

southern java -  
a 'then meets now' travel  
adventure



Java, one of the most densely populated patches on earth, is saturated with a rich and proud history and dramatic rural landscapes. Yet, it can still offer a place to surf with just you and a few of your mates.

**To surf and travel is the very essence of the longbreak ethos. As surfers, the pursuit of our passion of walking on water at breaks all over this planet is a given. However, wherever we tread has consequences both positive and negative. longbreak recently joined an Insearch Travel tour to the south coast of Java and found the interface between travellers and hosts a delicately balanced equation.**



## secret locations and shady takeoffs

As we drove, our host, guide and tour director, Paul Edmiston, explained the region, its culture and his philosophy on sustainable tourism – information that was to be the source of ongoing discussion throughout our southern Java journey.

Our journey officially started when seven people, from places as far apart as Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and Dubai, were met by Paul from Insearch Travel, on the steps of the arrival hall at Bundung Airport in the dead of night. Personal luggage and boards were stowed and a head count finally made, then we headed south for the coast in two vehicles weaving their way through the suburbs of a two million plus city located in northern central Java.

Paul explained that, when all is said and done, tourism is about bringing people together. Surfers travel to see and surf places and experience cultures different from their own, so, by its very nature, tourism celebrates cultural diversity. However, within the context of mainstream tourism, the interaction between host and guest is often restricted to the immediate environs of tourist enclaves. This limited exposure presents the mainstream tourist with only a

partial picture of the life and culture of the people in countries they visit. Detouring from the usual tourist trails by staying in coastal villages and interacting with the locals on a level where friendships can be made requires in-depth knowledge of the local area, customs and language that takes more time than most people can muster in preparation for a two week holiday.

This is where Insearch steps in with travel experiences that provide the infrastructure for interaction between the traveller and local communities.

Paul has been surfing and travelling the Indonesian archipelago since the late 80s and aims to offer experiences where



*Above:  
Via traditional stories, puppets are ready to  
comment on all matters political, religious  
and social.*

*Right and facing page:  
Ready to rest.*



the sense of discovery is similar to that experienced by the pioneering surf adventurers, but with the peace-of-mind of being in the hands of people who tie the whole thing together with a reasonable level of comfort. This is very much what he has achieved.

From the very first roadside stop for water and munchies to sustain us on our long drive, it was feet first into the local culture. When our linguistic attempts failed to negotiate our purchases, Paul was on hand with his fluent Indonesian. The following six-hour drive through a dark, moonless night and driving rain gave us no opportunity to connect with the passing environment. The hi-tech entertainment devices on board served to further disconnect us from our surroundings. When the dead of night came to a sudden end with the beam of lights from our hotel, we felt that we had been parachuted into our new environment.

With the early light of dawn accompanied by the call to prayer from the Mosques, assessment of our accommodation and wider surroundings became possible. We found that the road we had travelled literally ended at Pangandaran, a fishing village and coastal retreat for people from the hinterland. But, this was not to be the end of our journey, just a day-and-a-half stopover before being led to the promised land - a point break.

This interlude was not without its delights and rewards. Directly across from the hotel were long sweeping volcanic black sand beaches producing numerous breaks - not quality waves, but certainly of an acceptable standard to start the surf component of the trip.



*The size and location of the hotel places you right amongst the very essence and beauty of the rural and traditional lifestyles of Java.*

*Facing page:*

*A scene unchanged for centuries and able to be viewed countless times as you make your way through this beautiful region.*

*Above:*

*The harvest from the sea and the ever present coconut palm is ongoing and vital to the sustainability of the local economy.*

In stark contrast with these breaks was the wave on the other side of the point, at the end of the village and beneath a National Park. This was where we headed in a parade of people, long and short boards all transported by a collection of rustic beaks down the main village thoroughfare and along the foreshore to a river mouth.

Beyond the river mouth, over a small outcrop of limestone and past a disused Japanese gun emplacement, a relic of the Second World War, the beach went from volcanic black to coral shell white and, in only a matter of metres, green grey waters were replaced by crystal blue. Appreciation of the diversity of the place we had come to was beginning to dawn - all this and a reef break on the next point only a short walk and brief conversation away!

This break is surfed by a few locals and a handful of visitors and is easily approached on foot or by boat. Paddling from a shore entry out around the outside of the wave is quite simple and the boat approach is a laid back affair with little energy required to make your first wave, because the boat can safely get very close to the take-off zone.

Sheltered by the point from the Trade Winds, this wave can produce glass faces with lightning fast take-offs. The swell wraps around the point and hits a series of reefs and this can create some confusion in the take-off area. Time and discreet observation of the locals is required to help put you in the best zone. Your observation of the locals may reveal that they're not wearing booties but this should not be replicated - the reef is razor sharp and sections of this walling break will take you flashing across some extremely shallow ground.

