

Bali, Indonesia

Dili, Timor-Leste

Maubisse

SOUTH EAST ASIA



Head For The Hills

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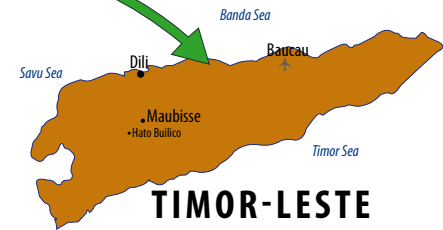


The setting sun illuminates the road which winds its way out of Maubisse. The road, which snakes through Timor-Leste's mountain areas, is a main north-south passage for the country.



A traditional three-pronged wooden totem doubles as a Christian cross outside a Portuguese-built Catholic church

Graham Bond



Lying in a basin 1,840m above sea level, Maubisse was once a playground to Portuguese colonialists wanting to escape the heat. Now, it represents one of the greatest hopes for Timor-Leste's still-fledgling tourism industry. From its Acropolis-like location atop a steep hill at the centre of town, the Pousada de Maubisse – a colonial-era villa-turned-guesthouse – offers a remarkable 360-degree panorama. The view takes in the sweep of fertile fields and valleys where locals reap the fruits of the land to both earn a living and build their homes.

The Pousada also represents a comfortable base from which to hike out along some of the region's most spectacular and least trampled pathways. Because Timor-Leste has been largely untouched by man's quest for natural resources, and thanks to its geographical position on the cusp of Australia, the bird, animal and plant life will delight – and likely challenge – even the most experienced of naturalists.

The drive into town takes visitors past another striking colonial relic. At the Maubisse Church, there is evidence of the way traditional animist beliefs have been meshed with, rather than usurped by, devout Catholicism. Standing before the entrance is a three-pointed wooden totem. It is the same symbol that is traditionally used at ancestor-worship ceremonies, but here it acts as a Christian cross.

Down in the valley basin, the wind gently sighs in the trees. By night, locals say the noise sounds like the *Rai Na'in* – the earth "spirit" or "owner" – talking. Whether it's in the rich blue firmament, the starry night sky or the haunting sound of spiritual chatter, the gods do somehow seem that much closer in this beautiful, bewitching land. **AGEO**



Highlighted by the rising sun, an early morning mist rests on the valley floor near the mountain town of Maubisse



Holding their roosters apart, men in Maubisse prepare for the start of a cockfight, a common pastime for Timorese men



HOW TO GET THERE

Indonesian carrier Merpati has daily flights from Denpasar, Bali, to Dili. Australia's Air North makes the journey from Darwin. Note that both airlines tend to change their schedules at short notice. From Dili, Timorese-owned tour company, Eco Discovery (www.ecodiscovery-easttimor.com), can organise tours to Maubisse.



ACCOMMODATION

The Pousada de Maubisse has eight rooms, two of which are located in the main house, the former residency of the Portuguese Governor. When busy, bed and breakfast costs up to US\$40, though rates are negotiable and go as low as US\$17 in the low season.



ATTRACTIONS

Hiking. About 10km south of Maubisse, a road turns off west to the village of Hato Bullico. This village is the base for climbing the 2,963m Mount Ramelau, Timor-Leste's highest peak.



CURRENCY

The official currency is the US Dollar. Credit cards are accepted only in certain places in Dili.



FOOD

Maubisse's *pousada* offers both Portuguese and local cuisine. Cheaper and simpler rice-based dishes are available in town. Dili has a selection of restaurants offering Chinese, Japanese and western food.