

INDONESIA

# Labuan Bajo

Cultural Cities Profile  
East Asia



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Tom Fering / creative consultancy

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**Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy** is the leading international consultancy for culture and the creative economy. We offer research, strategy and policy leadership across the creative, cultural and arts sectors. We offer technical expertise, strategic thinking and the tools to position creativity to the heart of society. With offices in London and Porto and associates in 12 countries, we are an international agency operating in every region. <http://tfconsultancy.co.uk/>

**Indonesia Creative Cities Network (ICCN)** is a hub organisation for cross-communities forum, connecting 200+ cities/regencies from all over Indonesia that are committed to implement the 10 Principles of Indonesia Creative Cities that was declared in 2015. ICCN published the White Book of Indonesia Creative Cities (2017) that adapts the 10 Principles to the Indonesian government's KPI, and is developing a dashboard of Creative Cities Index as a tool for local governments to make policies/ regulations based on the real time creative economy data of their respective regions. <https://iccn.or.id/>

**Centre for Innovation Policy and Governance (CIPG)** is a research-based advisory group which aspires to excel in the area of innovation, policy and governance. Considered to be among the first research-based advisory groups, CIPG grows to be an open-minded and multicultural think tank with keen interest in building Indonesian research capacities across many sectors. <https://cipg.or.id/en/>

**Tanahindie** was established in 1999, composed of personnel from various backgrounds (researchers, authors, advocates, craftspeople, lecturers, students, social workers, and housewives). Exploring urban social development from the perspective of arts and culture, the organisation's activities include research, seminars, exhibitions, reviews, and publication. <https://tanahindie.org/>

# Introducing Labuan Bajo

With a population of just 6915, Labuan Bajo is a small fishing town located on the island of Flores, within the Komodo archipelago of 264 islands. The islands, known as Komodo District, are a part of East Nusa Tenggara Province, a larger group of islands extending eastwards from Bali towards Timor.

Labuan Bajo is also the district capital and gateway to Komodo National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserve, and home to the world-famous Komodo Dragon, the world's largest lizard, as well as the Batu Cermin limestone caves.

The UNESCO designation, made in 1986, had a significant impact on the developmental direction of the town. Originally dominated by traditional maritime industries and local port trade, Labuan Bajo is now also home to international resort hotels and a tourism industry focusing on ecological and cultural activities. However, most of the town's economic and cultural activities, including for fishing and port trade, remain concentrated in the old city area<sup>1</sup>, along the coast of Bajo Bay.

## Komodo National Park

Photo © jakpost.net



<sup>1</sup> Laporan Antara Kementerian Pekerjaan Umum Direktorat Jenderal Cipta Karya Tahun Anggaran 2012, penyusunan Rencana Tata Bangunan dan Lingkungan Kawasan Pusat Kota - Labuan Bajo Kab. Manggarai Barat- Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Timur.



## Regional economics and the '3T' group

Labuan Bajo is included in the "3T" (Terdepan, Terluar, Tertinggal, or 'frontier, outermost and least developed') regions of Indonesia. In developmental terms, national strategies for 3T regions prioritise community empowerment through the strengthening of local economic activities.

In the case of Labuan Bajo, the focus is on its international tourism profile, its ecological status, and its government designation as one of Indonesia's five 'Super Priority Destinations'.

Labuan Bajo is also being prepared to host the G20 Summit in 2022 and the ASEAN Summit in 2023.

## Labuan Bajo's cultural infrastructure

Named as one of Indonesia's five Super Priority Destinations by BEKRAF, the national Tourism and Creative Economy Agency, Labuan Bajo has a strategic position as the main route to Komodo National Park and associated tourist areas. This condition has led to the growth of the tourism sector, especially in terms of services, shops and hotels.

Based on the town's cultural profile and environmental attributes, the stated civic vision for Labuan Bajo is "Creating prosperity for West Manggarai people through tourism development based on community, ecotourism, and cultural uniqueness." The main strategy is to optimise the strength of local cultural and commercial capacity, in order to ensure the sustainability of this development.

Managing this process in the context of the region's growing profile for international tourism has required direct investment in civic infrastructure.

