

MAGICAL MEDAN

**Immerse yourself within the city's heritage and
surrounding scenery, in the heart of North Sumatra**

By Randy Mulyanto





Across Indonesia, the world's largest archipelagic nation of over 17,000 islands and more than 280 million people, there is no shortage of breathtaking landscapes and cities embedded in rich history waiting to be explored. Among the list is Medan, the country's third most populous city with over 2.4 million people, which is also the provincial capital of North Sumatra, and sits on one of the largest islands on the planet.

Medan is home to various ethnic groups, which, just like in other Indonesian provinces, symbolise the country's 'Unity in Diversity' motto. Aside from the indigenous tribes of Sumatra, the city also sees ethnic Arab, Chinese, Indian and other communities living side by side and leaving their footprint in this part of Southeast Asia.

As Etihad Airways starts its direct flights to Medan this month, marking the airline's first Sumatran route and third Indonesian destination after the capital Jakarta and world-renowned island of Bali, here is what you need to know before setting foot in the city.

A journey through history

From the sultanate era to the Dutch colonisation period and waves of ethnic migration, Medan witnessed pivotal moments of history that shaped the city's heritage and identity.

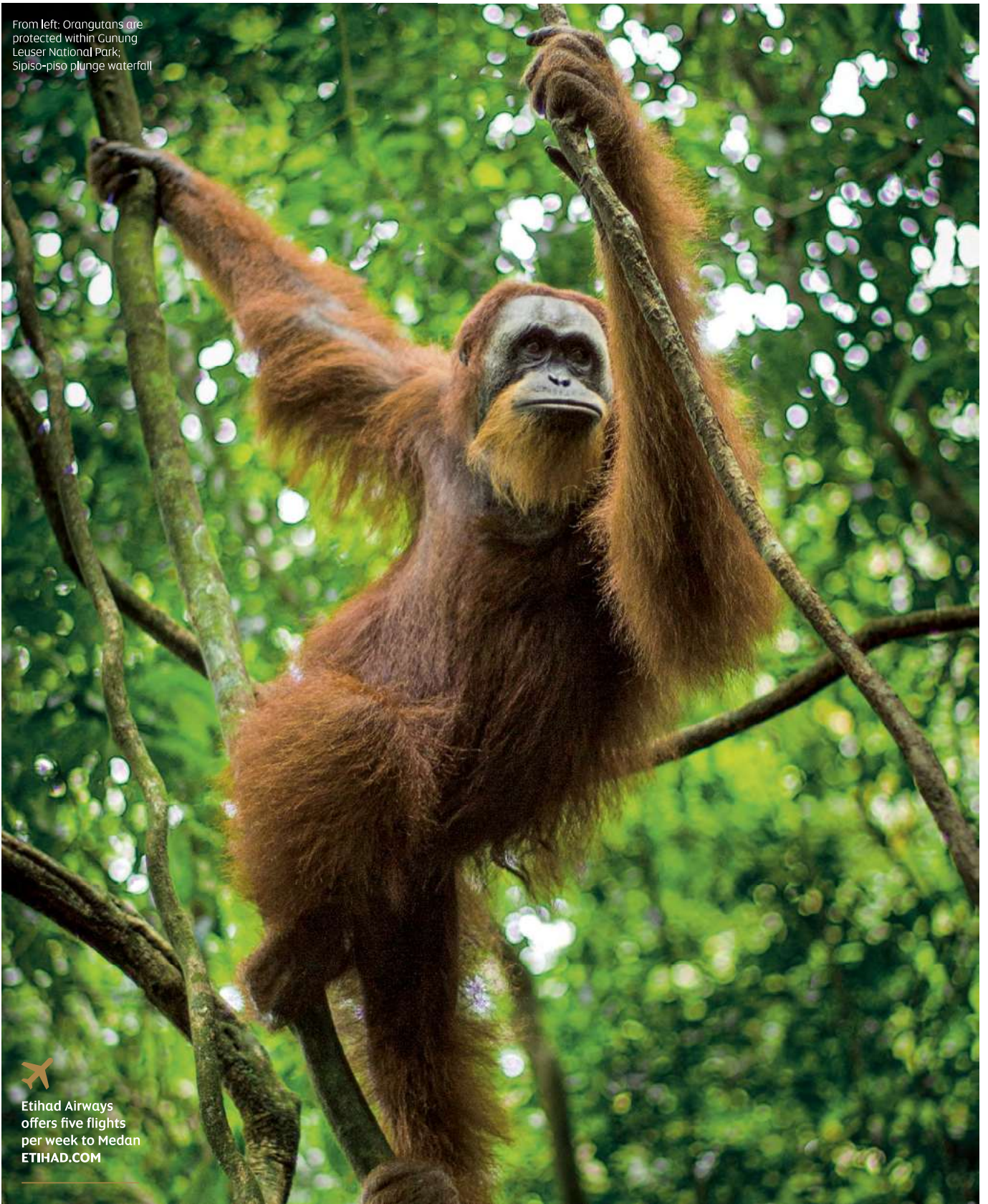




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Previous spread: Lake
Toba and surrounds
Clockwise from top left:
Tjong A Fie Mansion;
The historic Warenhuis
building, which is popular
for photo stops; Inside
Maimoon Palace

From left: Orangutans are
protected within Gunung
Leuser National Park;
Sipiso-piso plunge waterfall



Etihad Airways
offers five flights
per week to Medan
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Recognised by its yellow exterior, Maimoon Palace was established by the Sultan of Deli in the late 19th century, and is currently a museum. One of Medan's main attractions, it incorporates Malay, Mughal and European influences. Near the palace sits the octagonal Grand Mosque of Medan (also known as the Al-Mashun Grand Mosque), built in the early 20th century.

Still in downtown Medan, the white façade of Warenhuis building stood against Dutch rule before Indonesia's independence in 1945, which also makes a photo stop background for first-time visitors.

Built near the end of the 1800s, Tjong A Fie Mansion features Chinese, Malay and Art Deco elements in its architecture. Now a museum that commemorates his life, the namesake migrated from dynastic-era China to the then-Dutch East Indies, where he later made a fortune and gave back to the local population.

Consider joining any of the "pay as you wish" walking tours organised by Medan Good Guide, a local unit of the Jakarta Good Guide set up earlier in the Indonesian capital, or plan a private tour with the company and stroll around some of the city's local neighbourhoods.

Nature on your doorstep

Venture outside the city to explore some of Sumatra's most dramatic panoramas. One of the ways is to meet the protected orangutans by trekking around their natural habitat in the tropical rainforests of Gunung Leuser National Park, starting from Bukit Lawang, a riverside village a few hours away from Medan.

Yet, Lake Toba shines as the crown jewel. With over 450 metres in depth, one of the world's deepest, the crater lake has an island almost as big as Singapore in the centre, after what was believed to be the massive volcanic blast some 74,000 years ago.

For a starter, head overland from Medan to the lakeside town of Parapat for about three to four hours, and then take a boat to the island and experience the indigenous Batak culture. While heading to Parapat, make a stop at the Berastagi fruit market to taste the local harvest. Witness the 120-metre Sipiso-piso plunge waterfall – and consider that as a prelude to the lake.

While you are at it, enjoy the lake for four hours on Phinisi Kenzo (a type of Indonesian sailing vessel). There are water sports options if you're feeling adventurous, too. Thinking of staying the night? Sleep inside one of the Bobocabin cabins, then wake up to the view in the morning, or hike the caldera. Take your time to surround yourself in the world's largest volcanic lake – and celebrate what life has to offer.