



KOMODO INDONESIA

Komodo is one of over 17,500 islands that form Indonesia's Malay Archipelago. It is located between the islands of Sumbawa and Flores in a group known as the Lesser Sunda.

Most of the 3,000 people on Komodo gain their livelihood from the sea. They are primarily the descendants of exiled convicts who intermarried with the indigenous Ata Modo and Bugis, among others. As is common throughout Indonesia the majority of the population is Moslem with a small mixture of Hindu and Christians.

Indonesia has been greatly influenced by various European countries from the early 1500's to the middle of the 20th century. It was primarily Holland, as they expanded their empire in the early 1600's with their Dutch East India Company, which grew to dominate Indonesia until World War II.

It was not the lush islands or the beautiful beaches of Indonesia that Holland was interested in. Indonesia, often referred to as the Spice Islands, has seen its sailors, spice merchants and traders plying the waters of South East Asia from China to India as far back as 200 BC. When spices, by caravan, finally reached the Egyptian port of Alexandria, it was the powerful merchants of Venice with their complete control of European trade in the Mediterranean Sea that introduced them to Europe. In an effort to break the monopoly of the Venetians and reap the huge financial rewards, especially in the spice trade, Holland, among others, sent her ships around the horn of Africa and sailed west to Indonesia and the Spice Islands. This led to the building of a Dutch empire and to Europe's great Age of Discovery. The spices of Indonesia literally changed the world.



HISTORY

It must have been with a heart pounding sense of adventure and anticipation that young W. Douglas Burden sailed that morning in 1926 through the Lintah Straits of the ancient and mysterious islands of Indonesia. Though the European nation of Holland, through their Dutch East India Company and now the Dutch Colonial Government, had controlled much of Indonesia since the early 1600s, the remote and desolate island of Komodo remained virtually unknown to the West until 1912.

Intrepid Indonesian pearl divers had returned from Komodo to the island of Java and began to tell fantastic stories of a great monster that lived on this island. It had a head with razor sharp teeth the size of a crocodile's that could bite a man in half. The monster had the forked tongue of a snake that flicked about as it sought out its prey. The pearl divers told of its claws that were long and hooked and could tear asunder a mighty water buffalo with the power of a single stroke. And the sound this monster made ... a wicked, evil hissing sound that sent a chill up the spine of the bravest man.

When the stories of this vile beast finally reached New York there was only one thing a brave young hunter and explorer like W. Douglas Burden could do. Under the direction of the American Museum of Natural History, Burden set out to lead his expedition to the far side of the world to capture a pair of these monsters and bring them back alive for public display in the New York Zoo.

Burden and his party sailed through the Java Sea towards Komodo island aboard a steamer, the S.S. Dog, which had been loaned to him by the Dutch Colonial Government. And what a strange cargo of characters he had convinced, cajoled, hired or bribed to accompany him. First there was F.J. Defosse, an experienced big-game hunter who was well aware of the many dangers that the jungles

held in store. This would be Defosse's first hunt for a dragon, however. Dr. E.R. Dunn was the scientific expert from Smith College in the United States. Scholarly and serious, he was excited to be on the brink of discovery. Together with fifteen Malay porters and a film cameraman named Lee Fai from China, W. Douglas Burden decided to bring along, of all things, his beautiful young wife.

After battling high winds and strong currents the Captain of the S.S. Dog was finally able to pilot his small ship into Komodo island's Python Bay. It must have been amazing as the expedition, this strange group of characters that seemed to have been cast in a classic Hollywood adventure movie, set foot upon this mysterious island for the first time. To Burden's knowledge no westerner had ever been here before. Komodo Island was a very dangerous place and the tales of the giant dragon was just part of that peril.

Burden and his expedition, to the great joy of Dr. E.R. Dunn, had landed on an island that was ripe for scientific discovery and exploration. Not many days after coming ashore Burden stumbled upon evidence of the monster he had traveled so far to capture ... or kill.

There ... pressed into the muddy jungle path ... the gigantic prints, the claw marks gouged deep into the earth ... the unmistakable marks of the dragon. It reminded Burden of the fossils of prehistoric dinosaur tracks that he had seen on exhibit back at the Natural History Museum in New York. But these were no fossils. These prints were fresh and the monster was close ... very close. Burden decided that it was time to set his trap.

