



YAYASAN EKOWISATA (INDONESIAN ECOTOURISM NETWORK)

The Indonesia village of Waerebo provides an idyllic mountain setting for its seven traditional thatched 'Mbaru Niang' houses. These are home to 25 families, who continue their indigenous lifestyle farming the surrounding fields for coffee.

Beautiful as it is, however, Waerebo is also very

remote. It's a four hour's walk to the nearest village with any access to motorised transport. From there it's a seven hour drive to Bajo, the capital city and main tourist entry point on the island of Flores. And Flores itself is some 1500km east of Jakarta, the Indonesian capital. This makes sustaining a livelihood - and thus giving the young a reason to stay - a challenge.

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By 2007, only 3 out of the 7 houses remained intact. Thankfully at that point, a local NGO called Indecon (Indonesian Ecotourism Network) began working in the village refurbishing the houses. By encouraging the preservation of these houses, Indecon was also securing the protection of the surrounding forest, as the villagers needed it to remain intact to ensure a supply of bamboo and rattan, the materials from which their houses were made.

At the same time as preserving the village's physical heritage, Indecon helped develop Waerebo's potential to generate an income for its residents through community-based sustainable tourism. Today, guests come from all over the world to stay here and to enjoy trips such as A Journey of a Cup of Coffee.

They spend the day trekking through the plantations to pick coffee beans, then follow the bean all the way through to the grinding and packaging stages. In 2008 Waerebo saw 155 tourists. In the first 10 months of 2014, it welcomed 2,100.

It's just one story from Indecon's 20 years spent promoting ecotourism across the islands of Indonesia. Whether helping locals address environmental degradation due to illegal logging, or turning around the loss of heritage, the organisation has enabled many local communities to maintain their sense of place by preserving their culture and sharing it with foreign visitors.

