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# Moving to Bandung

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## Introduction

Welcome to Bandung! Whether you're moving from inside Indonesia or traveling from overseas, this guide will help you navigate the quirks and charms of relocating to the heart of West Java. Beware: this isn't your run-of-the-mill moving guide, and we assume you're already versed in the universal truths of moving boxes, choosing a new living room rug, and the occasional existential crisis. Instead, we dive directly into what makes Bandung tick—or occasionally, what makes Bandung's roads seem to move at a slow crawl.

Bandung, often dubbed "Parijs van Java," is far more than its colonial aspirations might suggest. Strategically located amongst the lush volcanic hills of West Java, Bandung's mix of cultural heritage, academic acclaim, and tantalizing cuisine (watch out for the sambal, it bites back!) makes it a fantastic, albeit sometimes baffling, place to plant new roots.

Yet beware: cultural and bureaucratic quirks abound. Boxes of paperwork and peculiar national idiosyncrasies might line your path, but you didn't move across the globe—or the island, for that matter—just to skim the shallows, right? Picture it as administrative spelunking. It's about delving deep and sometimes getting a bit mucky, but always with a hot cup of West Javanese coffee waiting at the other end.

But before you leap into Bandung life armed with little more than a grin and your favorite nasi goreng recipe, heed this sage advice: Laws change. Regularly. Don't worry, this isn't Bandung's version of "The Hunger Games," but it is a life where an ever-updating playbook is essential. Always check the latest regulations from the Indonesian Directorate General of Immigration or your local Indonesian consulate.

Lastly, while Bandung is a city of hills and history, it's also one of students and startup enterprises. Embrace the unpredictable ride of angkots and enjoy the weekend exodus of Jakarta's residents, as you settle in to understand why Bandung is a city best understood not just by cyclopean skyscrapers and business cards, but by its charismatic mix of chaos and calm. Here's to your Bandung adventure—one visa stamp, family road trip, or surprise traffic-jam picnic at a time!

## CHAPTER ONE: Introduction to Bandung

So, you're thinking about Bandung. Good choice. Or possibly a choice driven by work, family, or a perhaps misguided desire to escape the relentless steam bath that is Jakarta. Whatever your reasons, welcome to the starting line. Bandung isn't just a dot on the map of West Java; it's a sprawling, complex, often charming, sometimes infuriating city nestled rather picturesquely in a giant volcanic basin. Think of it as nature's cereal bowl, ringed by misty, brooding mountains that occasionally like to remind everyone they're still geologically active. This lofty perch, averaging about 770 meters (that's roughly 2,500 feet for those still resisting the metric system), is the city's secret weapon against the sweltering tropical heat found elsewhere in Indonesia. While you won't need your winter woollies, you'll certainly appreciate the noticeably cooler air, especially in the evenings when a light sweater might actually feel necessary. It's a pleasant departure from the coastal norm, a sort of natural air conditioning system that occasionally gets turned up too high during the rainy season.

As Indonesia's fourth-largest city, Bandung certainly has the population and sprawl to prove it, but somehow it often manages to feel less overwhelmingly gargantuan than its big sibling, Jakarta. Perhaps it's the topography, breaking up the urban expanse with hills and valleys, or maybe it's the slightly more laid-back Sundanese approach to life. Don't get us wrong, navigating Bandung requires patience, particularly when confronted with its infamous traffic, but the chaos feels... different. It's a complex urban organism, constantly growing and changing, yet still retaining pockets of village-like calm and green spaces that haven't quite succumbed to concrete. You'll find ultra-modern shopping malls standing cheek-by-jowl with tiny neighbourhood *warungs* (food stalls) that have been serving the same delicious recipes for generations. It's a city of contrasts, and understanding its geography—both physical and cultural—is the first step to feeling at home here. Remember those surrounding mountains? They aren't just pretty backdrops; they influence the weather, the views, and provide weekend escape routes when the city buzz gets a bit too much.

The city carries its nicknames with a certain historical weight. "Parijs van Java" – the Paris of Java – harks back to the Dutch colonial era when Bandung was groomed as a potential capital, blessed with wide boulevards, grand government buildings, and a flourish of European architectural styles, particularly Art Deco. Stroll down Jalan Braga or admire the iconic Gedung Sate (the provincial government building, instantly recognisable by its central skewer-like pinnacle), and you can see the echoes of that ambition. Does it feel like Paris? Well, let's just say the resemblance is more fraternal twin than identical sibling, separated at birth and raised in entirely different climates. The elegant facades are there, but they now house bustling Indonesian banks, trendy cafes, or shops selling everything from local crafts to mobile phone chargers. The tree-

lined streets envisioned by Dutch planners often groan under the weight of modern traffic, and the scent of croissants is more likely to be replaced by the tempting aroma of *martabak* frying nearby. It's Bandung's unique take on history – acknowledging the past without being entirely defined by it.