*The locals prefer the waves produced by the afternoon low tide and this leaves open the possibility of a full tide early morning solo surfing session.*





Over the day-and-a-half of our stay, three sessions at this break provided long and short boarders alike with enough excitement to propel us enthusiastically on to the next section of our JavaSoul journey.

With the Insearch Travel ethos of cultural immersion in full swing, the journey from Pangandaran to a nearby coastal village was extended by several hours with diversions, both fascinating and truly spectacular. At one stop, tucked away amongst duck ponds, rice fields and Balsa trees, a puppet maker and performer took us into his artisan world of craftsmanship, complementing this with an impromptu performance overlaid by satire and a stinging wit. It's amazing how insightful and open a puppet can be on all matters religious, political and social!

Some 20 minutes later, this relatively intimate experience was trumped by the spectacular – like a Joseph Conrad moment or a scene from that legendary epic, *Apocalypse Now*. Secured in two motorised outrigger boats, we journeyed up-river through towering tropical gorges, trickling waterfalls and isolated dwellings to expansive caves and

*Spread:*

*A take-off beneath the trees and heading towards the next point and, just maybe, the second bay - if the knees can take it.*

*Above:*

*Low tide provides easy access for the visiting surfer and interesting grazing opportunities for local members of the dairy herd.*



deep emerald green swimming holes. No Marlon Brando or Kurtz seen, but all the ingredients were there.

Although this location felt like complete isolation, it was only a short journey to our ultimate destination - the local coastal village, home to our beachside accommodation and waves. All this and a surf in the same day? Yes!

This village is nestled along the shore of two large sweeping bays, each with a towering limestone, jungle-covered headland. The beaches are black but more loved and cared for than in many other parts of Asia. With swell rising up at the foot of the far point and marching sedately into the bay, this is what had been expected and was now delivered. This break has been described as 'the Noosa of Asia' - a fair description, but with delightful differences.

With not a rock in sight, entry to the water and break has a picnic atmosphere, especially if one has just walked through the trees from the village warung after a helping of mid-morning noodles and fresh mixed juice.

*Above:  
No fancy 4x4s required here, a gentle becak ride  
along the foreshore to the break.*

*Spread:  
A local puts a board borrowed from a visitor  
through its paces.*





The take-off zone is as individual as you will ever experience - in complete contrast with so many of the isolated, spooky, unforgiving places we have all attempted at some stage in our surfing life.

Here you can literally sit under the shade of a tree and wait for a wave. The Point's headland rises some 20 or so metres above the water and is covered with dense tropical vegetation from which trees reach out to overhang the bay in their quest for sunlight.

It is also very easy to factor in your own excitement by simply paddling further out around the headland and 'backdooring' the break. This aspect of the sport is practiced to an elite level by the few surfing locals. Their take-offs are so far behind the point of the headland it is more a case of 'back-gating' the wave.

Those of us who are not inclined to race the 70 or so metres across the front of a sheer cliff face, can easily pick off the slightly wider swells for a 400 metre journey across the bay. The wave quickly becomes ideal for cruising cut-backs, gentle sweeping turns, cross stepping trips to the nose and, as the second point looms into view, some speedy sand-bottom sections. Also, there is the added anticipation of the possibility of making it around the second point and off into the next bay for an extra 200-300 metres of ride.

A late-afternoon surf here can be truly magical. The black sand bottom reflects in the crystal clear water and it is as if you are surfing on waves made from sheets of black silk. During eight days spent surfing this location, The Point always produced a rideable and enjoyable wave. Two other

*Spread:*

*The headland and cliff not only supply the infrastructure for the wave to work, it also provides one of the best natural grandstands to view surfers riding this consistent and predictable point wave.*

*Retreating from the mid-winter  
chill of Victoria, Brendon steps out  
across the bay at The Point.*



breaks were also on offer. Aply named after the volcanic rock structure protruding from the beach directly in front of our hotel, The Reef was always good for a high tide session before breakfast. A 30-minute boat trip or bone-crunching motor bike ride of similar duration takes you to a powerful reef break. This is rarely surfed but has been visited and noted by the Quicksilver Crossing crew. This break is definitely for the more experienced and confident surfer.

The ability of Insearch Travel to put you in a good surf space is not just luck. It comes from years of experience on the ground in the region. The same applies to the accommodation and food, essential components for a satisfying and memorable surfing retreat.

Opposite the reef break there is a small hotel imaginatively named The Reef and Insearch Travel use this almost exclusively for their stays in this area. The Reef Hotel is new, small (maximum of 12 guests) and basic, but provides all that is required for a six to eight day stay.