In order to balance the process of increased tourism against the needs of cultural and environmental preservation, in 2018, the Labuan Bajo Flores Authority Implementing Agency (Badan Otorita Pariwisata / BOPLBF) was formed as unit under the Ministry of Tourism, with the task of planning, coordinating and managing the development of tourism in Labuan Bajo and the Flores area.

In addition to overseeing strategic planning and promotion, BOPLBF initiatives have also included a series of training workshops for local creative and tourist enterprises; cultural awareness education programmes for local schools; and the 2020 Labuan Bajo Creative Economy Meeting Point, an expo that brought together local and regional tourism, retail and creative industries actors with community representatives from across Labuan Bajo and Flores.

Labuan Bajo port







**The strength of premium tourism lies in the communities and society. So far, we are too focused on Komodo, while other potential areas and objects to be developed are actually in abundance.**

**Shana Fatina,**  
President Director of Labuan Bajo  
Flores Authority Implementing  
Agency (BOPLBF)<sup>2</sup>

A range of further initiatives involving other stakeholder bodies have also contributed to the development of Labuan Bajo's cultural infrastructure, seeking to engage local creative actors and communities in a number of national projects and programmes.

## Selected Case Studies

### **BISA Movement 2020<sup>3</sup>**

Following the impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic on tourism, the reopening of Komodo National Park for national tourists in August 2020 helped resurrect the local economy. However, the national BISA Movement, practiced in tourism villages all over Indonesia, helped put in place strict health protocols as part of a move towards sustainable tourism and social environmental responsibility.

Conducted in Komodo by BOPLBF, BISA (Bersih, Indah, Sehat, Aman, or 'Clean, Beautiful, Healthy, Safe') is also an effort to help West Manggarai people adapt to the "new normal" of post pandemic lifestyles.

### **Sekapur Sirih 2020<sup>4</sup>**

Sekapur Sirih is a pre-event of the Makassar Biennale 2021. Held by Makassar Biennale Foundation, together with Tanahindie and Goethe Institut, Labuan Bajo was included as one of the five main communities (along with Makassar, Parepare and Bulukumba in South Sulawesi, and Nabire in Papua) for research, writing and concept development on the sub-theme "Sekapur Sirih". Sekapur Sirih, a term for the habit of chewing betel nut, generally refers to hospitality purposes towards guests and traditional culture in Nusantara, and also represents those healing traditions that nature provides for humans.

### **AKSILIRASI 2020<sup>5</sup>**

AKSILIRASI 2020 is a programme led by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy that seeks to connect academic, urban and digital creative actors with creative actors in rural destinations with strong cultural traditions and communal attributes. AKSILIRASI 2020 was held in four national locations: Labuan Bajo, plus Mandalika (Lombok), Toba Lake (North Sumatera), and Likupang (North Sulawesi).

- The first incubation programme in Labuan Bajo was held in November 2020, with the theme "Maintaining Memories, Celebrating Culture". It will subsequently take place annually over the next five years, involving 195 artists and participants from Labuan Bajo and other communities from across Flores. In addition to developing cultural practice, this initiative also aims to co-create creative products that will contribute to a sustainable cultural economy, with a particular focus on music, publishing, fine arts, and performing arts.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Tanahindie.

<sup>3</sup> <https://labuanbajoflores.id/boplbf/news/boplbf-gelar-gerakan-bisa-di-desa-wisata-ulu-loga-respons-adaptasi-kebiasaan-baru-pariwisata>

<sup>4</sup> <https://artefact.id/2020/09/09/writing-and-research-workshop-sekapur-sirih-in-five-cities/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://pedulicovid19.kememparekraf.go.id/siaran-pers-kememparekraf-gelar-uji-publik-program-aksilirasi-di-labuan-bajo-ntt/>



**We hope that the AKSILIRASI program can bring a positive impact to the sub-sectors of music, performing arts, visual art, and publishing for Labuan Bajo people in particular, as well as strengthening the identity of West Manggarai and Flores in general.**

**Muhammad Neil El Hilman,**  
Deputy of Digital Economy and Creative Economy, Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Interview by Tanahindie

## Empowering creative communities



**The formation of young creative communities in Labuan Bajo would raise the bargaining value of the local medium and small enterprises**

