

Frequently Asked Questions

We recommend PRINTING OUT this document and carrying it with you for easy reference.

NOTE: Singapore has aligned its time zones with Hong Kong and Perth meaning that Singapore is one hour **AHEAD** of Batam which is in the same time zone as Jakarta.

GETTING THERE – What's the best way to travel to Batam?

BEING LESS than an hour from Singapore makes Batam very accessible from just about anywhere in the world. Singapore's Changi Airport is the major regional hub for South East Asia and is one of the most convenient and efficient airports in the world.

From Changi take a taxi to the Harbour Front Ferry Terminal (about 20 minutes, taxis metered, cost about \$SGD20 or about \$US14 - note that a surcharge applies for taxis in Singapore between 12 midnight and 6am).

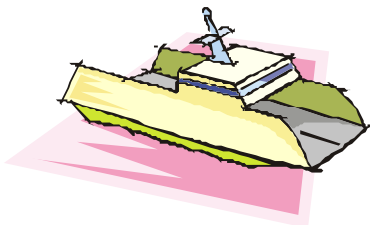
Enter from the Harbour Front taxi drop-off, turn right and walk through the shopping centre (you will pass McDonalds on your left) until you reach the SECOND escalator to the upper floors. There will be money changers and Cruise Centre desks to your right and a Cocoa Trees chocolates outlet and the Xin Food Court to your left.

Take the escalator up one floor, turn left at the hawker stands and then left again (past MJG Bags and the Fruition outlet). Then turn left yet again up a short escalator to the ticketing desks for the Wavemaster (Berlian), Penguin or Batam Fast Ferry Services (all good). Buy a return ticket (about \$SGD48 including taxes and charges and a fuel price levy). Wavemaster (Berlian) to Harbour Bay and Penguin to Batam Centre offer the highest service frequencies.

If you are planning to stay in a Nagoya Hotel or spend most of your time in and around the main business and entertainment district it is **STRONGLY RECOMMENDED** that you take a Wavemaster ferry to HARBOUR BAY.

This newest Batam terminal opened late in 2006. It is less crowded and very efficient with excellent facilities, including a Visa on Arrivals desk. More importantly it is located at Batu Ampar right next door to the main commercial centre of Jodoh/Nagoya - just down the road from the Pacific Palace and Planet Holiday hotels.

The ferry journey to Harbour Bay is faster and you will save another 20 minutes or so on ground transport at the Batam end. There are services to



HARBOUR BAY from Singapore about every hour from 7.55am until 9.45pm and from Batam to Singapore from 6.45am until 9.30pm (all local times).

*The current Wavemaster ferry timetable is available as a link from www.smilinghill.net (Go to **Visit Smiling Hill** and select Travelling to Batam from the pagetable of contents).*

You must purchase a ticket at the Harbour Front ferry terminal in Singapore a minimum of 30 minutes before the departure time (this is strictly enforced at the ticketing desks).

The Singapore ticketing desk will give you a computer generated partially-completed Indonesian Immigration Entry Card along with your boarding pass and return ticket.

After purchasing your ticket you can book through your luggage to Batam at the desk one floor down on the second floor near the departure gate. You are entitled to check 20 kilos of luggage per passenger free. Excess luggage will be charged.

Proceed through security and immigration and take the escalator down to the departure hall where there is plenty of seating and a duty free shop. While waiting for your ferry boarding call complete your Indonesian Immigration Entry Card.

The ferry crossing to Harbour Bay takes about 50 minutes to Harbour Bay while the crossing to Batam Centre takes about 70 minutes. After clearing Immigration at your destination terminal take a Port Taxi to your hotel (about FIVE minutes from Harbour Bay and 20 to 25 minutes from Batam Centre to Nagoya, the main hotel, business and entertainment district).

Taxi desks are located just outside the exit doors as you walk out of the arrivals halls. The Port taxis are air conditioned and clean and the drivers are usually courteous and helpful. Standard fares are charged to city locations – inquire at the taxi desk.

It is a good idea to have some Singapore or US dollars to cover Visa on Arrival costs (see below). Money changers and ATMs are available at the Batam Centre and Harbour Bay ferry terminals to obtain Indonesian rupiah. You will need rupiah to pay taxi fares.

