

Exploring Indonesia: Society, History, Culture, and Politics

ASIA-3500 (3 credits)

Indonesia: Arts, Religion & Social Change

This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description

This interdisciplinary course offers a comprehensive introduction to the vibrant and complex archipelago nation of Indonesia. Spanning thousands of islands and home to hundreds of distinct ethnic groups, languages, and cultural traditions, Indonesia presents a fascinating case study in diversity, historical transformation, and political development. The course delves into Indonesia's rich and layered history, tracing the influence of early kingdoms, the arrival of Islam, the impact of European colonialism, the struggle for independence, and the tumultuous periods of nation-building and political transition. Through this course, students will gain a multifaceted understanding of Indonesia's remarkable complexity and its significance in the contemporary world.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. **Describe** the key geographical and environmental features of the Indonesian archipelago and their influence on Indonesian society
2. **Analyze** the major periods and turning points in Indonesia's history, from ancient kingdoms to the present day
3. **Identify** and discuss the diverse ethnic groups, languages, and cultural traditions of Indonesia
4. **Analyze** the key features of Indonesia's political system and its evolution
5. **Evaluate** the challenges and opportunities facing Indonesia in its ongoing development and democratization
6. **Understand** Indonesia's growing role in regional and international affairs

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English.

Instructional Methods

SIT's philosophy of education is rooted in experiential learning model, which drives the design of this class. Each module allows for experience, reflection, and application. Experiences range from critical analyses of datasets to site visits and conversations with local experts. These experiences are framed by readings, multimedia texts, and class discussion. Reflection occurs throughout the learning process in various forms, such as verbal debriefs after learning on location experiences to reflexive components in papers/projects. Through reflection, students are encouraged to become aware of their process of learning, to make sense of their experiences, and connect the learning acquired on the program with previous experiences and information. Application activities reinforce learning by practicing communication skills, experimenting with theories, and preparing to transfer learning to future contexts.

Course Readings

**These are sample readings. Individual instructors may adapt as necessary.*

Acciaoli, G. (1985). Culture as art: From practice to spectacle in Indonesia. *Canberra Anthropology*, 8(1-2), 148-172.

Cribb, R., & Brown, C. (1995). Modern indonesia. *A History since 1945*.

Geertz, C. (1984). Culture and social change: the Indonesian case. *Man*, 511-532.

Jackson, K. D. (1978). The political implications of structure and culture in Indonesia. *Political power and communications in Indonesia*, 23-42.

Li, T. M. (1999). Compromising power: Development, culture, and rule in Indonesia. *Cultural anthropology*, 14(3), 295-322.

Li, T. M. (2000). Articulating indigenous identity in Indonesia: Resource politics and the tribal slot. *Comparative studies in society and history*, 42(1), 149-179.

Mangundjaya, W. L. (2013). Is there cultural change in the national cultures of Indonesia?.

Moser, S. (2008). *Performing national identity in postcolonial Indonesia* (Doctoral dissertation, National University of Singapore).

Nordholt, H. S. (2003). Renegotiating boundaries: Access, agency and identity in post-Soeharto Indonesia. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, land-en Volkenkunde*, 159(4), 550-589.

Nordholt, H. S. (2008). Identity politics, citizenship and the soft state in indonesia: an essay. *Journal of Indonesian Social Sciences and Humanities*, 1, 1-21.

Schefold, R. (1998). The domestication of culture: Nation-building and ethnic diversity in Indonesia. *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land-en volkenkunde*, 154(2), 259-280.

Steelyana, E. (2012). Batik, A beautiful cultural heritage that preserve culture and support economic development in Indonesia. *Binus Business Review*, 3(1), 116-130.

Steinhauer, H. (1980). On the history of Indonesian. *Studies in Slavic and general linguistics*, 1, 349-375.

Course Assignments

Class Participation (10%)

Students are expected to be physically and mentally present for all classes. To prepare for class, students should critically read the assigned texts prior to each class and come prepared with relevant questions and insights.

Reflective Journal & Analysis (20%)

Students are expected to submit 4 journal entries throughout the semester (250-500 words each) that include a reflection on class discussions, site visits, readings, and any additional experiences that may be relevant. Students can choose which weeks to submit.

Oral History Project (20%)

Students will interview a local community member, focusing on a specific issue relevant to their interests (e.g., traditional knowledge preservation, climate change adaptation, cultural heritage preservation, the role of the arts or religion). Students must submit interview questions in advance, for review and approval from the program director. Students will submit the interview transcript and create a poster presentation to share with the class, to represent what they learned through the oral history project.

Museum Analysis Paper (20%)

Students will visit a local museum of their choice to analyze the exhibits in relation to the class discussions and readings. Paper should be 5-6 pages in length, drawing on 5-6 academic sources.

Interactive Museum Exhibit: Group Project (30%)

In pairs or small groups, students will design a virtual or physical museum exhibit on a chosen theme related to Indonesia. This could involve creating interactive displays, writing interpretive text, selecting artifacts or images, and considering the visitor experience.