**Fiki Satari,**  
Special Advisor for creative economy empowerment.



### **Baku Peduli Rumah Tenun (Weaving House)<sup>7</sup>**

The Baku Peduli ikat weaving house is a workshop, museum and gallery initiated in 2018 by Sunspirit for Justice and Peace<sup>8</sup>, a community-based social development group in Labuan Bajo. Working as a community-run centre for cultural conservation, community empowerment and engaged tourism, the Weaving House hosts training workshops, exhibitions and information about traditional woven motifs, weaving processes, and natural dyes. It also acts as an outlet for local produce including Flores coffee, organic rice, local souvenirs and handicrafts, as well as a library of research and publications on Flores and Bajo culture.

### **Puncak Waringin Creative Hub<sup>9</sup>**

Following the Indonesian government's designation of Labuan Bajo as a National Strategic Tourism Area, since March 2020 the Ministry of Public Works and Housing has been facilitating the development of the Puncak Waringin Creative Hub. When complete, Puncak Waringin Creative Hub will act as a centre for research and development for creative economy actors in West Manggarai Regency. It will also act as a studio, workshop, gallery and performance space, a weaving house, and as a retail outlet for creative SME products, textiles and crafts.

### **Baku Penduli**

Photo © lh3.googleusercontent.com

## Cultural Institutions and creative hubs

Labuan Bajo has a small but emerging network of cultural institutions and creative hubs, often closely linked with building a sustainable approach to tourism.



<sup>7</sup> <http://rumahtenunbakupeduli.org>

<sup>8</sup> <https://sunspiritforjusticeandpeace.org/2018/06/27/rumah-tenun-baku-peduli-2/760/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.propertyinside.id/2020/01/21/puncak-waringin-creative-hub-di-labuan-bajo/>



**Dibawakolong<sup>10</sup>**

Dibawakolong is a collective office and co-working space for various creative communities and SMEs. At their shared “space to grow”, Dibawakolong provides exhibition space, a multimedia hub, a photo studio and a home recording facility. It holds networking and development events, discussion sessions, movie screenings, exhibitions, workshops and classes. Member enterprises are associated largely with cultural tourism in Labuan Bajo and Komodo National Park, and include: @pesiarlagi, @labuanbajotrip, @tourtokomodo (touring services); @rekammoment (photo and video services), @citrarasa (cuisine, cooking classes and food delivery), @adarental\_ (rental and repair services), @thelumis (graphic design, printing and digital publishing), and @bajobaby (baby spa/massage and homecare).

**Flores Human Orchestra<sup>11</sup>**

Flores Human Orchestra (FHO) is a musical and performance community based in Labuan Bajo. Focusing on the creation, preservation and performance of indigenous music and dance from Flores, they provide a hub for traditional and contemporary musicians from Flores, and play a key role in training, education and awareness-raising on Bajo musical traditions.

**Lontart Gallery<sup>12</sup>**

Lontart Gallery is a commercial art gallery, cafe and exhibition space founded by Mart Sakeus, located in Nggorang around 7 km from Labuan Bajo.

**Flores Muda<sup>13</sup>**

Flores Muda is an online magazine and digital media community focssing on cultural and creative activities in Labuan Bajo and Flores. Working with local schools and colleges, the magazine’s editorial board also works to establish school-level communities on journalism, literary and arts criticism and social analysis, and encourages the submission of articles, essays and creative writing for online publication.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/dibawakolong/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/fho.official/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/Lontartgallery>

<sup>13</sup> <https://floresmuda.com/>



**Caci Warrior Dance at Cecer Village, Labuan Bajo, Flores, East Nusa Tenggara**

Photo © Shutterstock / Dwi Prayoga

## Festivals and events

Many festivals and events in Labuan Bajo are directly associated with the promotion of tourism or the development of the local creative and tourist economies. However, they also maintain a strong association with the presentation and preservation of a broad range of cultural traditions and art forms.

### Komodo Festival<sup>14</sup>

Komodo Festival is an annual event held between Feb and March to promote tourism and support the creative economy and local cultural and creative entrepreneurs. Activities include a culinary bazaar, artistic performances and cultural attractions, film screenings, dance events, boat decoration and canoeing competitions, and the Komodo Statue Parade. Due to the pandemic, the Department of Tourism and Creative Economy of NTT Province had to postpone this and two other regional events (the Sarong Festival in Kupang, and the Pasola Festival in West Sumba).