With regular ferry services from Singapore to Batam from around 7.30am until 9.45pm it is possible to make same-day ferry crossings from flights arriving at Changi up to around 8pm (Singapore time). Later arrivals will require an overnight stay in Singapore before making the ferry crossing next day.

Likewise if you are planning to take an early flight out of Changi (before about 11am Singapore time) you will again need to overnight in Singapore.

The first ferry out of Batam is at 6.05am local time from Batam Centre or 6.45am from Harbour Bay (with Singapore an hour ahead that means departures at 7.05am or 7.45am Singapore time). Travel time, immigration clearances at Harbour Front Ferry Terminal in Singapore and a taxi to the airport will require up to two hours.

You will notice at Harbour Front in Singapore that there also are ferry services to SEKUPANG and WATERFRONT CITY in Batam. Unless you have a specific reason for going there, DO NOT take a ferry to Sekupang or Waterfront City – these are locations well away from the main town centres.

ARRIVAL TIMES –
What time do I need
to be in Singapore for
a suitable ferry con-

ALLOWING FOR possible delays in Singapore immigration and baggage handling or late flight arrivals you should be scheduled to arrive at Changi Airport before about 8pm to be sure of comfortably making a same-day ferry connection.

With early morning or late night arrivals you will need to wait until the first morning ferry. This may mean an overnight stay in Singapore.

Likewise for departures. The first ferry out of Batam is at 6.05am local time from Batam Centre or 6.45am from Harbour Bay (that's **7.05am or 7.45am** Singapore time). With travel time, the time-zone difference, immigration clearances at Harbour Front Ferry Terminal in Singapore and taxi to the airport, this means that if you are planning to take an early flight out of Changi (before about 11am Singapore time) you will again need to overnight in Singapore. Best if you book an afternoon or evening departure flight if possible.

PASSPORT & VISA –

What are the entry requirements – do I need a passport and Visa?

YOU NEED a passport valid for at LEAST SIX MONTHS from your date of entry. Travellers from MOST Western countries can obtain a single entry Visa on Arrival for 30 days (\$US25) or seven days (\$US10). There are exceptions where a Visa must be obtained through an Indonesian Embassy or Consulate prior to travel – check with your travel agent or nearest Indonesian Embassy or consult the information provided in the *Visit Batam* pages of the Smiling Hill website.

NOTE: The seven-day Visa actually entitles you to a stay of only SIX nights! And the 30-day visa to 29 nights.

If purchasing a Visa on Arrival try to ensure you have US currency or Singapore dollars.. Rupiah are not accepted.

Visitors from ASEAN countries which have reciprocal arrangements with Indonesia are issued a FREE 30-day tourist Visa on arrival.

You may be asked to show you have a return ticket to your country of embarkation (Singapore), though this is very unlikely.

ELECTRICITY – What is the electricity voltage in Indonesia? Do I need to bring an adaptor or transformer?

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The electricity supply in Batam is 240 volts with bulky three-pin power plugs in the British style. You will need a transformer if you wish to operate 120 volt appliances.

Most hotels have connection adaptors available to accept plugs widely used in other countries or you can readily purchase them very cheaply at Batam electrical or department stores (about SGD\$2).

TELEPHONES – How about staying in touch from Batam Island – is the telephone system OK?

THE INTERNATIONAL telephone call prefix for Indonesia is 62 and the area code for Batam is 0778. If calling from outside Indonesia you will need to drop the zero (viz 62778).

Similarly with cellphone numbers. From overseas dial the country code and then the telephone number **dropping the initial zero**. In Indonesia cellphones or mobile phones are referred to as handphones. If the letters "hp" precede a number it denotes handphone.

International Direct Dialling telephone links to the rest of the world are readily available but international telephone calls out of Indonesia from hotels or handphones are expensive. You can save a lot of money by going to a "**Wartel**". These are privately operated public telephone offices and you will see them dotted around the streets.

The main access codes for landline overseas calls out of Indonesia are 007, 017 or 001. You can save money on handphone calls to overseas numbers by using the access code prefix 01017, but the quality of the connection can sometimes be poor.

The best way to stay in touch when in Indonesia is to buy a local pre-paid SIM card for your handphone. Let the folks back home have the number in case they need to reach you and also give this number out to the people you meet. Go to a *Wartel* for your own international calls.

Once you make some contacts here then be prepared for some heavy SMS traffic. Indonesians, especially the young women, are heavy users of the Short Message Service (text) as it is effective and inexpensive.

