

# Jakarta: Indonesia's National and Business Capital

The capital of the Republic of Indonesia, Jakarta, is a huge, sprawling metropolis, home to 9 million people. During the day the number increases with another 2 million as commuters make their way to work in the city, and flock out again in the evenings.



Located on the northern coast of Java, the province of Jakarta has rapidly expanded through the years, absorbing many villages in the process. In fact Jakarta is a conglomeration of villages known as kampungs, now crossed by main roads and highways. It is a small wonder therefore, that you may drive down one wide avenue one minute then suddenly find yourself squeezed into a small street together with scores of cars and motorbikes.

The names of these former villages can be detected from their main streets, such as Tanah Abang, Kebon Kacang, Kebon Jeruk, Kampung Melayu, and many more. Together with its many suburbs Jakarta has become a megapolitan city. Therefore, when you visit Jakarta it is best to invest in a good map, or rely on GPS.

Jakarta itself is built on a wide flat delta, intersected by no less than 13 rivers. Fronting the city in the Bay of Jakarta are a large number of tiny islands, known as the Thousand Islands or Pulau Seribu, a tourist resort for snorkeling and swimming. To its south are the majestic volcanoes of Gede and Pangrango, where mountain resorts like Bogor, Puncak, Sukabumi and Bandung can be found.

Jakarta, the capital city of a country with 240 million people, is not only the seat of the national

government and the provincial government, this city is also Indonesia's political center. Moreover, Jakarta is also the center and hub of Indonesia's national finance and trade. It is no wonder, therefore that you will find Jakarta an ever dynamic city, a city that never sleeps.

### **The Thamrin-Sudirman Avenues**

To get to know Jakarta one has to travel its main streets. At the heart of Jakarta's Central Business District is the wide Sudirman-Thamrin Avenue, with tall high rise towers on either side. Here are headquartered Indonesia's central bank, Bank Indonesia, and most major banks. Separating the Sudirman from the Thamrin road is the large central fountain that cools this roundabout, which is surrounded by the landmark buildings of Hotel Indonesia and Wisma Nusantara, the first high rise buildings in Jakarta.

Along this main boulevard are also a number of Jakarta's top hotels, such as the Hotel Indonesia Kempinski, the Grand Hyatt, the Nikko Jakarta, the Sari Pacific, the Grand Sahid Jaya, and the Meridien.

Indonesia's top shopping centers are also located here. These are the exclusive Plaza Indonesia and the Grand Indonesia. Behind these are the textile wholesale malls of Tanah Abang, while a little bit off this avenue is the Sudirman Square, where are Pacific Place and many financial buildings.

### **The Merdeka Square**

The Sudirman-Thamrin avenue leads to the Merdeka Square, where in its center stands the National Monument which houses the first red-and-white flag flown at the Proclamation of Independence on 17 August 1945. This flag has now become threadbare, and so nowadays on Independence Day ceremonies, the original flag is taken out but only to accompany the replica flag to be flown in front of the Merdeka Palace.

The 137 meter tall National Monument is an obelisk topped with a 14.5 meter bronze flame coated with 32 kilograms gold leaf. Within the pedestal is a museum depicting in diorama Indonesia's fight for Independence as well as the original text of the Proclamation of Independence. A lift takes visitors up to the look-out platform at the base of the flame for a grand view of Jakarta.

Surrounding the Monument is now a park with a musical fountain, enjoyed by the Jakarta public on Sundays for sports and recreation. Deer roam among the shady trees in the park.



Merdeka Square is the center of most important government buildings. During Dutch colonial days there was the center of government, known as Koningsplein or the King's Square.

The north side is dominated by the Merdeka Palace once the home of the Dutch Governor Generals, which now also houses the office of the President and the Cabinet. To the South is the office of Indonesia's Vice President, Jakarta's Governor and the provincial parliament building, as also the American Embassy, while to the West is the National Museum, the Constitutional Court, the Ministry for Culture and Tourism and the Indosat building, Indonesia's first international telecommunications company.

### **Lapangan Banteng**

Beyond Merdeka Square there are the principal Dutch colonial buildings constructed in neoclassical style during the 19th century, that include buildings surrounding Lapangan Banteng, or Banteng Square, namely the present day Department of Finance, the neo-gothic Catholic Cathedral and adjoining Sancta Ursula girls' school, and further down the Foreign Office and the Imanuel protestant church, facing Jakarta's main Gambir station.

Across the road to the Cathedral stands now Jakarta's largest mosque, the Istiqlal mosque. Nearby is the Concert Hall and colonial style shopping street called Pasar Baru, once the preferred haunt of the wealthy Dutch elite. In the 18th century, Dutch Batavia was famed as the "Queen of the East".



## **Old Batavia**

Behind the President's Palace is the canal which runs north pass the old Archive building to the Old Batavia, once the seat of the Dutch East Indies Company, VOC, built by Governor-General Jan Peterszoon Coen in the 17th century. Here renovations continue to preserve this historic area of the city which is dominated by the Stadhuis, or municipal building, which now houses the Jakarta History museum. In front of it is a central paved plaza, now named the Fatahillah Square, after Sultan Fatahillah, founder of this port, who, before the arrival of the Dutch razed the old harbour to the ground on 22 June 1527 and renamed it Jayakarta, City of Victory. The square is surrounded by once important Dutch government buildings that have now become museums, among which the Fine Arts Museum, the Wayang Museum, and the Museum Bank Mandiri.

Further down is the old harbor called Sunda Kelapa, in its heyday it was the thriving entrepot for the Far East trade in cloves, nutmeg and pepper, sandalwood, silks and more. Here one can still admire majestic Bugis phinisi schooners at anchor where men still carry on their backs loads of merchandise for the archipelago. A new Batavia Marina has been built near this harbor. Nearby are also the old warehouses where now stands the Maritime Museum.

Today, the former location of Batavia town proper is Jakarta's predominantly Chinese business district, but a large part of this is now modernized with full air-conditioned shopping centers and hotels.

## **Kuningan and Parliament Building**

Other important areas in Central Jakarta are the Jalan Gatot Subroto, where there are Indonesia's Parliament building, and the Jalan Rasuna Said, location of most foreign Embassies.

At the Mega Kuningan Square are located the business and financial offices, a number of Embassies,

and the luxurious Marriott Hotel and the Ritz Carlton. While across the road is the Ambassador mall, frequented by the staff of offices located at Mega Kuningan. Further along the Casablanca road is the Kuningan City under construction which will vie in design, comfort and luxury with cities like Singapore and Kuala Lumpur.

Today Jakarta continues to spread out into all directions and the metropolis now consists of interconnected self-contained clusters of residential areas, recreation and shopping centers.

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