Due to the size of The Reef, travelling in a group of similar size to ours, say seven to ten people, means that you tend to take over the premises so that it feels more like a large family house than paid accommodation.



The large indoor/outdoor reception area doubles as the eating area and looks directly across a small local road to the beach. This became the epicentre of all manner of activities for our group.

Spectacular feasts are not usually the expectation of a group of surf travellers but we were in for several surprises, all seafood centred. In both villages, at the local food markets and cafes, meals of an excellent standard were served. Freshly caught seafood cooked full of Javanese flavours were served in abundant quantities and at ridiculously cheap prices.

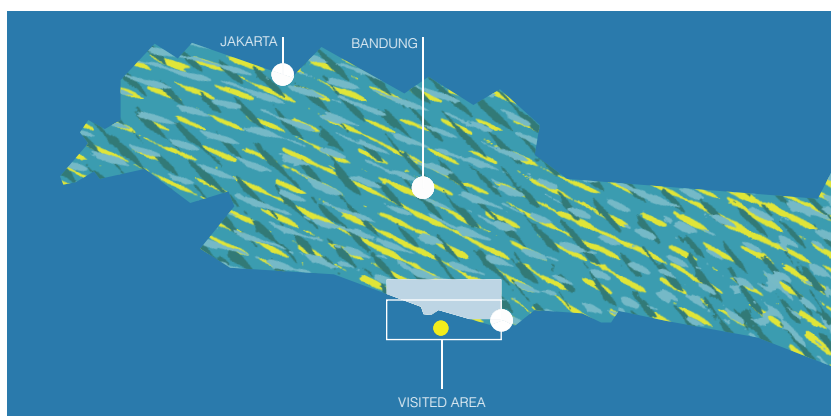
*It is very easy to dial in  
your own excitement  
factor. Simply position  
yourself on the inside  
of The Point and race  
across the cliff face.*

*Above and facing page:  
The cliff face negotiated, it's now time to set a  
course for the other side of the bay.*

*Left:  
A local screams across the cliff face and positions  
himself for the nice little cover-up section  
before the wall of the wave broadens out.*



## longbreak destination details: Java South Coast



### **SURF BREAKS**

Many of the breaks found in this area are not officially designated and are known by a variety of names.

### **Other activities**

Surfing was certainly the focus of our journey but this did not preclude the touring party from participating in the local scene. Our length of stay and the small size of the hotels, with their lack of division from the surrounding population and environs, certainly enhanced the opportunities for experiencing local life.

A typical day would be a sunrise surf at The Reef, then breakfast and debate about how to spend the middle of the day, whilst mindful of the fact that one had to be back for the low tide sunset surf at The Point.

Such debate often resulted in accepting an invitation from one of the locals to explore truly beautiful villages and rural landscapes. Under the reassuring approval of Paul, motor bikes with drivers were always at hand to provide transport and guidance. To avoid any irritating police road blocks, a standard feature in Indonesia, detours were frequently taken so that any sense of direction or ETA was completely lost by the traveller. We found the best approach was to not even try - just go with the flow. We found that we were amazed by the joys of the journey and the people we met.

### **Getting there**

If you have three months to spare and are fluent in Indonesian, with a good working knowledge of several local dialects, you could make your own way successfully to this special region.

If this is not the case, the best gateway to the region is through Insearch Travel.

Insearch's company director and tour manager, Paul Edmiston, has a degree in Asian Studies and has done postgraduate work on sustainable tourism in Indonesia, focusing on this particular region. He has the ability to make things happen at the pace and within the time frame required.

Insearch has developed several flexible packages designed for small groups of approximately four to six people. If you are travelling alone, it is reassuring to know that they put considerable time, effort and care into assembling groups of travelling companions to maximise compatibility.

Insearch can also access very competitive airfares from Garuda Indonesia for the Australia - Indonesia sector.

### **Destination Summary**

#### **Travelling to Java**

Commencement of the JavaSoul tour can either be from Australia and included in your Insearch Travel package or from Bandung, making your own way via Bali or Jakarta. Garuda has daily services to these destinations from Sydney Melbourne and Perth.

[www.garuda-indonesia.com](http://www.garuda-indonesia.com)

#### **Accommodation**

The Reef: Accommodation is twin share simple, clean and comfortable.

#### **Dining**

The Reef Hotel

Local fare is most acceptable

#### **Surf Breaks**

The Point, The Reef

#### **Optimum Surf Period**

February - July

### **Travel Tips**

JavaSoul is the product name of this 10-day package. It is recommended that you arrange a tailored package with a specialist such as Insearch Travel. Full details of the costing structures available from their website.

### **More Information**

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