INTERNET - Is there a reliable Internet service in Batam and are there Internet Cafes?

BATAM'S INTERNET SERVICES have improved greatly with higher speed ADSL and wireless connections progressively taking over from basic dial-up systems. The ADSL services sometimes suffer from congestion due to the heavy volume of users and are dependent on having a landline telephone connection.

The services are generally adequate but still fall well short of the high-speed broadband access available in nearby Singapore or in most major Western countries. Providers are recognising the market opportunities and wireless Internet access at higher speeds is gradually becoming available.

There are many Internet Cafes scattered around Batam and they are popular with locals. Smiling Hill offers FREE Internet access from two wireless Hot Spots for those with laptops. We have a desktop computer with ADSL connection available FREE for guests without laptops.

THE WEATHER – Batam Island is near the Equator – what's the weather like?

BATAM IS tropical all year round with temperatures ranging from an average minimum of 25 degrees to an average maximum of 34 degrees Celsius (77 to 95 Fahrenheit). The middle of the day usually is hot and humidity ranges from 73% to 96%. Hotels, bars, restaurants, shops and offices and most taxis are air conditioned.

The annual average rainfall is 2,600 mm (about 105 inches) with the wet season extending from November to April/May and the dry season from June to October.

The dry and wet season descriptions are relative – it still rains between June and October though usually not so frequently. The most concentrated rains tend to fall during November and around April. Fortunately a lot of the rain falls overnight or in the early mornings (before sunrise). Storms typically occur in the early or mid-afternoon. Even in the wet season tropical downpours on any given day usually will be preceded and followed by periods of sunshine.

CLOTHING – What kind of clothes will I need?

FOR THIS CLIMATE you need casual light clothing and you will NOT need jackets or coats. You should make sure you bring swim trunks (difficult to buy bigger Western sizes here).

Many visiting Western men wear smart shorts and short sleeves or T-shirts during the day and this is quite acceptable in hotels, bars and public places. (If you do not have these items as part of your wardrobe at home you can readily buy good quality shirts, shorts, slacks and T-shirts in Western sizes at Batam's department stores and specialty outlets relatively cheaply.)

If you have a stop-over in Singapore off-the-hook clothing of this kind in Western sizes can be purchased very cheaply at the Mustafa's Department Store in Little India (it is open 24 hours).

Long pants may be advisable in Batam during the evening hours, particularly if you are sensitive to mosquitoes or other biting insects and will be spending time out of doors (for example at the excellent open-air food markets).

If you are planning business calls or wish to visit Government offices then you MUST wear long trousers and a collared shirt. To do otherwise is to insult the people you are visiting and in some cases you may even be refused admittance to official offices.

Batam is a place where you can be a slack vacation slob with regard to dress if you wish. But human nature being what it is the world over you will have an edge with the people you meet and in bargaining with traders if you take the trouble to turn yourself out more smartly.

THINGS TO BRING –
What are some of the items you would recommend I bring from home?

MAKE SURE of the swim trunks and your digital camera.

If you already have an English-Bahasa Indonesia phrase book or dictionary then bring it. If not then wait until you arrive as you can buy one cheaply here. Some of the new electronic translators are excellent and convenient to carry with you – they are not only useful but can be the source of a lot of fun, especially if you meet Indonesians with only a smattering of English. A very adequate electronic translator will cost about \$US15. We can help you source.

Gifts

You can become a hero if you take the trouble to pack a few inexpensive gifts to give to the people who please you. Particularly popular with the girls are small stuffed toys representative of the animals of your home country. Packaged foodstuffs, chocolate (of good quality) and jewellery, particularly any small thing in heavy gold with a potential emergency resale value, will win you huge points. Do not bring expensive perfumes – they are available cheaply here and will not be really appreciated.

Condoms

Many of the young women you meet may be quite willing to participate in unprotected sex and probably will not have condoms. Though they are readily available in the supermarkets here it can be a good idea to bring your own, especially if you require a larger fitting. Personal lubricants are readily available here (not worth risking the mess should a pack rupture in your luggage).

Viagra

If you use Viagra already then by all means bring your supply but it is available here at about the same price as you would pay from a pharmacy at home (around \$US12 to \$US14 per 100mg tab).

MONEY – How much extra spending money should I bring with me?