Note on Attendance and Participation: Due to the nature of this experiential program, full participation in all classes and program activities is required. Students may not voluntarily opt out of required program activities. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be discussed with the Program Director or other designated staff person. Absences impact

academic performance, which may impact grades. Excessive, unexcused absences could result in program dismissal. Alternative work for absences will be expected.

Note on Late Assignments: IHP programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program. Extensions may be granted on a case-by-case basis with approval from the Program Director or other designated staff person. Requests must be made in writing and at least 12 hours before the posted due date and time. Students who do not submit their work within the extension period will receive a failing grade.

Grading Scale

94-100%	A	74-76%	C
90-93%	A-	70-73%	C-
87-89%	B+	67-69%	D+
84-86%	B	64-66%	D
80-83%	B-	below 64	F
77-79%	C+		

Program Expectations

In order to make the most of the opportunities presented in program, communicate respectfully, prepare for student success, and demonstrate best possible engagement, SIT has the following expectations of students:

- **Content Considerations:** The texts and activities you will encounter in this course delve into sensitive topics that may be emotionally and intellectually challenging. Our classroom is a space where we can engage with challenging ideas, question assumptions, and navigate difficult topics with respect and maturity. As possible, I will flag content and activities that are especially graphic or intense, so we are prepared to address them soberly and sensitively. If you are struggling to keep up with the work or participate in the course because of the nature of the content and activities, you should speak with me and/or seek help from counseling services.
- **Learning Community:** Respect differences of opinion (classmates', lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across differences and consider other perspectives with respect.

- **Presence.** Show up prepared. Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.
- **Engage.** Ask questions in class. Interact with the lecturer. These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.
- **Be Honest.** Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- **Store Your Work:** Keep several copies of your work as back up and keep one copy accessible to you through an online forum, such as an attachment in your email, the course learning management system, or cloud-based storage. This way your work will always be available despite technical issues. Lost files, deleted drives, or computer crashes are not excuses for late, missing work.
- **Personal Technology Use:** Cell phones and other personal electronics can be used for taking notes and other class activities. Off-task usage is not acceptable, especially during a guest lecture or presentation from a peer. You may be marked as absent for habitually using them for something other than classroom activities.
- **Course Communication:** Course documents and assignments will be posted on the learning management system, Canvas. Although the course calendar provides a broad overview and the general sequence of work and assignments for the course, what we accomplish in class will vary, and revisions to the calendar will be posted at the course site. You will need to check the course site regularly. You are responsible for letting me know about any network-related problems that prevent you from accessing or submitting assignments.
- **Recording Policy:** To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use. Documented academic accommodations may supersede this policy.

SIT Policies and Resources

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#) section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field

study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [Accessibility Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.

Course Schedule

**Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs*

Note: This is a suggested sequence of modules and topics where each location explores parallel modules with a comparative focus. Local faculty should appropriately adapt how these topics are taught and select local texts, case studies, guest speakers, and site visits that are relevant to the context and course themes.

Class 1: Course introduction

- Review of syllabus, assignments, expectations
- Overview of key course concepts

Class 2: Geography of the Indonesian archipelago

- Explore Indonesia's vast and diverse physical geography, including its volcanic activity, climate zones, and maritime environment
- Analyze how these geographical features have shaped the distribution of populations, economic activities, and cultural development across the islands

Class 3: Early Kingdoms and key historical turning points

- Examine the rise and influence of significant early kingdoms and empires across the archipelago.
- Identify pivotal moments and external influences, such as the arrival of major religions, that transformed Indonesian societies before European contact.

Class 4: European colonialism in Indonesia

- Investigate the arrival and impact of European powers, and its impact on European society

- Discuss the economic exploitation, social hierarchies, and political structures imposed during the colonial period and their lasting legacies

Class 5: Indonesian nationalist movement & independence

- Trace the emergence and evolution of the Indonesian nationalist movement
- Analyze the struggle for independence against the Dutch and the key figures and events that led to the proclamation of an independent Indonesia

Class 6: National-building and authoritarianism

- Examine the challenges of unifying a diverse nation post-independence, including political instability and regional rebellions
- Analyze the rise of authoritarian rule under Suharto's New Order, its characteristics, and its impact on Indonesian society and economy.

Class 7: Diversity of Indonesian society, ethnic groups, cultural traditions

- Explore the immense ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity that defines Indonesia, home to hundreds of distinct groups
- Discuss the rich tapestry of cultural traditions and daily life, that vary across the archipelago

Class 8: Oral History poster presentations

- See assignment details above

Class 9: National identity & regionalism

- Analyze the complex interplay between a unified Indonesian national identity and strong regional affiliations
- Discuss how historical, cultural, and political factors shape the ongoing negotiation between national belonging and local distinctiveness

Class 10: Indonesian foreign policy

- Examine the core principles and historical trajectory of Indonesia's "free and active" foreign policy
- Discuss Indonesia's role in regional organizations (e.g., ASEAN) and its growing influence in global affairs

Class 11: Museum Exhibit Presentations

- See assignment details above