

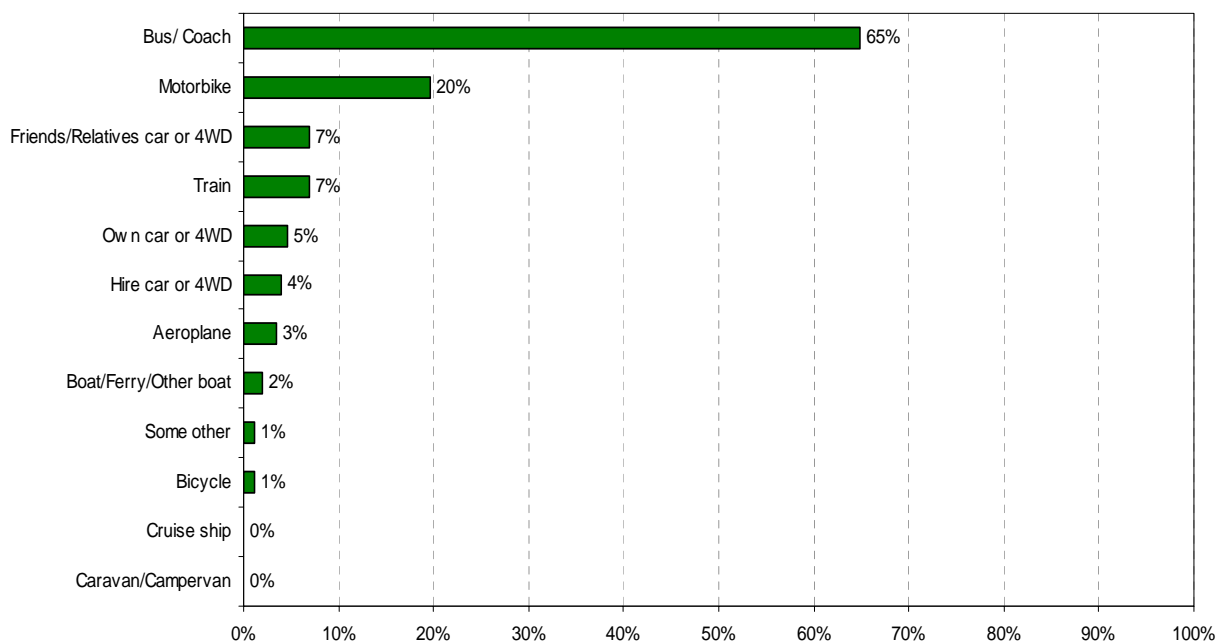
Tourism offers business opportunities second to none in Indonesia.

Like most people everywhere, most Indonesians spend their lives in their provinces without ever having travelled far away from home. Far is of course a relative term. All modes of transportation put together, about 13 per cent of the population travel beyond their daily routine, usually two or three percentage points higher than their intentions each year. That difference between intention and actual travel would be explained by unplanned trips for business or social reasons.

Only 3 per cent have used an airline to go anywhere during that period, domestic or international. They are the same 3 per cent who live the good life, they are the people who have the plastic cards, the new cars, the luxury holidays. But just over 1 per cent of all Indonesians have travelled overseas in the last 12 months, on business or pleasure, or both.

With two out of three Indonesians living on the world's most densely populated piece of real estate, the Javanese travel within the country more than any other islander in the archipelago. That's understandable, considering distances, the availability and cost of convenient transportation and the reality that most people have friends and relatives in neighbouring provinces if not their own. Buses are the most popular form of transportation even on holidays, with 65 per cent using the country's most popular set of wheels. Another 20 per cent of the population simply get the family to hop on to the motorbike and off they go on vacation. Yet another 7 per cent travel on holiday in the cars of friends and relatives. Just 2 per cent use a boat or ferry. Travel peaks around Lebaran, then Christmas.

Modes Of Transport Used On Last Holiday



These conclusions are based on Roy Morgan Single Source, the country's largest syndicated survey with over 27,000 Indonesian respondents annually, projected to reflect almost 90% of the population over the age of 14. That is a universe of 140 million people. The results are updated every 90 days. The opinions expressed are my own.

All holiday-makers, regardless of the distances they travel, make a significant contribution to the local economy. Not many industries make such a positive contribution to people from all walks of life. Even before the traveller has stepped onto that bus or plane, someone has sold a ticket, booked a room. The taxi-driver, the porter, the doorman, the chef, the waitress, the housekeeping staff all have a job to do. As does the craftsman, the shopkeeper, the boatman, the barmaid. The list goes on and on. If you trace the number of people a couple of tourists engage with everyday they are on holiday, it could run into the hundreds. That's good for employment.

It's also good in so many other incalculable ways. The exchange of views, the mingling not the clash of cultures, the sharing of natural beauty, the development of communal pride and purpose. No other industry promotes human values, the desire to live and let live, the urge to celebrate life more than tourism does. Spend a little time looking at Google Earth, zoom in on Indonesia, and you will discover pristine natural beauty that is breathtakingly beautiful. How many people have seen that beautiful beach off Padang? In contrast, how many have heard of its bigoted mayor who is inflicting his ignorance on Muslims and non-believers alike?

With tourism growing rapidly in Asia, Indonesia is lagging way behind its neighbours in developing this lucrative sector. In terms of tourist arrivals, even Vietnam is growing at a dramatic pace, while a Bali-centric Indonesia languishes. The world knows little more than Bali and most tourists to that particular haven don't make the connection with Indonesia as a whole. Yet, it could be argued that the undeveloped locales that Indonesia has to offer tourists would add up to more than all of its ASEAN neighbours' offerings, combined. On their own initiative, regional and local budget airlines appear to be doing more to develop travel and tourism than any other entity, including the cash-strapped Department of Tourism. But airline passengers who aren't visiting friends and relatives need hotels, food and beverages, attractions and activities, shopping and nightlife. Some, or all of the above. Equally important is the need for a tourist-friendly local government that has its citizens' welfare at the top of their agenda, not their own bigotry.

Here is an open invitation to put a coalition of the willing together to do some good and make money, at the same time. Would an interested official from the department of Tourism, a provincial government, a bank and BKPM please raise his or her hand? An email to this writer from all of the above would be met by more-than-equal enthusiasm by a group of capable, experienced investors to bring about a textbook execution of a new resort that all concerned would be proud of. Challenged to put my energy where my mouth is by some readers of this column, I would join this coalition and dedicate as much time as I can to bring an eco-friendly, socially-responsible resort to fruition, somewhere in Indonesia. It can be done. With better dividends, in every way, than any new shopping mall could offer.



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