route or local guide.

### Guided v Independent

Due to the many infrastructure challenges and lack of signage, independent hiking is recommended only for experienced adventurers.



adventure, the Coast2Coast trek takes 8-10 days to walk across the entire country from the capital Dili to the south coast (usually Betano), which can include Mt Maubo, Mt Ramelau, and Mt Kablaki as well as the impressive Dokomali Falls, depending on the route taken. Less than 100 people have completed this ~100km journey with over 5,000m of elevation gain and loss. A few impressive trail runners have completed it in a day!

### City walks

Almost all visitors arrive in Dili. Though often overlooked, the city offers excellent hiking opportunities, and many of the walks can be

accessed by public transport. Hills rise to 500m above crystal-clear waters, with trails offering panoramic views. The 27m tall Cristo Rei is one of the tallest statues of Jesus in the world and allows access to hiking trails through the Hera Hills. Afterward, cool down with a swim at Back Beach, which also offers great snorkelling.

Tasi Tolu, located near the airport, surrounded by hills, is home to three lakes visited by migratory birds, and provides walking opportunities for all abilities. It is where Pope Francis held mass in September 2024 to over half the population of Timor-Leste. It is the second most Catholic country in the world, behind only the Vatican City.

**Below:** Bobonaro.

**Above:** Atauro Island.



**“TIMOR-LESTE IS ONE OF THE LEAST VISITED COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD”**




Hikes in Dare, in the hills behind Dili, are through eucalyptus bush, and offer spectacular views, along with an opportunity to visit the WWII Memorial Café, which tells the history of the conflict between the Australian Sparrow Force and Japanese troops.

### Island time

A short 15-minute flight or 90-minute ferry ride from Dili lies Atauro Island, a paradise known for its diving and snorkelling. However, Atauro also offers amazing hiking, with options ranging from coastal walks to trekking across the island's mountainous spine. The summit of Manucoco (995m) is a popular challenge, though the Vila to Makili Circuit is easier and arguably more scenic, while others will enjoy walking across the island from Beloi to Adara. A full circuit of the island can be done in 3-5 days, staying in remote village homestays, with a mixture of beach and hill walking.

### Practicalities

Timor-Leste is one of the least visited countries in the world, and its infrastructure reflects this. Hikers won't find mountain huts or many campsites, and there is almost no trail signage. For all but the shortest hikes around Dili or Atauro Island, a local guide is recommended, and for multi-day treks, a support crew is essential. Access to food can be difficult outside of cities, and many roads are impassable without a 4WD vehicle.

Eco Discovery, a Timorese owned tour operator, have been welcoming visitors to Timor-Leste since 2005. They are the only locally owned company focusing on, and with extensive experience, of supporting multi-day hikes. They also provide guided tours other places of interest including Jaco Island (Timor-Leste's other island), Baucau (Timor-Leste's second city, filled with historical sites) and Balibó (where in 1975 the invading Indonesian army killed five Australian-based journalists). 

**Above left:** Back Beach behind Cristo Rei.

**Above:** Dokomali Waterfall.

**Left:** Mt Abendudatoi.

### NEED TO KNOW

For more inspiration, check out Jonty Crane's books *Exploring Timor-Leste: A comprehensive travel guide to one of the least visited countries in the world*, a travel guidebook, and *Exploring Timor-Leste on Foot: 30 Incredible Hikes in one of the least visited countries in the world*, a hiking guide, both available on Amazon, and his websites [exploringtimor.com](http://exploringtimor.com) and [jontytravels.com](http://jontytravels.com). He has been volunteering in Timor-Leste through New Zealand's Volunteer Service Abroad.



**alpine exploratory**  
WALKING HOLIDAYS IN THE ALPS,  
UK AND SCANDINAVIA

**EXPLORATION  
FLEXIBILITY  
FRIENDLINESS**

[WWW.ALPINEEXPLORATORY.COM](http://WWW.ALPINEEXPLORATORY.COM)

**Real Meals**  **TM**  
FREEZE DRIED



*We ship to Australia*

**Cooked in Nelson, New Zealand**  
[www.realmeals.co.nz](http://www.realmeals.co.nz)