

# Neighbour of mystery

A two day trip will get you to Australia's newest neighbour of Timor-Leste a country **Rosemary Jilderts** writes is keen to welcome cruising visitors

Land of mystery; land of secrets; an ancient land of towering cliffs and prehistoric caves that date back 35,000 years; a land of friendly locals and rich cultural history; a land of spectacular landscapes and unspoiled sand beaches; a land surrounded by turquoise waters within whose realms lies a veritable wonderland for divers; a land of promise; a land of excitement.

So, where is it – this mysterious land?

Good news, it's right on Australia's doorstep. Just a hop, skip and a jump from Darwin.

For over four centuries timor-Leste was held by various world powers until on August 30, 1999 the East Timorese decided on an independent future and on May 20, 2002 Timor-Leste became independent.

In 2010 the Timor-Leste government reinstated the Darwin-Dili Yacht Rally as an annual event. However, while tourists are trickling in, tourism director Jose Quintas doesn't want the party-crazed visitors that are attracted to other Asian destinations.

Quintas says his country is more than ready for tourists to arrive but he wants adventurers and sun-seekers. "It's not about bringing tens of thousands of visitors to Timor-Leste. In fact, the government is only looking for a small rise in the number of foreigners arriving.

"As a new destination we don't want to overdevelop our tourism. We need to learn from other countries, take it step by step".

Timor-Leste is relatively small but full of surprises.

The terrain varies from majestic mountain ranges to grassy plains, from tropical rainforests and swamps to white and black sand beaches and pristine coral reefs.

The people are shy but proud and, above all, friendly. Speak to them and be rewarded with a smile that will break down any barrier and melt any heart.

The majority of the population is of Malay-Polynesian and Papua origin with a minority of Chinese, Arabs and Europeans. About 90 per cent are Catholics, 10% Protestants and Muslims. While the main religion is Catholicism it existed alongside animism well into the 20th century creating a mix of modern with ancient. Evidence such as many distinct dialects and the presence of cave paintings and stone carvings points to the fact that people have lived there for well over 4,000 years.

The territory of Timor-Leste (previously known as Timor, Timur or East Timor) comprises the eastern half of the island of Timor; Atauro Island, north of Dili; Jaco Island on the eastern end of the island and Oecussi, an enclave on the north western side of the island in West Timor, Indonesia.

The 2010 Census showed a population of around 1,066,582 in an area of about 15,000km<sup>2</sup>. The official languages are Tetun (also spelled Tetum) and Portuguese but Bahasa Indonesia and English are commonly spoken.

High in the hills above Dili the country's much sought-after Arabica beans are produced. Grown in the shade and mostly organic (few farmers can



afford fertilisers and pesticides) Timorese coffee is popular for its cocoa and vanilla character.

Despite this resource and the slowly growing tourism industry, the country still suffers from annual 'hungry seasons' when crops fail and villagers may go hungry for several months.

### What to see

Atauro (Goat) Island lies 13.5 nautical miles north of Dili. A large population of goats and around 11,000 people live there.

The island is stunning with high cliffs plunging into the sea; protected bays; beautiful beaches; spectacular diving and snorkelling. The waters surrounding the island are rich in marine life, extensive fringe reefs and steep drop-offs. Perfect cruising grounds for large pelagic species.

Hundreds of friendly dolphins and graceful whales pass through the 3000 metre deep channel between the mainland and Atauro Island in late October and early November.

