



Indonesia

Family Life



Most households consist of parents (or a parent) and children. Some households have one or more relatives living with the family, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles or cousins. Live-in house help are also common, even in lower-middle class households. Drivers are common in middle and upper class households. Household chores may not be something students are used to.

Nowadays in Indonesia, both parents usually work out of the house. Traditionally, though, the father is the breadwinner and the ultimate decision maker, and the mother is the “home manager” and general advisor of the family. The mother’s role is highly respected in a family. There is an Indonesian saying that speaks to the immense respect mothers are given: “Heaven lies under a mother’s feet.” In Indonesia, parents and elders are highly respected, and children are taught to listen and obey without question. Children are taught to kiss the back of the elder’s right hand as a sign of respect.

Generally in Indonesia, dinner is eaten together, but this depends on the family schedule. When families do eat together, they don’t linger at the table or engage in lengthy table talk. More likely, the family will eat quietly, even silently, and take conversations elsewhere after the meal. Talking throughout mealtime is considered impolite. Students may be especially uncomfortable when serious family issues are discussed at mealtime.

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Indonesians are very communal, and families tend to do things together. Individual time is rare, if it exists, and is usually reserved for study time in the evening. If an Indonesian family member is found alone, it is a sign that there is something wrong. Generally, teenagers have their free time on the weekend to spend with their friends. The concept of individual pursuit and personal time to one’s self in the U.S. may be surprising and uncomfortable for the student at first. Students might feel left out if a sibling or other family member is taking time to his or her self.

Teen Life: Objects or personal items may be considered as belonging to one individual, but by everyone in the family as the family is viewed as one unit in Indonesia. Clothing articles are often shared between siblings, but when siblings want to borrow they must ask first. Older children are expected to care for younger ones. Sibling rivalry is not prevalent and spats among Indonesian siblings do not happen often.

Responsibilities: Parents usually give an allowance to their children daily or weekly. The allowance covers transportation and meals at school. Children rarely work for pocket money unless parents cannot provide pocket money. The YES stipend amount is approximately equal to 75 to 80% of the average monthly salary of the regional minimum wage in Indonesia. In light of this, Indonesian students may either want to save as much as they can, or conversely may have impulses to spend.

In some families, chores or tasks are divided by gender. It is most common for teenage females to help in the kitchen. Males are usually given more “physical” chores, like tending the garden, repairing things, and sweeping and mopping the floor. Some males may not easily follow instructions from females or feel uncomfortable in a female dominated household. In Indonesian households, the mother or housekeeper prepares the meals. Students may find it challenging to prepare meals for themselves because of unfamiliar kitchen appliances, unfamiliar ingredients, and different ways of cooking or preparing food.

Parental Involvement: In home internet connections are rare in Indonesia, especially in smaller towns, however homes in bigger cities may have it. Students typically use the internet in internet cafes and parents almost never accompany him or her to these places. Parents do not monitor their child’s internet use and a student’s time on the internet is limited in a different way than it is in the U.S. Students now commonly use their cell phones or tablet to access the internet in Indonesia. WhatsApp and Line messaging are the most popular communication platforms. The use of social media platforms among Indonesian students are high. Progress in school in Indonesia is usually reported in mid-semester or semester reports. Rarely do parents keep up with academic progress more than monitoring those semester reports; only if there is something alarming occurring. Teenagers are mostly dependent on their parents. Big decisions have to be discussed with parents and other family members. Schedules are also discussed as a family.

Pets: In most Indonesian Muslim communities, dogs serve as watch dogs not domestic pets. Dogs are generally not allowed in the house and the saliva is considered unclean. Indonesian students may be uncomfortable with or scared of dogs.

Personal Interactions



Mixed Gender Socializing: Generally, it is not culturally appropriate for teenage boys and girls to socialize one-on-one, though it is typical for teenagers to hang out in groups of mixed genders. Close friends or best friends would be the same gender, and it would not be uncommon for girls to hold hands with other girls and boys to sit close to other boys. In Indonesia, men and women are not separate, but do not touch each other.