Then there's "Kota Kembang," the City of Flowers. While Bandung certainly boasts lush gardens and parks, and the surrounding highlands are fertile ground for nurseries, the name is often interpreted more poetically. Some say it referred to the beauty of the local women in colonial times, others to the flourishing culture and creativity. Regardless of its origins, the nickname speaks to a certain prettiness and vibrancy. You'll find flowers sold on street corners, elaborate floral displays at weddings, and a general appreciation for greenery that softens the urban edges. It's a reminder that despite the inevitable pressures of growth, Bandung strives to retain a connection to the natural beauty that surrounds it. From the manicured lawns of Gedung Sate to the wilder landscapes just a short drive away, the spirit of the "City of Flowers" persists, sometimes subtly, sometimes in glorious full bloom right outside your window.

Let's talk climate in more practical terms. That lovely cool air we mentioned comes with conditions. Bandung operates on a fairly distinct two-season schedule: wet and dry. The wet season typically parks itself over the city from around October to April. Forget gentle showers; this is often serious, tropical rain. Expect sudden, intense downpours that can turn streets into temporary rivers and make a motorcycle journey feel like an extreme water sport. Umbrellas are essential, waterproof jackets are wise, and developing a zen-like acceptance of potential soakings is practically mandatory. The upside? The landscape becomes incredibly lush and green, the air feels freshly washed afterwards, and there's a certain cozy appeal to being indoors listening to the rain hammer down. Just plan your outdoor errands accordingly, perhaps adopting the local habit of waiting out the worst of the storm over a cup of coffee.

The dry season, usually May to September, is generally glorious. Think warm, sunny days and pleasantly cool nights. This is prime time for exploring the surrounding hills, enjoying outdoor cafes, and generally basking in Bandung's most agreeable weather. However, 'dry' doesn't always mean bone-dry; occasional showers can still surprise you. The air quality might dip slightly without the rain to wash away pollutants, and you'll likely encounter more dust. But overall, it's the season that best showcases Bandung's natural advantages. Whether wet or dry, the temperature remains relatively stable year-round, rarely straying too far from a comfortable range between 20°C and 30°C (68°F to 86°F). This consistency is one of the city's major draws, offering respite from the energy-sapping heat common in many other parts of Southeast Asia. Just remember that 'cooler' is relative – it's still the tropics, just with the thermostat turned down a notch.

At its heart, Bandung is Sundanese territory. This isn't just a minor detail; it's fundamental to the city's character. The Sundanese people are the predominant

ethnic group in West Java, and their culture, language, and traditions permeate daily life in Bandung. While you'll hear Bahasa Indonesia, the national language, everywhere – especially in formal settings, media, and among people from other parts of Indonesia – step into a local market, chat with your neighbours, or hop in an *angkot* (public minivan), and you'll be immersed in the softer, somewhat melodic tones of Bahasa Sunda. You don't *need* to be fluent in Sundanese to survive, especially as Bahasa Indonesia is widely understood, but learning even a few basic phrases will earn you delighted smiles and open doors. Simple greetings like *wilujeng énjing* (good morning) or polite interjections like *punten* (excuse me, often used when passing someone) show respect and willingness to engage.

Sundanese culture is distinct from its Javanese counterpart further east. It often prides itself on being more expressive, perhaps more artistic, and possessing a unique sense of humour. This cultural identity manifests in various forms. Music is central, with the hypnotic chiming of the *gamelan degung* ensemble and the iconic *angklung* – bamboo rattles played collectively – being signature sounds of West Java. You can experience this firsthand at places like Saung Angklung Udjo, a cultural centre dedicated to preserving and showcasing Sundanese performing arts. The food, too, has its own distinct personality, often featuring fresh raw vegetables (*lalapan*) served with fiery *sambal* (chili paste), grilled fish, and rice steamed in banana leaves (*nasi timbel*). It's a culture that values community, politeness, and a connection to nature, all elements that contribute to Bandung's unique atmosphere.

