



EMBASSY OF TIMOR-LESTE · REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Discovering Timor-Leste

A young nation, an ancient soul —
and the newest **voice of ASEAN**

Lecture for KOICA Mid Term Volunteer Dispatch Program



POLITICS

Governance,
foreign policy &
ASEAN



ECONOMY

Growth pillars,
coffee, trade &
infrastructure



SOCIAL & CULTURE

People, language,
heritage &
living traditions



TIMOR-LESTE & KOREA

A friendship built
since 1999 —
peacekeeping to
partnership



António da Cruz Santa

Third Secretary, Embassy of Timor-Leste in Seoul

21 July 2026



11TH MEMBER OF ASEAN

Officially admitted on 26 October 2025
at the 47th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur



What we'll cover



01 Nation Profile

Geography, people, and the story of independence



02 Politics & Governance

System of government, foreign policy, and Timor-Leste's new seat at ASEAN



03 Economy & Development

Growth pillars, trade, coffee, and major infrastructure



04 Society & Culture

Language, faith, heritage, and places worth discovering



05 Timor-Leste & Korea

A friendship built since 1999 — peacekeeping to partnership

Timor-Leste at a glance

Timor-Leste is located on the eastern part of Timor Island. The country also includes Oecusse, Atauro Island, and Jaco Island. It is sitting right in the center of the Coral Triangle, which is the world’s richest ocean area. This makes Timor-Leste home to an amazing variety of coral reefs and sea life.





CAPITAL

Dili



POPULATION

~1.51 million (2024)



CURRENCY

US Dollar & Centavos



OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Tetum & Portuguese



INDEPENDENCE RESTORED

20 May 2002



REGIONAL STATUS

11th ASEAN member (2025)



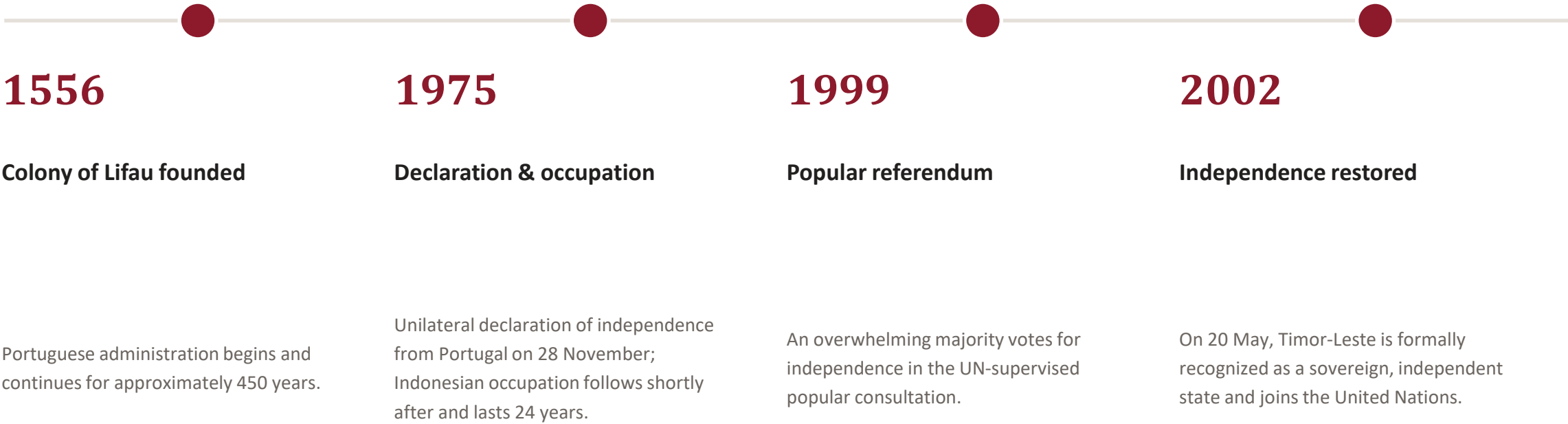
SECTION I

A journey to independence

Nearly 500 years of resilience, patience, and determination



From colony to Asia's youngest democracy



“ Today, 20 May is celebrated nationally as Restoration of Independence Day.

SECTION II

Letefoho Specialty Coffee Roaster

Café Brisa Serena Unipessoal Lda

Politics & governance

A young democracy with a resolutely peaceful foreign policy

A semi-presidential republic

Power is balanced across four organs of state, each with a distinct role in Timor-Leste's democracy.