IT'S A QUESTION of how much do you want to spend?

You should not need more than \$US100 a day to cover entertaining partners, meals, drinks and tips, a little incidental spending and optional extras.

(Our estimate does not include money for shopping or hotel room – the room rate often includes breakfast. Obviously, you will need more if you are planning to splurge on some of the cheap goodies available here.)

CURRENCY – What is the local currency and what is the approximate exchange rate?

THE LOCAL CURRENCY is the Indonesian Rupiah. Approximate indicative interbank exchange rates as at October, 2009 were:

·	1 GBP	=	Rp	15,100
·	1 \$US	=	Rp	9,400
·	1 EUR	=	Rp	13,900
·	1 \$AUD	=	Rp	8,500
·	1 \$SNG	=	Rp	6,750

However, in the current international financial climate you should check current rates for yourself.

There are many money changer booths around the commercial districts of Batam where you can convert foreign currency like \$SNG, \$US, \$AUD, EUROS or GB Pounds at fair exchange rates. Any US notes will be very carefully scrutinised unless new and some may be rejected. Often you will be offered a lower rate for lower denomination notes. Australian dollars and Euro notes also can sometimes be problematic with smaller money changer outlets. The rates offered generally will be below those shown above but not unduly so and changers usually are prepared to bargain a little.

Many of the major Indonesian banks on Batam (Lippo, BNI, BCA, Permata and others) have modern conveniently located ATM machines linked to the Maestro, Cirrus and Visa Plus international networks where you can withdraw funds from your card account at home or obtain advances on your credit cards.

Typically an ATM limits you to from Rp 1m to Rp 2m per transaction (you usually can make additional withdrawals but you pay an additional transaction fee for the further funds). You save on transaction fees by using ATMs which allow a higher withdrawal limit (the Permata, BCA and Bank Mandiri machines dispensing Rp 50,000 notes offer this). The Lippo Bank has machines dispensing up to Rp 3m in Rp 100,000 notes. The ATM inter-bank exchange rate is usually more favourable than offered by the money changers, offsetting some of the transaction fee. Most ATMs offer a choice of English or Indonesian instructions.

Avoid changing money at your hotel or in bars or nightclubs. You almost certainly will be ripped off on the exchange rate.

You also will incur extra costs and considerable inconvenience if you use Travellers Cheques. In fact Travellers Cheques are unpopular with traders and money changers and often will not be accepted (you usually have to go to a bank to cash). For convenience alone Travellers Cheques should be avoided.

Indonesian traders and service providers like cash. Expect to be charged a premium equivalent to the card service fee if you offer a credit card for all but major transactions, such as hotel bills.

**PERSONAL SAFETY
AND SECURITY – I
have heard Batam
Island is a bit of a
wild place – is it safe
there?**

BATAM ISLAND has an utterly undeserved reputation in some quarters for being a “hotbed” of violence, gangsters, drugs, gambling and danger. Much of this impression has been created by sensationalist media reports in sanitized Singapore where some of the Powers That Be look disapprovingly at having a full-blown low-cost good-time playground at their front door and try to scare their nationals into staying at home.

There also is a view in other parts of Indonesia (particularly among those with conservative Muslim moral values) that Batam is a “loose” and “dangerous” place.

The reality is that Batam, and Nagoya in particular, does have a measure of crime, danger, drugs, sex, and gambling (though organised gambling has been shut down since February 2005) like just about any other sizeable city in the world, particularly those with a vibrant entertainment district. But unless you seek it out you are most unlikely to be touched by it.

There are seedy areas and a few no-go districts and a lot of poor and unemployed who will steal or commit other crimes to survive. Homes are locked with grated windows (just as they are in places like the inner suburbs of Sydney or American cities) and there are security staff around shopping centres, public offices and hotels.

But overall Batam is much less dangerous and frightening than the inner areas of many of the cities of the United States, Europe other Asian countries and even some other Indonesian cities.

A mugging here will make front page news. Can you imagine a minor street crime making the front pages of a newspaper in Washington DC, New York or even Sydney?

**SECURITY PRECAU-
TIONS – How should
protect myself and
my valuables?**

A WESTERN VISITOR who exercises reasonable prudence and common sense is unlikely to have many problems. All you need do is follow the standard rules for any foreign destination:

- Ensure your passport and valuables are placed in a safe or safety box at your hotel. Carry a photocopy of your passport identification pages and your entry/departure card in case you are asked for ID by the

police or some other authority. Keep a record of your passport number in a safe place.