Bandung pulsates with youthful energy, largely thanks to its status as a major educational hub. With dozens of universities and colleges scattered throughout the city, Bandung hosts a massive student population. This influx of young minds from across Indonesia (and beyond) fuels a vibrant, creative atmosphere. You see it in the proliferation of quirky cafes perfect for studying or socializing, the affordable eateries catering to student budgets, the thriving independent music scene, and the countless *distros* – distribution outlets selling locally designed clothing, often with edgy graphics and limited runs. These distros are a Bandung phenomenon, distinct from the more famous factory outlets, representing homegrown creativity and entrepreneurial spirit. This constant churn of students keeps the city feeling dynamic and receptive to new ideas, contributing to its reputation as a center for innovation, particularly in design and technology.

Ah yes, the factory outlets. No introduction to Bandung is complete without mentioning them. For years, the city has been a magnet for shoppers, particularly bargain hunters from Jakarta who descend in droves on weekends. Streets like Jalan Riau and Jalan Dago became legendary for their concentration of outlets, selling surplus or off-season branded clothing, often at dramatically reduced prices. While the scene might not be quite as frenzied as its peak, the factory outlets remain a significant feature of Bandung's retail landscape. It's a treasure hunt – sometimes you'll find incredible bargains on international brands, other times you'll sift through

racks of questionable quality. It's part of the Bandung experience, navigating the crowds, honing your bargaining skills (though prices are usually fixed in FOs), and perhaps emerging triumphant with a designer label for a fraction of its original cost. Just be prepared for the traffic jams they inevitably generate on weekends.

A quick rewind into Bandung's past helps contextualize its present. While settlements existed in the basin for centuries, the modern city really took shape under Dutch colonial rule. The fertile highlands were ideal for plantations (tea, coffee, quinine), and Bandung's cool climate made it an attractive location for European administrators and residents seeking respite from the coastal heat. The construction of the railway connecting Bandung to Batavia (now Jakarta) in the late 19th century spurred growth, and early 20th-century plans envisioned it as the future capital of the Dutch East Indies. This ambition led to the development of planned neighbourhoods and the construction of impressive government buildings and villas, many designed by prominent European architects experimenting with styles that blended Western forms with tropical considerations, leading to the unique Indo-European and Art Deco architecture still visible today.

Beyond the colonial imprint, Bandung holds a significant place in modern Indonesian and world history. It was here, in 1955, that leaders from 29 newly independent Asian and African nations gathered for the Bandung Conference (Konferensi Asia Afrika). Held in the Gedung Merdeka, a landmark building on Jalan Asia Afrika, this conference was a pivotal moment in the Non-Aligned Movement, promoting Afro-Asian economic and cultural cooperation and opposing colonialism. This event cemented Bandung's international profile and remains a source of great local pride. Visiting the museum attached to Gedung Merdeka offers a fascinating glimpse into this crucial post-colonial chapter. Understanding these historical layers – from ancient Sundanese kingdom roots, through colonial development, to its role on the world stage – adds depth to your perception of the city beyond its contemporary image.

So, what's the overall vibe? Trying to pin down Bandung's essence is like trying to catch fog – it's tangible but elusive. It's a city where serene, tree-lined residential streets can abruptly merge into choked arteries of honking cars and weaving motorcycles. It's where cutting-edge digital startups operate near workshops crafting traditional musical instruments. It's inherently Sundanese yet increasingly cosmopolitan. Some expats find the pace refreshingly slower than hyper-kinetic capitals elsewhere, while others get perpetually frustrated by the seemingly illogical one-way street systems and the phenomenon known affectionately (or not) as *jam karet* – 'rubber time', a flexible approach to punctuality. It requires a certain adaptability, a willingness to embrace the occasional absurdity, and perhaps a good sense of direction (or a reliable GPS app).

Living in Bandung is about navigating this blend. It's about discovering hidden cafes tucked away down narrow *gangs* (alleys), mastering the art of crossing the road

amidst seemingly chaotic traffic, enjoying the spectacular mountain views that appear when the clouds part, and learning to appreciate the genuine warmth and friendliness of its people, even when communication involves creative sign language. It's not always easy, but it's rarely dull. It's a city that rewards exploration and patience, revealing its charms layer by layer. It's less about finding a little piece of Paris in Java, and more about discovering the unique, multifaceted, and thoroughly Indonesian character of Bandung itself. Prepare for a journey that's likely to be as colourful and complex as the city itself.

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