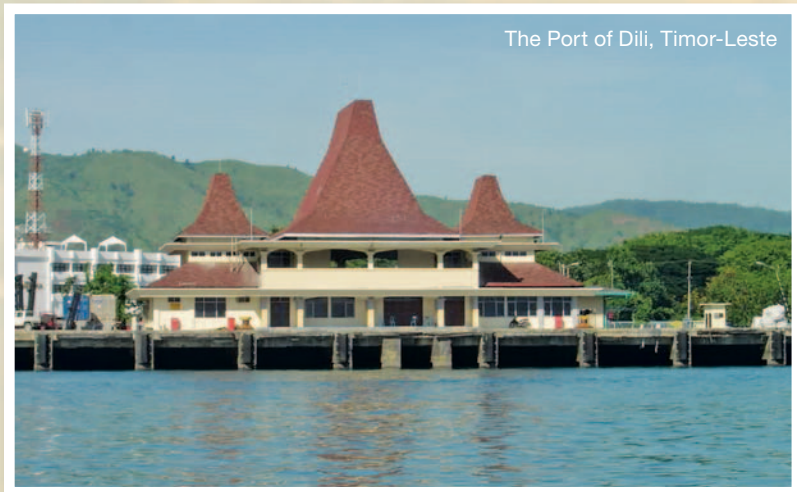
Compass Charters who run an ecocamp and dive tours, maintain that the western coast of Atauro Island has incredible undiscovered dive spots that rival any in Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia.

Jaco Island is very popular and can become overcrowded on week-ends. It's part of the famed Coral Triangle: an underwater area with the greatest diversity of corals and coral reef fish. It is protected by the Nino Konis Santana National Park.

Jaco is considered a sacred site by the locals with no permanent structures and camping prohibited. There are a few simple thatched-roof guesthouses on the shore across from the island but some visitors pitch tents on the beach. They all wait for a friendly fisherman to take them across to Jaco by canoe.

### Leaving Darwin

Clearing out of Darwin is generally casual as the authorities understand yachts like to leave on an ebbing tide.



The Port of Dili, Timor-Leste

If you are competing in the Darwin-Dili Yacht Rally, it will of course dictate date and time of departure. But if heading off on your own accord you can afford to wait for the right weather to make the 425 nautical mile run to Dili.

Once out of the harbour, it's a north-west course across the Beagle Gulf until the SW corner of Bathurst Island has been cleared to starboard before taking a more northerly course towards the eastern end of Timor-Leste.

The unmistakable scent of sandalwood is usually noticed about 20 miles off.

On the 2013 rally the yachts took between 52 and 61 hours to complete the trip but, if you're cruising, pick your weather and enjoy the sail.

A cruising guide is currently being developed and will be available on the Sail Timor-Leste Web site hopefully soon: <http://www.sailtimorleste.org>

### Entering Timor-Leste

To enter the country by boat, cruising permits and visas are required.

These can be obtained by emailing Sail Timor-Leste ([mail@sailtimorleste.org](mailto:mail@sailtimorleste.org)) or by phoning Kiki Varela (670 772251289).



The few restrictions include the usual ban on dumping garbage overboard.

Lots of small wooden fishing boats ply the waters of Timor-Leste so keep an eagle eye out for them.

To cruise the area recommended charts are Aus 313, Aus 4721, Aus 901 and Aus 26.

Dili is the capital of Timor-Leste and official entry/exit port for yachts visiting the country. Dili is a busy working port with large cargo vessels anchored outside, so extreme care should be taken when approaching and traversing Timor and especially when approaching the harbour.

Prior to entering the harbour, radio Dili Harbour master on VHF Ch16 to advise of your impending arrival. Don't worry if there's no answer as they may be too busy or not understand English well.

Enter between the designated port and starboard channel markers to avoid the fringing drying reefs that surround Dili Harbour.

Boats must then proceed to the port side of the main wharf and the yacht anchorage located at approximately 8°33.10'S and 125°34.5'E. Beware of a small reef in the centre of the yacht anchorage area.

After entering the harbour you will notice two yellow quarantine buoys to port. These are not to be used by vessels as they shifted during heavy weather and now sit on top of a reef.

#### Dili Bay moorings

20-25 permanent moorings are located in Dili Bay. These may be used by visiting yachts if they aren't being used by Darwin-Dili Rally yachts. Some fees may apply.

These moorings were installed in 2012 and were inspected and refurbished prior to the 2013 rally. As with all moorings there is no guarantee of their fitness for purpose so yachts using them do so at their own risk.

#### Visas on arrival

Foreigners wishing to enter Timor-Leste on a temporary visa must have a valid national passport with an expiry date not less than six months from the date of entry into Timor-Leste and with at least two spare pages.