- Avoid carrying or displaying large sums of cash and be a little wary when using and leaving ATM machines (take a look at who might be watching and waiting – if suspicious consider going elsewhere).
- Secure your wallet and handphone, especially in crowds, pubs, nightclubs, karaoke's, discos and the like. Consider placing reserve credit or debit cards in the hotel safety box with your passport or carry cards in pockets other than where you keep your wallet. Consider a money belt or some other secure way of carrying cards or cash that you can wear under your clothing.
- Avoid walking around by yourself at night in areas other than the immediate inner shopping district unless you have first checked with hotel staff, resident ex-pats or trusted locals (especially if you have had a drink or two). The locals will tell you whether an area is safe.
- Be a little selective about taxis and transport and if alone generally stick to hotel or Port taxis or recommended drivers or operators. Avoid using unofficial taxis (the official taxis have yellow number plates and generally are painted in fleet colours).
- Mind your own business, don't talk too much or too loudly and don't get involved under any circumstances in any altercation with a local. Be polite, smile, say thank you and **walk away** if necessary.
- Be very careful about people who want to take you to venues or places you do not know for alleged shopping bargains or personal services, especially if they are away from the mainstream. Never take up such an invitation alone.
- Be careful with your valuables if you invite a girl from a disco, a bar or from a chance meeting to visit you in your hotel room. With girls selected from karaokes you are unlikely to experience pilfering or if you do then you have some recourse to the establishment. With a "freelance" girl you do not. Remember that all you know about her is whatever she has chosen to tell you.

TRAVEL ADVISORIES –
Some Governments
have issued travel
advisories saying it is
unsafe to go to Indo-
nesia following the
bombings in Bali in
2002 and 2005 and
bombings in Jakarta
in 2003 and 2004 –
am I risking becoming
the victim of some
kind of extremist
attack?

YOU CAN REASONABLY put thoughts of bombings, official visitor warnings and fanatics aside ... on Batam you will experience an easy and ready acceptance from the overwhelming majority of the local population.

Some are shy and few speak very much if any English. But a smile and a hello usually will bring a beaming response from men, women and children alike. If you can manage a few words of Indonesian then the response will be even warmer.

Unlike other more remote areas of Indonesia there generally is a friendly familiarity with or curious interest in Bules (Western foreigners) and acceptance that they are important contributors to the local economy.

Very occasionally you will hear a rude comment from young local men (usually in Indonesian so that you cannot understand anyway). They, not unnaturally, can be jealous of your perceived affluence – just smile and be gracious and otherwise ignore them.

Should you have a problem you typically will find local people going out of their way to help and guide you, though there are times when you need to exercise your judgment and commonsense.

Many Batam residents and people elsewhere in Indonesia, are mystified at the attitude of foreign governments in warning their nationals about visiting – the locals point out that even the Bali bombings and the Marriott/Ritz Carlton hotel bombing in Jakarta pale into insignificance compared with 9-11 attacks in New York, the London of the IRA troubles and the July 2005 train bombings, or the subsequent train bombings in Madrid. But nobody is

warning everyone to stay away from the UK, the US or Spain. Guess the Indonesians just don't understand that Western bureaucrats and politicians can be much more concerned with protecting their backsides than with logic, reason or reality.

HEALTH – What about the health risks – am I likely to finish up catching some awful tropical disease?

THE HEALTH RISKS to travellers to Batam are comparable to other countries in the region. If you would feel safe enough travelling to Singapore or Kuala Lumpur then you can also be comfortable about travelling to Batam. (The SARS outbreak, which claimed lives in Singapore, actually did not reach Batam.)

The Batam water supply is operated by a British-based contracting company with sophisticated collection, treatment and distribution systems. Tests show the supply exceeds World Health Organisation standards and we know executives of the supply company who routinely drink water direct from the tap.

However, it probably is prudent to not drink tap water, even in 5-star hotels, unless you know that it has been boiled for at least 5 minutes. Safe, good quality bottled water is cheaply and readily available in shops, restaurants, bars and at roadside stalls and is used by most locals as well as visitors. Your hotel usually will supply free bottled water for you each day.