With the help of his men and the carcass bait of wild boars, Burden waited for the beast to make its appearance. And appear it did. Crashing through the underbrush the dragon set upon its new found feast with a ferocious appetite. The expedition watched from their blind in amazement as the monster tore huge chunks of the carcass and downed them in one grotesque gulp. Then Burden sprung his trap. As a rope tightened around its belly the enraged beast thrashed about snarling and hissing so violently that the Malay helpers, terrified, would help no more.

Burden and his expedition were finally able to kill twelve of the giant lizards and capture two alive. Returning from the other side of the world to New York with his tales of adventure, discovery and two live monsters, the public turned out in massive crowds to see for themselves the unbelievable, terrifying and now famous Komodo dragons. It was no wonder that the young adventurer, W. Douglas Burden, quickly became the talk of the town.

Now ... if by chance this story of a brave hunter's adventure, sailing to a far off mysterious jungle island to discover and capture a great monster and bring it back to New York alive ... an expedition into the terrors and untold dangers of the unknown that would include a fearsome beast and a beautiful young woman ... if this is beginning to sound a bit familiar ... well? You see, W. Douglas Burden told his fantastic story

to a man by the name of Merian C. Cooper and Mr. Cooper was a movie producer ... and with a small change in the story ... from giant dragon to giant ape ... in 1933 Mr. Merian C. Cooper of Hollywood brought to generations of moviegoers the most exciting classic adventure movie ever released ... starring the beautiful young movie heroine Fay Wray and the great ape, leading-man, screen immortal ... King Kong!

PLACES OF INTEREST

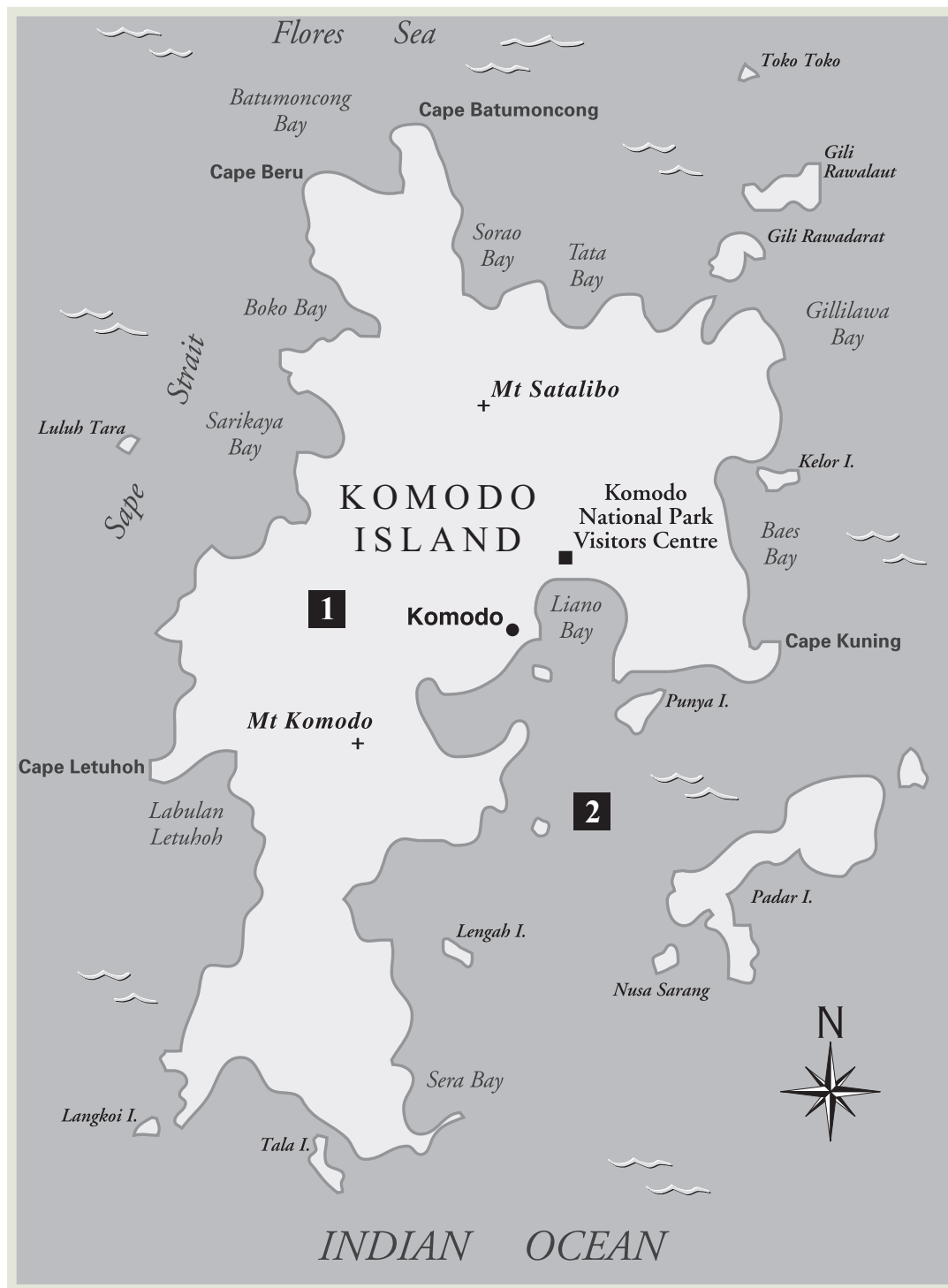
1 Komodo Island, combined with the close-by yet smaller islands of Rinca and Padar, make up Komodo National Park. Indonesia established the park in 1980 in order to protect the prime inhabitant and main point of interest, the world famous Komodo dragon (*Varanus Komodoensis*). Since the park first opened it has expanded its responsibilities to include the protection and preservation of all plants and animals within its boundaries both on land and in the sea. The combined area of the park including the three main islands and the surrounding waters cover nearly 1,000 square miles.