Charges are reasonable at US\$100 for full clearance of vessel (health, quarantine, customs and port); immigration entry visa is US\$30 per person and a three-month cruising permit is US\$50.

On arrival, each crewmember will be issued with a 30 day visa that can be extended for a further 30 days + 30 days (i.e. 60 days in total) for a further payment of US\$30 per 30 day extension. The total cost of a visa for a 90 day stay is US\$100.

There's an anomaly here which has been brought to the attention of the people in Timor-Leste. However, I'm assured these figures are correct. There's a small administrative charge associated with the extension after the first 30.

Further information regarding visa regulations can be found on the Timor-Leste Immigration Department website: [www.migracao.gov.tl](http://www.migracao.gov.tl).

## USEFUL CONTACTS

The Australian Embassy  
Avenida dos Mártires da Patria  
Dili  
E-mail: [austemb\\_dili@dfat.gov.au](mailto:austemb_dili@dfat.gov.au)  
Phone: (670) 332 2111  
Fax: (670) 332 2247

### EMERGENCY

Fire: (670) 723 0686  
Police: (670) 723 0686  
Ambulance: (670) 723 3212

### BANKS

There are three banks in Dili all with ATM services available for Visa, Maestro and Cirrus.

- Banco Nazionale Ultramarine (BNU)  
Tel: (670) 3324 301
- ANZ Tel: (670) 3324 800; Fax: (670) 3324 822; E-mail: [etimor@anz.com](mailto:etimor@anz.com)
- Bank Mandiri Tel: (670) 3317 777; E-mail: [dilibranch@mail.timortelecom.tp](mailto:dilibranch@mail.timortelecom.tp)



### Inwards clearance

To clear into Timor-Leste the following papers must be produced: yacht registration certificate; a crew list, all passports and visa fees; port clearance from the last port of call.

After anchoring, the procedure is as follows:

Between 0900 and 1600 hours, captain and crew should come ashore and report to the Sail Timor HQ on the foreshore of Dili Bay. If the Sail Timor HQ is closed, you must report to the Maritime Police next door to Sail Timor HQ.

Sail Timor staff will provide all documentation you need. A fee of US\$50 plus visa costs must be paid if you wish Sail Timor staff to process your inward clearances. If you wish to do your own processing they will provide you with a mud map of the port area showing the location of all the offices.

If the Sail Timor office is unattended follow directions by the Maritime Police, which will usually be to go to the Dili Port Authority for Inwards Customs, Immigration, Quarantine, Health and Port clearance. All CIQP officials have offices at the Dili Port Authority.

Customs and quarantine officials will interview the captain and decide whether they will make an inspection of the vessel.

On completion of inwards clearance, you will be provided with: a clearance form stamped by Customs and Quarantine; formal receipt for visa fees and a visa stamped in each passport.

A crewmember must then return to your yacht and take down the 'Q' flag and hoist the courtesy flag if you had to purchase it in Dili.

For any assistance required, call Kym-Louise Miller on (670) 77230967.

### Outwards clearance

Sail Timor staff can arrange outward clearance for a fee of US\$35. Please advise Sail Timor staff one day in advance.

If you wish to do your own clearances the captain and all crew should collect documents required from Sail Timor HQ and after completion proceed to the Dili Port Authority with all passports for outward processing. An outward crew list should also be provided.

You will be processed through Immigration and Customs and provided with a port clearance from Dili which will be needed at your next port of entry.

You will also receive a sailing authorisation for Timor-Leste waters. This allows yachts (which have already cleared from Timor-Leste) to visit all waters and ports of Timor-Leste including Atauro Island and the enclave of Oecusse.

The Port Authority/Harbour Master will issue sailing authorisations as yachts clear from Dili (and Timor-Leste). Sailing authorisations are valid for a maximum stay of three months in Timor-Leste provided all crew have valid visa extensions for the period of the authorisation.