Generally you can safely enjoy ice in your drinks. Restaurants, bars and open air food courts; Pujesera (food court) vendors and most others involved in the Batam food and drink industry buy in their ice from specialist ice-makers.

Food offered in most restaurants and from food market vendors usually is properly prepared and generally quite safe. You would be most unlucky to contract a case of "Delhi belly". The risk is probably about the same as eating out at home.

However, be careful of offerings from street vendors. They usually are OK and they do take the best care they can in preparation. But unfortunately even the best intentions can fall short if facilities are inadequate.

INNOCULATIONS – What shots should I have for my visit to Batam?

THE ONLY MANDATORY requirement is a Yellow Fever vaccination certificate (intended to protect the Indonesian community) if you are travelling direct from Africa or some areas of South America.

Otherwise, again think in terms of Singapore to judge what's appropriate. Most travellers to Singapore and Batam dispense with shots completely.

General country advisories for Indonesia will often recommend Hepatitis A and Typhoid inoculations but reputable Travel Health clinics only *sometimes* recommend them for Singapore or Malaysia.

The point of this distinction is that Indonesia is a vast country of many regions (the world's longest archipelago) and country advisories must take into account the WHOLE country. Batam is further from West Irian than London is from Moscow – the conditions in one region may be very different from those in the other.

Malaria does occur in Indonesia and general country advisories again recommend precautionary medication plus the usual care in using insect screens and repellents. Again there usually is NO Malaria recommendation for Singapore or Malaysia.

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES – What is the risk of my catching something nasty ?

WE ALWAYS ADVISE our guests to practice safe sex. However, we also are aware that the temptation not to do so is very great on Batam and elsewhere in Indonesia and that many visitors and local residents do so routinely.

Medical people we have consulted say there is a low incidence of HIV Aids in Batam and the risk to men from uncovered vaginal or oral sex is minimal.

However, there are periodic cases of gonorrhoea (clap) and it turns up fairly regularly when girls from the Karaoke bars go for medical screenings.

In the event that you do contract a nasty STD there are efficient testing and treatment facilities available and modern antibiotics are available from Batam pharmacies (*apoteks*).

There have been some reports of genital herpes cases from time to time but we have no first-hand information.

MEDICINES – What if I need medications – are they readily available?

BATAM AND NAGOYA in particular has plenty of well-stocked pharmacies or drug stores (*apoteks*) where you will be able to obtain most of the medicines or other products you may need, usually without having to provide a doctor's prescription.

The supermarkets also are well stocked with sunscreens, insect repellents, lotions, elastic bandages, condoms and other likely needs. They are not expensive.

Apart from your regular prescription medicines, medical items worth bringing with you might include:

- Over-the-counter anti-diarrhoea medicine to take if you have an emergency in the middle of the night.
- A broad-spectrum antibiotic and perhaps an anti-nausea drug like Stematil for emergency use.
- A good heartburn and antacid preparation like Zantac or Omeprazole in case you awake in the night with a stomach aflame after enjoying some of the excellent curries or other spicy Indonesian foods.

However, all of these items are readily available over the counter from Batam *apoteks* (pharmacies) and often in very inexpensive generic forms. A recommended outlet is Budi Farma in Nagoya (not far from Lusy's bar). The Pharmacist there speaks a little English and is very helpful.

TOILETS – I have heard that the toilets can be pretty awful and that you have to use Asian style squat toilets?

THE TOILET FACILITIES in good hotels and bars or restaurants operated by foreigners typically will be clean and well maintained with Western style pans and facilities.

However, in many restaurants, karaokes, food courts and food markets (*pujaseras*) they are likely to be smelly, possibly dirty and have only Asian style squat pans. It is unlikely there will be toilet paper provided but rather a dipper and a container of water for cleaning yourself. This can represent a hygiene challenge for Western visitor.

Most food courts (*pujaseras*) and many restaurants have separate hand wash basins away from the toilets with liquid soap supplied. Look for them.

MEDICAL FACILITIES – What happens if there is an accident or some other medical emergency – can I get proper treatment?

IN THE EVENT that the worst happens and you do need medical attention, Batam has health facilities superior to most regional areas of Indonesia with medical clinics, capable general practice medical practitioners, diagnostic laboratories and state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment for those with the means to pay.

