



# The Transformation of Labuan Bajo

Labuan Bajo is transforming from a sleepy seaside village, to a thriving and vibrant tourist destination.

Written by Suzanne Srdarov and Clare Srdarov

**L**abuan Bajo is transforming from a sleepy seaside village to a thriving and vibrant tourist destination. Walking down the main street, evidence of progress is everywhere, with new buildings and businesses popping up before your eyes.

With a multi-million dollar investment from the Indonesian Government, there is no reason to think it'll slow down anytime soon. The government spending is earmarked for infrastructure to support the rapid growth and increased numbers of domestic and international visitors, safeguarding the sustainable future of Labuan Bajo. Much of the change in Labuan Bajo can be credited to increasing tourist numbers, and budget airline carriers making travel more accessible to a greater number of people, starting with Air Asia's inaugural flight to Labuan Bajo in August 2019. As tourist numbers continue to increase, particularly with the new marina opening with other tourism facilities, the addition of new carriers and extra flight services to Labuan Bajo and the rest of Flores, is vital and inevitable.

The exciting food scene in Labuan Bajo is enticing foodies to indulge in the diverse and lively cuisine on offer. From authentic Indonesian food like masakan padang and the incredibly fresh Flores seafood, often sold in buckets by the roadside to Japanese restaurants, fine Italian dining and American style burger joints, Labuan Bajo has something for everyone. The fish markets at the harbour have been attracting locals and tourists for years, who flock to buy the freshest seafood and enjoy the daily catch shown off by the market vendors. The markets are looking better than ever, after having undergone total facelift and having proper work stations installed to include running water and bins for waste management. The community have also closed off the roads into the markets so that stallholders can have alfresco cook out, enabling visitors to wander through the stalls to try the fresh catch, making the markets a major tourism drawcard.

The restaurants and eateries in Labuan Bajo are more conscious than ever of sustainability and responsible practices. They are sourcing fresh produce from local growers, removing single-use plastics from their businesses, and encouraging



patrons and staff to be more aware of these issues. This enhanced awareness is a positive step in managing the rapid development and progress in Labuan Bajo and ensuring a healthy and sustainable future for the island communities.

Similarly, there are groups all across Labuan Bajo and Flores, taking this responsibility and ownership seriously and working towards progressive and positive strategies to preserve the natural beauty of the region. Groups like DOCK Komodo and Trash Hero run regular education programs, and have established themselves as leaders in environmental best practices to benefit the whole community. Regular Clean-ups, the 'Save Money Save Komodo' campaign, plus water refill stations all over town, are helping to reduce the amount of plastic seen in Labuan Bajo.

Of notable mention is In this issue, we feature an article about the floating Hospital and their medical team from Labuan Bajo, who visit remote villages and provide life-saving care. This Team is also behind an initiative to introduce a groundbreaking new invention, a machine that could change the way we use plastics and recycle our rubbish. This incredible machine can convert plastics into fuel through a process of combustion that turns the plastic into gas. The gas is collected in a storage bottle, is then distilled, and turned into viable fuel. There is very little residue left behind from the plastics, and it emits zero toxic gases or pollution into the air. It could revolutionise the plastics, recycling and fuel industries, and is an incredibly exciting step towards a sustainable future.