Central Sulawesi

The province of central Sulawesi (Sulteng) is a jumble of towering, forest-clad mountains where rain falls almost every afternoon of the year. Yet its most fertile area, the Palu valley, is also the driest region in all of Indonesia, averaging only 40-80 cm (15-30 in) of rainfall a year. Minutes away from coconut groves and irrigated rice fields are barren, cactus-studded plains riven by empty watercourses, where emaciated oxen and cows wander in search of shrubs.

Religious contrast abounds as well scattered in the highland west of Palu, east of Ampana and along the ridge of the northern neck. Are dozens of relatively isolated ethnic groups practicing shamanic religions. While the Dutch reformed church and the salvation army have made minor inroads in the area, over 75 percent of the population is Muslim. The proportion is even higher in the densely populated coastal and valley regions, where traders, farmers, and fishermen of Bugis, Mandarese, and Gorontalo origin have settled, bringing Islam with them.

Geologically, too, the province is a stunning mosaic. The volcanic and tectonic activity which created the island left in its wake a network of streams and ravines. Along with massive rifts and craters that later became rivers, lakes, and upland plains. Covering 68,033 sq km (26,270 sq mi, roughly the size of Ireland), Sulteng is the largest of Sulawesi’s six provinces.

Though classified as a single province for administrative purposes, central Sulawesi is still at best a tenuous geographic entity. Communications remains difficult in a terrain percent of the land (over 95 percent of the province’s income derives from timber exports, mainly ebony).

Still, central Sulawesi remains one of most culturally diverse province on an island known for its diversity. Government publications list 12 different ethnic groups and 24 distinct languages for the province, and a trip through Sulteng will give the visitor a chance to witness a sort of microcosm of the multicultural “Indonesian experience” within a small geographical area. This is a rugged province whose natural attractions are best appreciated by the trekker with a sense of adventure and a knowledge of at least a few words of Indonesia.

Lore Lindu.

Fifty kilometers south of Palu lies the huge Lore Lindu national park. Covering more than 231,000 hectares (570,570 acres), the park straddles the border between Donggala and Poso districts. This vast and rugged area includes Mt. Nokilalaki and Mt. Tokosa, the entire Lindu plain with its large lake, the Besoa valley, and the western sections of the Baba and Napu valleys. In these three valleys are found the mysterious stone statues and cisterns of a long-vanished culture whose traces continue to intrigue archaeologists.

Most of the park is covered in dense montane forest, inhabited by many of Sulawesi’s endemic species-including babirusa, anoa, Sulawesi macaques and tarsiers. Though it is often hard to catch a glimpse of these creatures, the avian life of the park is abundant, accessible and very watchable. Whether stalking green imperial pigeons, hornbills, or egrets and herons. The avid bird watcher is
not likely to be disappointed starting at 300 meters (990 ft) above sea level and rising to 2,610 meters (8500 ft). The park’s landscapes are richly varied—dense forests alternate with grassy plains and swampy upland valleys.

While no permits are required to enter Lore Lindu, such projects as climbing Mt. nokilalaki do require permission from the nature preservation office KSDA (formerly PPA) on Jalan M. Yamin No. 17 Palu. There are many points of access to the park. From palu, minibuses may be taken on a small road through the palolo valley to wuasa (the capital of north lore, in the napu valley). Or south through kulawi as far as gimpu.