President of the Republic

Head of State



National Parliament

Legislative power



Prime Minister

Executive / Head of Government



Court of Appeal

Judicial power

KEY POLITICAL DATES

28 Nov 1975

Unilateral Declaration of Independence from Portugal

20 May 2002

Restoration of Independence



OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Tetum & Portuguese

Indonesian and English serve as working languages.

Zero enemies, and a seat at the ASEAN table



“Enemy to no country, friend to every country.”

Article 8 of the Constitution — Timor-Leste's guiding foreign-policy principle, known as the Zero Enemy Policy.

REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

- ASEAN Member State — since 2025
- United Nations — member since 2002
- Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP)
- Pacific Islands Forum



Asia's newest voice at ASEAN

11

th member state of ASEAN

On 26 October 2025, Timor-Leste was formally admitted at the 47th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur — the bloc's first expansion in 26 years, capping a 14-year accession process.

680M+ people across the ASEAN community Timor-Leste now joins

SECTION III

Economy & development

Building a resilient economy from coffee fields to new ports



Timor-Leste's natural wealth



Timor Sea Oil & Gas

The offshore Greater Sunrise field holds an estimated 5.1 trillion cubic feet of gas and 226 million barrels of condensate — the country's next major energy project.



Petroleum Fund

A sovereign wealth fund from two decades of oil and gas revenue — valued at roughly US\$18.9 billion, about ten times the country's US\$1.9 billion GDP.



Diversifying Beyond Oil

With the Bayu-Undan field's production ending in 2025, growing agriculture, tourism, and coffee exports are key to a resilient, post-petroleum economy.

Source: World Bank, Timor-Leste Economic Report · GDP: World Bank, via SEA Trends

Three pillars of national development



Poverty Reduction

An estimated 41% of Timorese live under the poverty line — placing inclusive growth at the center of national policy.



Human Capital

Investment in education, vocational training, scholarships, and leadership development to build a skilled workforce.



Infrastructure

Most infrastructure remains at a basic level — making it a national priority, alongside several mega-projects now underway.

From organic coffee to mega infrastructure



Timor-Leste's gift to the world

Grown organically in the Ermera and Maubisse highlands, Timorese coffee — including the disease-resistant Híbrido de Timor hybrid — is prized by specialty roasters worldwide.

MEGA-PROJECTS SHAPING THE FUTURE



Tibar Bay Port

A new deep-water port modernizing Timor-Leste's trade and shipping capacity.



Darwin-Dili Submarine Cable

Boosting national connectivity and digital infrastructure.



Two international airports

Dili and Oecusse, expanding air links for trade and tourism.



Roads, transport & rural electrification

Connecting rural producers to markets across the country.

