

# The Sukarno Center

Exiled on the remote Ende Island in Flores between 1934-1938 because his political activities were seen as a threat to the Dutch East Indies Government, Kusno Sosro Sukarno, an inspired nationalist spent four years meditating on his vision for an independent nation.

While under house arrest with his family Sukarno wrote the Pancasila, what was to become the philosophical foundation for the state of Indonesia. Derived from two old Javanese words – meaning five principles, it comprises of five values held to be inseparable and interrelated, the belief in one supreme God, humanitarian ideals, national unity, democracy and social justice.

The son of an aristocratic Javanese schoolteacher and his high caste Balinese wife Sukarno was born in Surabaya, East Java, in 1901. A dynamic and intelligent child, his knowledge of Dutch made it possible for him to enter a European elementary school, and in 1916 Sukarno began high school. During this period he lived with a prominent Islamic leader and the next 5 years were most important in Sukarno's future intellectual and political development. From 1921-26 he studied at the Institute of Technology in Bandung, graduating as an engineer, focussing on architecture. Sukarno then embarked on a political career, publishing a series of articles in which he endeavoured to show that Islam and socialism were not incompatible.

Sukarno was moved from Ende to Sumatra by the Dutch in 1938 and was released when the Japanese occupied Nusantara (the local name of the archipelago prior to the formation Indonesia) in March 1942. Familiar with Sukarno's strong anti colonialist views the Japanese made him a leader in their various organizations, and in June 1945 he headed the most influential independence organization. Here he set forth in eloquent terms the Pancasila. On August 17, 1945, Sukarno, at the urging of youth groups and colleagues, proclaimed his country's independence after Japan's surrender. He then became the first president of the new Republic of Indonesia, a position retained for almost 21 years.

Travel east from Ubud to Pejeng and then north upon the road to Tampaksiring (site of the ancient Gunung Kawi temple and Tirta Empul water temple), about five kilometres south from the township center you will discover on your left an imposing six meter high statue towering over the road. This marks the entrance to the Sukarno Center; a museum that honours the famous leader.

Prior to entering the two-storey building you will see two wooden carriages from yester year. You may wonder what relevance are these, they are, however intriguing relics of Javanese mysticism. Tradition reveals that the Sultans of Central Java after their marriage ceremonies travelled with their brides in one carriage, while the other empty carriage followed behind. Although the past Sultans according to custom had numerous wives, they had only one queen, Kanjeng Ibu Ratu Kidul, the beautiful, mythical queen of the southern seas, whose spirit is said to ride inside this second vehicle.

Step inside the museum and enter the heady world of power and grandeur. An enormous bronze emblem of the state of Indonesia - the Garuda Pancasila - depicting the mythical bird Garuda and the coats of arms greets you. Surrounded by an altar and ritual offerings this signifies the ancient spiritual narratives and forces that form the ideology of the nation sanctify Indonesia's stately powers.

The interior is adorned with beautiful relics, photographs and pictures, chandeliers, ornate cabinets and furniture, while the floor is adorned with Persian carpets. What began in 1998 as an art gallery for the collection owned by Sukarno's daughter Fatmawati has been transformed into wonderful shrine to commemorate her charismatic father. You cant help being swept up by the awe of Sukarno – a character of humble begins yet with a mighty vision, and the brilliance to unite many parties under the same cause – freedom from their colonial oppressors and the birth of their nation.

From speakers you can hear public addresses by the man who's spellbinding oratory and ability to phrase his political goals in a language the masses could understand made him a national hero, adding a powerful unseen element to your experience.

Renowned as a gentleman and an international statesman, photographs of Sukarno with world figures such as American president JFK, Chinese leader Mao Zedong and the Indian Prime Minister Nehru line the walls. Other images show Sukarno giving his legendary speeches and meeting numerous dignitaries. Many of the photos on display are from his family's private collection and never before been published. Arguably the most iconic image is Sukarno with Marilyn Monroe during his 1959 visit to the United States. Rumoured to have an irresistible charm with the ladies, Sukarno was a renowned womanizer, and of special interest is a photograph depicting Sukarno's family tree. This reveals his connections to nine different women, six whom he married, another three "acquaintances", while he fathered children to four separate women.

Cabinets contain fascinating relics, a collection of samurai swords formerly owned by the Emperor of Japan, currency from 1945-67 with images of Sukarno printed on them and incredible items of inheritance from the East Javanese Majapahit Empire (13th – 16th century). One small room is dedicated to the library of Sukarno with his collection of books, desk, and other memorabilia. A recorded mantra echoes through the room almost conjuring up his presence, and creating an eerie ambience. Another room recreates the meeting room where he delivered his inspiring Pancasila speech to fellow nationalist and contains the original furniture.

As an architect Sukarno was responsible for transforming the physical landscape of the capital city of his nation, Jakarta with public art. Sukarno too was an art lover and a great supporter of Indonesian modern art and Balinese traditional art amassing huge collections. There are photos of him standing in front of some of his collection, while paintings and a shrine in one corner upstairs honour the Goddess of the southern seas. For those wishing to discover more about the founding father of the nation the Sukarno Center is a recommended destination to learn about "Bung Karno" as he was known - the man who brought independence to the nation, instilled self-confidence and a national identity in the people and garnered international recognition for Indonesia.



