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Moving to Surabaya

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Table of Contents

- **Introduction**
- **Chapter 1** Starting Your Surabaya Journey
- **Chapter 2** Navigating the Climate: Surviving the Sun and Showers
- **Chapter 3** Dollars and Rupiahs: Understanding the Cost of Living
- **Chapter 4** House Hunting: A Guide to Finding the Perfect Nest
- **Chapter 5** Getting Around: A Hitchhiker's Guide to Surabaya
- **Chapter 6** Job Market Jamboree: Career Opportunities for Expats
- **Chapter 7** Educating Your Young Einsteins
- **Chapter 8** Healthcare Hustle: Keeping Fit and Fine
- **Chapter 9** Cultural Etiquette: Surviving Smiles and Sarongs
- **Chapter 10** Cracking the Culinary Code
- **Chapter 11** Shop Till You Drop: Malls and Markets
- **Chapter 12** Nightlife Narratives: When Surabaya Comes Alive
- **Chapter 13** Safety First: Staying Secure in Surabaya
- **Chapter 14** Visa and Immigration: Playing the Paperwork Game
- **Chapter 15** Setting Up Home Base: All About Utilities and Connectivity
- **Chapter 16** Discovering Local Landmarks and Hidden Gems
- **Chapter 17** Weekend Escapes: Beyond Surabaya's Borders
- **Chapter 18** Red Tape Rumbles: Navigating Bureaucratic Hurdles
- **Chapter 19** Bridging Language Barriers: From Bahasa to Javanese
- **Chapter 20** Embracing the Festivals and Public Holidays
- **Chapter 21** The Expat Community: Building Your Tribe
- **Chapter 22** Kids and Family Life in Surabaya
- **Chapter 23** Weird and Wonderful: Adjusting to Cultural Quirks
- **Chapter 24** Dot Your I's and Cross Your T's: Documentation and Admin
- **Chapter 25** The Adventure Continues: Becoming a Local

Introduction

Welcome, adventurous globetrotters and brave domestic wanderers, to the enticing and somewhat unpredictable world of Surabaya! Located on the northeastern coast of Java island, Surabaya is far from just a dot on the map; it's a pulsating, spirited city full of life, history, and opportunities waiting to be explored. Whether you're relocating across oceans or just hopping islands, this guide is your ultimate cheat sheet to thriving in the Surabaya area, a comprehensive decoding of this Indonesian enigma.

Now, before you dive headfirst into packing boxes and booking flights, let's get one thing straight - Surabaya isn't your one-size-fits-all metropolis. It's a place where colonial nostalgia meets modern hustle, where traditional markets buzz alongside glossy malls, and each day promises a new story to tell. Our mission here is to navigate through this charming chaos and give you the insiders' lowdown on making Surabaya your home, sweet home!

But hold those horses! A quick word about the ever-evolving nitty-gritty - laws, regulations, and a few unforeseen quirks. Policies can often morph quicker than you can say "Rujak Cingur," so as we embark on this journey, remember to always check the latest from government portals or consult residents who've walked these paths before you. Our guide plants your feet on solid ground, but the radar for change is all yours!

In the pages that follow, we promise not to bore you with the basics of boxes and bubble wraps that your well-traveled self is already acquainted with. Instead, we'll share chuckles and insights about Surabaya's distinct vibes, from housing hacks to foodie finds, and cultural tidbits to transport tricks. You'll uncover secrets known only to those who dare to dig deeper into this heroic city.

Our tone? Light-hearted and fun - because moving is serious enough without the guide reading like a legal treatise. Yet, we aim to be as informative and practical as we are engaging. Consider us your companion in this thrilling ride, equipped with humor and realism, always with the intent to equip, enlighten, and amuse you as you transition into Surabayan life.

With that, let's set sail on this extraordinary adventure! Surabaya is a city that embraces its past while striding into a promising future, and by choosing to move here, you're writing yourself into its ever-evolving story. So fasten your seatbelts, and let's explore what this vibrant city of heroes has in store for you. Welcome to the heart of East Java!

CHAPTER ONE: Starting Your Surabaya Journey

So, you've decided to take the plunge. Surabaya! The very name probably conjures images gleaned from quick internet searches – perhaps the iconic shark and crocodile statue, snippets of bustling streets, or maybe just a vague sense of "Indonesia's second city." Excellent. You've passed the first hurdle: choosing a destination that isn't the default Jakarta or the tourist-saturated paradise of Bali. Opting for Surabaya suggests a certain discerning taste, an appetite for the authentic, or perhaps just a really good job offer. Whatever your reason, consider this chapter your orientation briefing, the conversation you have *before* you even think about which suitcase holds the essentials and which one is mysteriously full of packing peanuts.