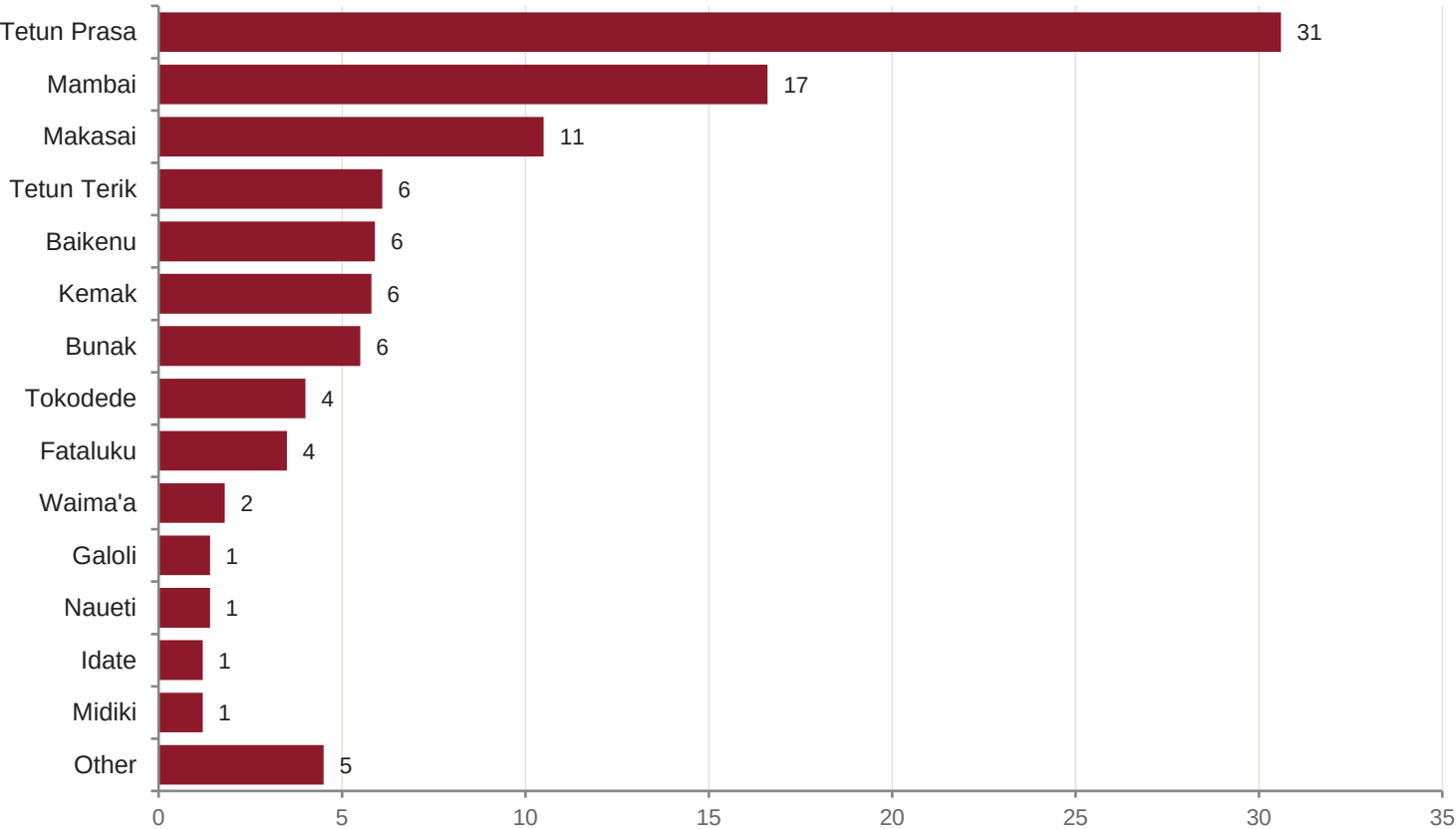
SECTION IV

Society & culture

A living tapestry of language, faith, and centuries-old tradition

One nation, many mother tongues

HOME LANGUAGES OF TIMOR-LESTE (2015 EST.)



Two official languages

Tetum and Portuguese are official. Indonesian and English are widely used as working languages, alongside 15+ indigenous mother tongues.



Faith & religious freedom

Timor-Leste is a secular state committed to religious freedom. Roughly 98% of the population is Roman Catholic, with Protestant, Evangelical, Muslim, and other communities also present.

A living thread across generations



Tais — UNESCO Intangible Heritage

This hand-woven textile has adorned Timorese life for centuries. Colors and motifs vary by ethnic group and region, marking identity and social status, and are exchanged at births, weddings, and funerals. In December 2021, Tais became Timor-Leste's first-ever UNESCO cultural designation.



Coffee — a quiet global contribution

Grown under the shade of indigenous trees, Timorese coffee is largely organic by tradition. The Hibrido de Timor — first discovered in Timorese fields — has been used worldwide to breed disease-resistant coffee varieties.

Untouched beauty, waiting to be explored



Atauro Island

World-class diving in some of the most biodiverse waters on the planet, within the Coral Triangle.



Mount Ramelau

Timor-Leste's highest peak — a trek rewarded with a breathtaking sunrise above the clouds.



Wetar Strait

Seasonal whale and dolphin migrations make this one of the region's great wildlife spectacles.

SECTION V

Timor-Leste & Korea

A friendship forged in peacekeeping, deepened through partnership



From the Evergreen Unit to today's partnership

- **Sep 1999**
The Republic of Korea deploys its “Evergreen Unit” as part of UN peacekeeping forces, strengthening security during the transition to independence.
- **1999–2003**
About 3,212 Korean troops serve in Timor-Leste under the UN mission, alongside the wider peacekeeping effort.
- **20 May 2002**
Korea is among the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with Timor-Leste, at Embassy resident level.
- **Since 2002**
Cooperation expands into education, capacity building, sports, health, climate change, gender, and employment.



3,212

Korean peacekeepers
deployed, 1999–2003

80+

Timorese scholars supported
via KOICA & GKS

5,335

Timorese working in Korea's
manufacturing & fisheries
sectors (by 2024)



OBRIGADA · 감사합니다 · THANK YOU

Let's build the friendship forward

António da Cruz Santa

Third Secretary, Embassy of Timor-Leste in Seoul

Questions & discussion welcome