



Fading Traditions of Java

A visual presentation of a selection
of traditions found on the island of Java

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*“Traditions bring continuity to one’s existence,
but this sort of continuity is precisely what
has been increasingly lost throughout modernity.”*
(Lars Fr. H. Svendsen, A Philosophy of Boredom)

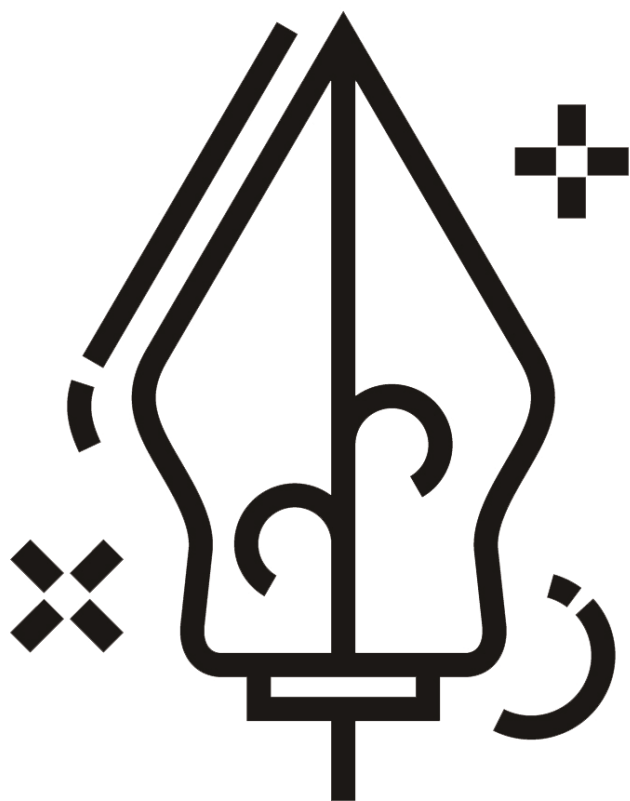




Ratna Susilawati, a young woman born and raised in Lelea village (Indramayu, West Java), is dressed up by one of the elderly women (Mrs Kanedah), for the upcoming *Ngarot* festival.

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Preface

I first became interested in photographing and documenting different cultures and traditions when I came to Indonesia in 1994. Mainly because the culture and traditions were so much different to where I came from, and 'those' traditions had almost vanished already. As I lived in Jakarta since I arrived in Indonesia, my main focus went to photographing traditions and landscapes found on the island of Java.

Over the years I collected quite a large database of photographs, and after having a close look at the photos in my database, I found that it consisted mainly of photos with a focus on local culture and traditions from the island of Java. For some time already, I had the desire to create a photo book, so I would have a physical representation of my work over time, so this is why I started to create a book about the traditions of Java. Also supported by a concern I have about the disappearance of cultures and traditions, and a desire to document still remaining traditions in a book. This way, people can learn about them, even in the future.

All the photos in this book were taken with a mirrorless digital camera from 2005 to 2022. Over the years I have received many help and guidance with regard to photography from local photographers and tutors, among others; Darwis Triadi, Risman Marah, Eky Tandy, Roy Genggam, Dewan Irawan, Rarindra Prakarsa, Ranar Pradipto and Andika Oky Arisandi. So I herewith would also like to thank them for all their help and guidance in photographing people and learning about the Indonesian culture.

I hope this book builds people's understanding about local traditions on the island of Java, and builds their interest in helping to preserve these local traditions, even though modernization is unstoppable. I also hope it contributes to the diversity of coffee table and photo books about Indonesia, and at the same time inspires people to produce photo documentation on Indonesian culture and traditions, and share the desire to create compelling books among Indonesian photographers.

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Introduction

About the island of Java

Formed by volcanic eruptions due to geologic subduction of the Australian Plate under the Sunda Plate, Java is the 13th largest island in the world and the fifth largest in Indonesia by landmass at about 138,800 square kilometres (53,600 sq mi). It is roughly the size of Britain. A chain of volcanic mountains is the east–west spine of the island.

Some 63 percent of the island is cultivated; 25 percent of the surface is devoted to wet-rice paddies. The northern coastal plain faces the shallow and busy Java Sea. Along the southern shore, plateaus fall sharply to the Indian Ocean. The Javanese homeland consists of the provinces of Central Java and East Java (minus the island of Madura) and the Special Region of Yogyakarta. Javanese have also settled for centuries along the northern coast of West Java, particularly in the area of Cirebon and Banten. Numbering between 60 million and 80 million people, the Javanese account for more than 40 percent of Indonesia's total population.

Four main languages are spoken on the island: Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese, and Betawi. Javanese and Sundanese are the most spoken. The ethnic groups native to the island are the Javanese in the central and eastern parts and Sundanese in the western parts. The Madurese in the Eastern salient of Java are migrants from Madura Island, while the Betawi in the capital city of Jakarta are hybrids from various ethnic groups in Indonesia. While the majority of the people of Java are Muslim, Java's population comprises people of diverse religious beliefs, ethnicities, and cultures.

So the main ethnic groups which can be found on the island are :

- * Javanese (incl. Tenggerese, Osing, Banyumasan),
- * Sundanese (incl. Baduy, Bantenese, Cirebonese),
- * Madurese (incl. Pandalungan),
- * Betawi

Indonesia's capital city, Jakarta, is on Java's northwestern coast. Many of the best known events in Indonesian history took place on Java. It was the centre of powerful Hindu-Buddhist empires, the Islamic sultanates, and the core of the colonial Dutch East Indies. Java was also the center of the

Indonesian struggle for independence during the 1930s and 1940s. Java dominates Indonesia politically, economically and culturally.

Traditions on the island of Java

Many traditional Javanese customs or festivals have their roots in the *Kebatinan (Kejawen)* belief. Javanese of other beliefs modify them accordingly, incorporating Muslim, Christian or Hindu prayers instead.

The many traditions can be divided into several groups :

- Ceremonies from birth to death (incl. pregnancy and marriage rituals)
- Ceremonies for certain important dates in the different religions
- Art & handicraft
- Clothing and dress
- Traditions in daily life (occupations) and pastime

Fading traditions

Development and industrialization on the island of Java has started a slow replacement of the old way of life with a modern one, mainly in the big cities but most likely being followed up by other more remote regions in the near future. Modernization is unavoidable, as people strive for a better world to live in. But it causes cultural traditions to fade or even vanish, and people become more and more afraid of losing them, until they become only memories...

This book hopes to show and document some of the traditions we can find on the island of Java. It is not the intention of the creator of this book to show them all, but just show an excerpt of the most interesting ones. The traditions shown in this book are grouped by : Daily life, Transport, Pastime, Art & crafts, Dress & ceremonies.



Map of Java