In the event of a truly serious medical problem there is also the assurance that all the facilities of modern Singapore are just an hour or so across the water.

The range of hospital and associated specialist medical services available on Batam took a quantum leap in mid-2003 with the opening of a modern new private hospital, the Rumah Sakit (hospital) Awahl Brothers to serve the well-off members of the local community and the well paid ex-pats who previously have gone to nearby Singapore for medical attention.

A first class semi-private ensuite hospital room (2 beds) equipped with TV etc can be available for Permanent Residents or Work Permit holders for as

little as 400,000 rupiah a day. For around 700,000 rupiah you will have your own VIP ensuite room with a sofa bed so your visitors can stay by your side.

Charges will be higher for Tourist or Business Visitors presumably because the Hospital is not entitled to recover Government subsidies for non-residents.

The hospital operates an ambulance service for trauma and medical emergency transportation and there is a helicopter pad for emergency evacuations to Singapore for specialist attention.

A full range of modern diagnostic equipment is available to the panel of specialist and general practice doctors who work out of the new facility.

DRUGS – Is there a drugs scene in Batam? What is the Indonesian position on involvement with recreational drugs?

AS FOR MOST of South East Asia, anyone who even considers becoming involved with illegal drugs in Indonesia is crazy! There was a time when people who were arrested on drug charges were able to bribe their way out of jail, but a Presidential crackdown on police corruption and directives from Jakarta to the judiciary on sentencing mean those days are long gone.

If you now plan to do drugs in Indonesia then you had best plan to also do serious time in appalling gaol conditions. You also had better plan to have a lot of spare cash available to pay police, lawyers, court and jail officials (despite the crackdown on corruption) to minimise your sentence and obtain the favours you will need to make your jail conditions at least bearable. Plan on around \$SGD40,000 minimum in support cash for a one-year sentence.

The discos are a favorite haunt of Batam's drug dealers. The main trade is in Ecstasy, Methamphetamine or Ice (known locally as Sabu Sabu) and Marihuana (known locally as Ganja). You almost inevitably will be offered these substances at some time or you will have girls asking you to buy substances for them to use.

No matter what the circumstances **DON'T BE TEMPTED!!!**

A favorite ploy is for the pusher or the girl to alert an undercover police associate who happens to be waiting in a convenient location nearby immediately after you buy ... guess what happens next!

The consequences if arrested and charged with possession, using or dealing are too horrendous to contemplate. Some offences carry the death penalty or life imprisonment. In a 2006 case two Australians were sentenced to execution by firing squad and seven others to life for their involvement in shipping heroin via Bali.

Unlike Western countries Marihuana (like Heroin) is considered a Category 1 drug in Indonesia and offences carry prison sentences of four to 20 years plus heavy fines. Typical sentences for locals for possession or dealing range from three to eight years. A recent Batam case involving a Westerner saw a sentence of 9 months plus a fine of Rp100 million (\$SGD17,650) for possession of 2.9 grams of marihuana. Possession of as few as four ecstasy tablets is grounds for a charge of trafficking.

If all of the above isn't enough then keep in mind also that the quality of some manufactured drugs is likely to be dubious and may be highly dangerous to your health. There have been deaths of visitors from overdoses and there are vacant shells of local people wandering around Nagoya who experimented with Sabu Sabu. Consider also the local accounts of drugs being cut with ground glass to cause internal injury and enhance the "high".

SHOPPING – Is there good shopping in Batam and what are the prices like?

IF YOU HAVE US\$, \$SGD, GBP (Pounds Sterling) or EUR (Euros) you will be delighted at how far they will go on Batam.

A haircut with shoulder and scalp massage will run to around US\$2. Or you can go the whole hog and also luxuriate in a half hour "cream bath" hair conditioning treatment and a scalp massage for around US\$4. A 1½ hour traditional or Thai massage will cost about \$US13.

Batam is essentially a duty free zone so there is plenty of cheap shopping to be had in the big new shopping malls and department stores of Nagoya and Batam Centre, especially for clothing, electricals, CDs, VCDs, DVDs small electronics equipment (cellphones, digital cameras), jewellery, luggage and leathersgoods, watches, perfumes and foodstuffs. There are excellent examples of Indonesian arts and crafts at very competitive prices if you take the trouble to look.