Of course the most famous occupant of the park, as we said, is the Komodo dragon, the largest lizard on earth. The islanders call it Ora or the buaya durat which means, quite appropriately, land crocodile. When you see one for the first time it is as if you are looking back to the age of the dinosaur. The male of the species can grow up to 10 feet long and weigh over 200 lbs. The female is usually a bit smaller. They live from between 20 and 40 years. They are a truly amazing species with a sense of smell that can detect their next meal from up to five miles away.

One would be hard pressed to call this giant lizard cute or cuddly. In fact they are rather vicious looking. Extremely strong, with huge hooked claws and a forked tongue that they use in much the same manner as a snake, the Komodo dragon is both fast on land and able to swim as easily as it can climb a tree. Their favorite prey is the wild pigs and Timor deer that are found on the island. The male dragon is very territorial and the bigger the dragon ... the bigger the territory. The Komodo is not adverse to attacking and eating other dragons that enter its range. However they are not picky eaters. It has been reported that they have attacked and eaten full grown water buffalo and, unfortunately, humans on rare occasions.

The old saying "a bark worse than their bite" does not apply to the Komodo dragon. Its teeth are formed much like that of a shark and, as a shark, are replaced often and easily. The great danger of a bite from a Komodo is the deadly bacteria found in its mouth. If an unlucky prey is lucky enough to escape the powerful jaws of this dragon it will soon succumb to the bacteria. Either way, the giant lizard gets its meal.

The Komodo dragon is an endangered species with only 3-5 thousand left in the wild. The harsh natural environment in which the dragon lives has a direct effect on the survival of the population. The islands that make up Komodo National Park are, for the most part, very dry and volcanic. The combined human population has exploded over 800% in the past 60 years putting great strain on the already slim natural re-



sources. This, combined with poaching of the dragon and its main food source, the Timor deer; along with the effects of tourism, puts the continued survival of the wild Komodo dragon in serious jeopardy. Consequently trade in live specimens or the skins of the Komodo dragon is strictly prohibited by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, of which Indonesia has been an active member since 1979.

It is easy to see why the care and conservation of this park by the Indonesian people is deemed so important that in 1986 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared Komodo National Park a World Heritage Site and a Man and Biosphere Reserve.

2 The **Flores Sea** that surrounds Komodo National Park is one of the most abundant sea life sanctuaries in the world. With over 250 varieties of coral, the extensive reef formations and mangroves provide a habitat for over 1,000 species of fish. Manta rays, sea turtles and of course dolphins and whales all combine to make the waters around Komodo island rich in undersea life.

The park is not without its challenges when it comes to preservation and protection of the sea life. The illegal use of dynamite and cyanide, by primarily non-local fishermen, leads to the destruction and decimation of both the fish and the fragile coral reefs. With the rapid expansion of the human population in the area the park has to continually be on guard against