Yachts travelling to Indonesia are welcome to stop over at the Timor-Leste enclave, Oecusse, (also known as Pante Makassar) which is located on the north coast of West Timor (approximate coordinates 09°10'S 124°20'E) and approximately 90nm from both Dili and Kupang. Oecusse will be automatically included on your Timor-Leste sailing authorisation so there is no need to decide about this destination in advance.

The anchorage is located directly in front of the Maritime Police Offices, which oversees security. Dinghies should be beached as close as possible to Maritime Police offices.

### Quarantine and other restrictions

Please don't bring any organic materials ashore for disposal or otherwise, as this will infringe Timor-Leste's quarantine regulations and protocols.

Duty free alcohol and other goods are permitted as ships stores.

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Areia branca beach near Dili; Aerial view of Dili; The Darwin-Dili Rally sees yachts leaving Darwin every year for the race to Timor-Leste; Playful dolphins around Atauro Island.



Suvida beheda, East Timor: beautiful beach.

However, like every other country in the world, you are not permitted to bring these goods ashore except as the individual duty-free allowance of crew members where the limit is strictly two litres of alcohol and one carton of cigarettes per person.

Guns, firearms and ammunition are strictly prohibited imports into Timor-Leste. Do not carry guns aboard your vessel.

Dress standards are important in Timor-Leste. Smart casual clothes are ideal especially when dealing with officials.

USD is the only currency accepted in Timor-Leste but notes must be newer than the year 2000. Few businesses accept credit cards so before leaving ask your bank if your credit and ATM cards will work there.

### Climate

Two clear seasons: the wet is November to May where temperatures are the highest; the dry season is June to October.

May to July is the best time of year to visit when the dry season is just commencing and temperatures are mild.

Temperatures vary throughout the country between 15° in the mountains and 30° on the northern and eastern coasts.

### Food and drink

Only drink bottled water, avoid ice and wipe off any water that has accumulated on the tops of drink cans before drinking from them.

If salads have been washed with tap water, avoid them. Fruit should be peeled and be wary of noncooked foods.

Antibiotics and some other pharmaceuticals can be found in Dili but hard elsewhere.

### Health and safety

Animals are usually not vaccinated so avoid contact with them as they can transmit diseases. Use insect repellent especially at dawn and dusk and use a mosquito net when sleeping.

Criminal rates are very low in Dili and virtually non-existent elsewhere but it's smart not to wear jewellery or carry other valuables.

Theft mainly occurs from cars with mobile phones a prime target.

Wandering alone on the beach at night isn't a good idea and women travelling alone should take particular care.

While traffic isn't heavy in Timor-Leste, getting around by car can be difficult as vehicles and roads are generally in poor condition.

### Culture

Public displays of affection or anger are not acceptable. It's considered rude and insulting to the person being addressed.

It's taboo for unmarried couples to kiss or hug each other publicly. The most common form of greeting is the handshake but, while men shake hands when meeting a woman from a foreign culture, they rarely do when greeting a Timorese woman.

When visiting remote islands or villages, basic protocols and respect for local customs and people should be adopted.

It is polite to wait until your host invites you to sit down, or to eat and drink.

### Acknowledgement

Today, Timor-Leste is a country that's already taken its first steps of freedom, peace, safety and true democracy. The country is quickly gaining a reputation of being one of the safest, if not the safest, destination in S.E. Asia.

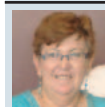
Combined with its rich and diverse community, distinct historical influences and the warm and friendly welcome that locals and the government offers tourists it's not hard to see why yachts are starting to arrive and why visitors are shouting the praises of this exciting new country.

So whether you plan on joining the Darwin-Dili rally or you wish to just wander across the Timor Sea and start exploring on your own, this land is just waiting to be discovered ... by you!

With thanks to: Timor-Leste Ministry of Tourism; Sail Timor-Leste, Darwin; Compass Charters, Dili; Tour de Timor.



### cruisinghelmsman Rosemary Jilderts



Rosemary and husband John began exploring the Queensland coast in 1984 as full-time liveaboards. Their love affair with S.E. Asia began in 1999 when they made their first trip into Indonesia.