First things first: let's talk reconnaissance. As an experienced mover, you know the drill – research, research, research. But researching Surabaya requires a slightly different lens. Forget glossy tourism brochures designed to lure fleeting visitors. You need the lowdown for someone putting down roots, however temporary. Start by virtually walking the streets. Google Maps and Street View offer a decent starting point, letting you explore neighborhoods from the relative comfort of your current location. Notice the blend of architecture, the density of traffic (even in static images, you can *feel* it), the ubiquitous street vendors, and the sheer vibrant chaos that characterizes much of the city. But remember, Street View rarely ventures down the narrow *gang* (alleys) where much of local life unfolds, nor does it capture the sounds, smells, and sticky heat – those sensory delights await your arrival.

Beyond the digital pavement-pounding, delve into online communities. Facebook groups dedicated to Surabaya expats, forums, and blogs can be goldmines of information, provided you approach them with a healthy dose of skepticism. Remember, online forums often attract those with strong opinions, both positive and negative. One person's nightmare commute might be another's daily dose of local color. Use these platforms to ask specific, practical questions – "Which internet provider is least likely to induce rage in the Darmo area?" or "Where can I find decent sourdough bread that doesn't require a second mortgage?" – rather than broad queries like "Is Surabaya nice?" You'll get more useful intel and avoid the inevitable comment wars. Try connecting with people directly if possible; a quick video call with someone already living there can provide insights no blog post can capture.

Consider the timing of your arrival. Sure, Surabaya's weather has its wet and dry seasons (more on that meteorological rollercoaster in Chapter 2), but there are other temporal factors to weigh. Planning your landing smack-bang in the middle of the Idul Fitri holiday, for instance, might seem like a good idea for soaking up culture, but it's also when much of the country is on the move (*mudik*), services slow down, many

shops close, and finding reliable help for moving or setting up can be... challenging. Imagine trying to get a bed delivered when the entire delivery crew has gone back to their home village for a week. Similarly, the peak rainy season months (usually December to March) can occasionally bring localized flooding (*banjir*) in certain areas, making navigating the city and moving bulky items an exercise in aquatic logistics. Arriving during the drier months (around May to October) often makes the initial settling-in process smoother, logistically speaking, although you trade the rain for potentially more intense heat. If you have children, aligning your move with school term dates (covered in Chapter 7) is obviously paramount.

Now, let's calibrate your expectations. This is crucial. Surabaya is not Singapore with cheaper food. It's not Jakarta-lite. It's Surabaya – proud, industrious, historically significant, and operating on its own unique rhythm. It's the "City of Heroes" (*Kota Pahlawan*), a title earned through fierce struggle, and that spirit of resilience and perhaps a touch of stubbornness permeates the local culture. Things might not always happen with clockwork precision. Appointments might be subject to *jam karet* ("rubber time"), infrastructure might occasionally hiccup, and navigating bureaucratic processes (oh, Chapter 18, we see you) can feel like a game of snakes and ladders designed by Kafka. Embrace the chaos, cultivate patience, and learn to laugh when your perfectly laid plans go spectacularly awry because a sudden tropical downpour has turned your street into a temporary canal. This adaptability is your superpower here. The upside? Surabayans are generally known for their friendliness, directness (sometimes surprisingly so, compared to the Javanese stereotype of indirectness), and warmth. The perceived lack of overt slickness is often replaced by genuine helpfulness and curiosity. Don't expect things to work exactly like they did back home; expect them to work in the Surabaya way.

Before you commit to a year-long lease based on enticing online photos, you'll need a temporary base camp. Surabaya offers a range of options for those first few weeks. International hotel chains provide familiar comforts, reliable Wi-Fi, and often staff accustomed to dealing with foreigners. They can be found clustered in central business areas and near major malls. However, staying solely within the hotel bubble won't give you much feel for real life. Serviced apartments are another popular choice, offering more space, kitchen facilities (useful for saving money and avoiding restaurant fatigue), and a semblance of home. Do your due diligence here – check recent reviews, clarify what "serviced" actually entails (daily cleaning or weekly?), and ideally, get photos of the *actual* unit you'll be renting, not just the glossy brochure shots of the penthouse suite. Consider location carefully for this initial stay. Being close to potential work locations, schools, or neighborhoods you're interested in for long-term housing makes the subsequent reconnaissance much easier than if you're stuck out near the airport. Areas like Surabaya Pusat (Central) offer good access to many parts of the city, while Surabaya Barat (West) might appeal if you're targeting the upscale residential estates and international schools there.

Let's talk pre-move paperwork and prep, the Surabaya edition. You know about sorting visas (a beast we'll tackle in Chapter 14), but consider document translation. While English is used in many business contexts, official dealings often require documents in Bahasa Indonesia. Identifying birth certificates, marriage certificates, or professional qualifications that might need certified translation *before* you leave can save significant hassle later. Don't assume your existing translations will automatically be accepted; Indonesian authorities can sometimes be particular about formats and accredited translators. Also, health checks. While Chapter 8 details the local healthcare landscape, getting a thorough check-up and any recommended vaccinations *before* you depart is wise. Discuss your move to East Java with your doctor; they might recommend specific immunizations based on WHO guidelines or your personal health profile. It's easier to manage this in a familiar healthcare system.