### Festival Florata<sup>15</sup>

The Flores and Lembata (Florata) Arts and Culture Festival is held annually in rotation in the two districts. In 2019, Flores and Lembata Traditional Arts and Culture Festival was held in Labuan Bajo. This festival is a stage for artistic and cultural creations from across the nine districts of the Flores and Lembata mainlands. This festival also aims to promote district culture and tourism.

### Floratama Forum<sup>16</sup>

The Floratama Forum is a multi-stakeholder event focussing on tourism development for the region, which brings together academics, businesses, communities, government and media, with an aim to build active coordination and strategic collaboration across all the 11 districts.

## Movers and Shakers – a sample

### Ivan Nestorman<sup>17</sup>

Ivan Nestorman is a neo-traditional musician from Labuan Bajo, known for combining traditional Florean music and song with popular culture and jazz traditions. Founder of the Flores Human Orchestra, he has also won several Indonesia Music Academy (AMI) Awards. He is currently a consultant for the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy in Labuan Bajo on their 5-year music sub-sector accreditation programme.

### Susanto Werry<sup>18</sup>

Werry Tan is an innovative local product entrepreneur and founder of LaBajo Flores Coffee. A former Director of Tourism Marketing at BOPLBF, he also created a smartphone-based Labuan Bajo tourist information application. Working with other local business actors, in 2020 he established the West Manggarai Association of Business Group Unitas (Akunitas) and is the main director of Bidadari Regional Public Company (Perumda), whose business activities include construction services, tourism industries, general trade and product markets.

### Michael Irawan Wahyu Agung<sup>19</sup>

Originally from Salatiga in Central Java, chef Michael has lived in Labuan Bajo since 2016. After four years of researching and studying West Manggarai culinary culture<sup>20</sup> he has written a West Manggarai recipe book. This book, containing traditional dishes such as nasi kolo, ute lomak, ute posok, tibu ikang, tibu manuk, manuk butuk, ikan butung, latung bombo, rumpu rampe, and many more, was published in 2018, in collaboration with West Manggarai Department of Tourism and Culture, and the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy.

<sup>14</sup> <https://beritagar.id/artikel/piknik/festival-komodo-pesta-besar-kabupaten-manggarai-barat>

<sup>15</sup> <https://pariwisata.manggarai.go.id/festival-seni-dan-budaya-flores-lembata-florata-di-labuan-bajo-30-juli-sd-02-agustus-2019/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://labuanbajoflores.id/boplbf/news/boblbf-gelar-rakor-dihadiri-gubernur-dan-11-bupati-di-forum-floratama>

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/ivan\\_nestorman/](https://www.instagram.com/ivan_nestorman/)

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/werrytan/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/mikhaelwhy/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://nationalgeographic.grid.id/read/132337055/chef-michael-gastronomi-labuan-bajo-adalah-pertemuan-bangsa-bangsa>

**Elizabeth Yanni<sup>21</sup>**

Elizabeth Yanni is founder of Komunitas Dapur Tara, a creative community and restaurant enterprise<sup>22</sup> working with local farmers and producers to reintroduce speciality mountain foods. Based in Labuan Bajo, the community and their suppliers use natural organic processes and packaging to build local-based, natural and creative cuisine from gardens and forests.

**Henny Dinan<sup>23</sup>**

Henny, or Ney, Dinan is a weaver, textile maker and social activist from Labuan Bajo. She is the curator of the Rumah Tenun Baku Peduli Weaving House, and researcher and writer for the Sunspirit for Justice and Peace social and cultural activist group.

**Mart Sakeus<sup>24</sup>**

Mart Sakeus is an artist and educator from Nggorang, just outside Labuan Bajo. A graduate of the Indonesian Art Institute, Yogyakarta, he is founder and manager of Lontart Gallery. He also runs craft-making and training sessions at local elementary and high schools in Flores.

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/dapur.tara.flores/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.dapurtara.com>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/ney.dinan/> / <https://www.instagram.com/neydinan/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100008256212187>

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