Be aware that many of the tapes and CDs will be pirated. Many of the cheap pirated DVDs are of very poor quality. Also do not be tempted to try to take home bigger electrical or electronics items – you probably will have trouble with Customs in Singapore. This is in part because in recent years many Singapore people have taken to travelling on day-trips to Batam to take advantage of the cheap shopping.

Liquor is heavily taxed in Batam and all Indonesia and is relatively expensive. This is a place where you certainly should pick up your favourite bottle from the Duty Free on entry.

TIP: If you happen to be due for a new pair of spectacles (eyeglasses) check out the prices and the standards of optometric testing services here – you will be pleasantly surprised.

LANGUAGE – I cannot speak Indonesian. Will I be able to make myself understood? How will I be able to relate to any locals I am with?

IT IS A BIG ADVANTAGE to be able to speak a little Indonesian, but it is by no means essential. Many ex-pats have lived permanently in Batam for a period of years speaking English only. There is usually someone in most official offices or big stores who speaks at least basic English and some who speak it very well.

Most staff at all the big hotels speak some English and many taxi drivers have good English. If you run into a situation where you cannot be understood there is usually someone nearby who speaks English who will cheerfully help you out with translations.

It can be helpful to carry a phrase book or one of the new electronic dictionaries (see also *Things to Bring* page 4 above).

Many of the young women speak some basic English, and some are quite fluent, particularly those who have lived and worked in Batam for some time. They often will be a little shy for fear of making mistakes but in private you usually will be able to converse to some degree.

Again the phrase book or dictionary can help greatly and this form of personal communication can become fun.

If you are prepared to go with partners who speak little or no English it will widen your choice immensely. If you can manage some Indonesian the possibilities are even better.

Keep mind that most Indonesians undertake some English studies at high school and almost all really want to learn to speak English. They will be grateful for any help you can provide them.

MARRIAGE – Is it realistic to hope to find an Indonesian marriage partner in Batam?

ABSOLUTELY. The dream of many of the beautiful young women here and elsewhere in Indonesia is to find a Western husband and most of them are very happy to be wooed by older men who no longer retain their former youthful film-star looks. Most of the single expats who are here for any length of time partner or marry local girls.

While some of these matches prove to be disasters many enjoy happy and enduring relationships. In general Indonesian girls believe they have an old-fashioned duty to really care for their husbands (usually to spoil them rotten) in return for the comfort and security the husband is able to offer them.

However, there are many, many issues involved and it is prudent to ask a lot of questions and to take your time before entering into any kind of permanent commitment.

Be truthful (particularly as to your status) and do not lead on the girls here with promises that you cannot or will not keep. To do so is not just dishonest but also discourteous, unnecessary and stupid.

There are plenty of young women who will be happy to accept you and your circumstances. Recourse to bullshit will only create needless problems, disappointments and hurt.

There are particular issues should you want to enter into a formal marriage here or to take your lady away to join you in your home country. We will be happy to discuss some of these with you during your stay.

LAUNDRY – Are there laundries where I can have my clothes laundered during my visit ?

THERE ARE no coin operated laundromats to our knowledge in Batam, However there are very inexpensive and excellent laundry services available in Nagoya. We can help you locate them. Unlike the typical downtown hotels we also offer laundry services for guests and residents at Smiling Hill at very reasonable prices.



INFORMATION – Where can I obtain further general information on Batam and Indonesia in advance of my visit?

YOUR MAIN SOURCE for authoritative and current general information on Batam and Smiling Hill is our website at

www.smilinghill.net

For a fun introduction to the Indonesian language go to Flirting in Indonesian at

freenet-homepage.de/indonesian/index.html

For good general information on Indonesia we recommend the these sites:

livinginindonesia.info/index.php/item/Home

This ambitious and excellent site was still under development as at September 2009 but already offers much useful and interesting information on Indonesia with essays covering history, culture, politics, visas the bureaucracy, the law, the economy, doing business, the regions etc.

www.expats.or.id

This site has been providing information for resident and prospective expatriates since 1997 with a main focus on Jakarta. It consists mainly of contributions from veteran and newer expatriate residents based on their experiences. It includes useful forums.

www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/id.html

If this site opens at a redirect page then choose World Fact Book from the search form. Then select Indonesia from the *Select a Country or Location* menu. This is a very comprehensive summary of key publicly issued official statistics. It is relatively current, thorough, reliable and comprehensive.



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