Think about your finances for the landing phase. While major credit cards are accepted in hotels, malls, and upscale restaurants, cash remains king in Surabaya, particularly for taxis (local ones, not app-based), local eateries (*warung*), markets, and smaller shops. Arriving with some Indonesian Rupiah (IDR) in hand is essential for those initial expenses like airport transport or a quick meal. ATMs are widely available, but informing your home bank about your travel plans is crucial to avoid blocked cards. Don't plan on easily opening a local bank account on day one; that process typically requires residency proof (like your KITAS) and can take time (more in Chapter 15). So, have a multi-pronged strategy: some cash, multiple bank cards (stored separately), and perhaps a travel-friendly online banking card.

And what about your precious belongings? Shipping furniture and household goods internationally to Surabaya is entirely possible, but it involves navigating Indonesian customs, which can be... an adventure. Regulations regarding import duties, taxed items, and prohibited goods can be complex and subject to change. This is one area where engaging an experienced international moving company with a strong track record specifically in Indonesia, and ideally Surabaya, is worth its weight in gold (or Sambal). They will be better equipped to handle the paperwork, potential inspections, and logistical hurdles at the Port of Tanjung Perak. Trying to manage this yourself remotely is often a recipe for frustration, delays, and unexpected costs. Seriously consider what you *really* need to bring versus what can be purchased locally. Surabaya has massive malls and local furniture makers catering to all budgets. Bringing every teaspoon you own might be more trouble than it's worth.

Let's touch briefly on language, though Chapter 19 will get into the nitty-gritty. While you might survive in expat bubbles or international workplaces using only English, your experience of Surabaya will be exponentially richer if you learn at least basic Bahasa Indonesia. Unlike heavily touristed areas where English is almost expected, in many parts of Surabaya – markets, local government offices, interactions with drivers or household staff – Indonesian is the primary mode of communication. Showing

you've made an effort, even with just greetings (*Selamat pagi/siang/sore/malam*), thank you (*terima kasih*), and please (*tolong*), goes a long way in building rapport. Don't worry about perfect grammar initially; enthusiasm and effort are appreciated. Download a translation app, grab a phrasebook, or start some online lessons before you arrive. You'll hear plenty of the local Javanese dialect (Suroboyoan) too, known for being more direct and distinct, but standard Indonesian will serve you well everywhere.

Setting the right mental stage also involves understanding *why* you chose Surabaya, or reinforcing that reason if the choice was made for you. Is it for a career opportunity in one of its thriving industries like trade, manufacturing, or logistics? Is it to experience a slice of authentic Javanese urban culture away from the international spotlight? Is it the lower cost of living compared to Jakarta (which we'll dissect in Chapter 3)? Keep that primary motivation in mind. Surabaya isn't trying to be Bali; it doesn't have beaches littered with surf schools and yoga retreats. It's a working city, a hub of commerce, a place with deep historical roots, particularly relating to Indonesia's independence struggle. Its charms are perhaps less immediate but arguably more substantial for those willing to look. It rewards curiosity and engagement. You won't find ancient temples on every corner, but you will find a vibrant culinary scene (Chapter 10!), sprawling shopping complexes (Chapter 11!), and the gateway to fascinating East Java excursions (Chapter 17!).

Preparing for the sensory input is also part of the journey. Surabaya is alive. It's noisy – the constant hum of motorbikes, the calls to prayer reverberating from mosques, the cheerful shouts of street vendors, the Cici helping you park your car with shouts and whistles. It's aromatic – the tempting smell of grilling satay mingling with the less-tempting aroma of clogged drains during the rainy season, the sweet scent of kretek cigarettes, the fragrance of tropical flowers. It's visually stimulating – a kaleidoscope of colors, textures, old colonial buildings leaning against modern glass towers, rivers flowing through the city, bustling markets overflowing with goods. It can feel intense, especially initially. Give yourself time to acclimatize. Don't feel pressured to see and do everything in the first week. Find a comfortable local coffee shop, order an *es kopi susu* (iced coffee with milk and palm sugar), and just watch the world go by. Observation is a powerful tool in the early days.

Finally, remember that even as an experienced mover, every new place presents unique challenges and learning curves. What worked seamlessly during your move to Frankfurt or Singapore might need tweaking for Surabaya. Bureaucracy might have familiar elements but with uniquely Indonesian twists (Chapter 18 will brace you). Cultural etiquette (covered in Chapter 9) will have its own nuances. Approach the initial phase with humility and an open mind. Ask questions, be observant, and don't be afraid to admit when you're confused or need help. Indonesians generally appreciate politeness and efforts to understand their culture. Starting your Surabaya journey isn't just about unpacking boxes; it's about unpacking a whole new way of life

in a city that reveals its character layer by layer. Welcome aboard!

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