Friendships: Many students in Indonesia are friends from childhood and grow up attending the same school. Groups of friends usually consist of students of the same gender that share common interests. Lending money to friends or family members is common in Indonesia. It is common to repay the money in installments or in a form of treating the friend to small favors or meals. Some confusion or misunderstanding may arise in the U.S. regarding sharing and lending money.

Communication Styles: Indonesians communicate indirectly as Indonesians, in general, avoid confrontation and avoid showing negative feeling as a way of maintaining harmony in society. Everyone is expected to not offend others and to understand unspoken needs. Indonesians may find it very hard to ask for help or to be the bearer of bad news. The student is trying to “save face,” a very important part of Indonesian culture. Children are taught to listen and not to explain or argue with adults, and even older siblings are treated deferentially. Indonesians generally won’t talk about it if they are having problems.

Rather than express emotion, or show it outright, Indonesians may write down their feelings for their own use. Expressions of love are not acceptable in public. In some cases, Indonesians smile when they are nervous or confused. Indonesians only discuss emotional topics with those to whom they feel very close, or “connected.” Indonesians do not feel that they can argue with a parent, so they may feel that it is better to say “yes” and then not comply, than to disagree or argue. To the parent, it may appear that they have said they would do something and then didn’t do it; however, to the student, it is not intended to be deliberately deceptive. If this becomes a problem, ask the student when something will be done, how s/he will do it, and what problems s/he anticipates in doing it. The answers will give you an opportunity to “read between the lines” to see whether “yes” really meant “yes.”

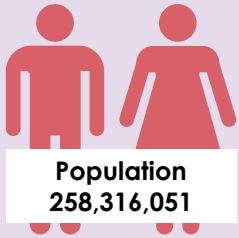
Eye Contact: Direct eye contact with older people is generally considered rude and students may feel uncomfortable with constant direct eye contact while talking. Students from the Jakarta area, however, are accustomed to making eye contact during conversation. Until the discomfort with direct eye contact passes, try looking at the student’s chin, and then back to his or her eyes while speaking.

Cultural Norms: Indonesians usually shake hands when they meet, and may follow a handshake by touching their right palm to their hearts in a show of friendship. When meeting for the first time, Indonesians often bow their heads slightly. This is often followed by small talks that could involve asking how the family is doing or encompass a larger conversation. Being punctual is well regarded, but time is loosely scheduled and more fluid, so it is not important to be on time. It is not common to plan future events. Time and deadlines are sometimes flexible in Indonesia. The Indonesian student may operate on “jam karet,” which translated literally translates from the Bahasa Indonesia language to mean “rubber time,” or “stretch the time and be late.”

School



Jakarta



Population
258,316,051



Square Miles
741,050



Currency
Indonesian Rupiah



Literacy rate
96.3%

Literacy rate
91.5%

Javanese 40.1%
Sundanese 15.5%
Malay 3.7%
Batak 3.6%
Madurese 3%
Betawi 2.9%
Minangkabau 2.7%
Buginese 2.7%
Bantenese 2%
Banjarese 1.7%
Balinese 1.7%
Acehnese 1.4%
Dayak 1.4%
Sasak 1.3%
Chinese 1.2%
Other 15%

Muslim 87.2%
Christian 9.9%
Hindu 1.7%
Other 1.3%

Classes: In Indonesia, students' subjects are determined by the track that they study throughout high school. Students usually do not take a specific test to determine their tracks but rather it is determined by their grades, their GPA average, their score on the National Exam that they take after completing junior high school (or middle school), and recommendations from their junior high school teachers. The tracks, or "majors," that are currently offered in Indonesian high schools are: natural sciences, social sciences, and language. For students who attend Islamic boarding schools, called Pesantren or Madrasah, they may also choose a Religious Studies track. Indonesian students take 13 to 15 subjects per semester; each subject is scheduled once or twice a week. Students do not study subjects at different levels of difficulty throughout high school. All classes and subjects are taken at the same level and there is a "passing grade" for each subject as a benchmark. Students remain in the same classroom and teachers rotate to the different rooms throughout the day. Depending on the school, one classroom will seat 30 to 48 students. Public schools in Indonesia are co-ed; boys and girls sit in the same classroom. Seats may or may not be assigned by the teacher. In Pesantren, boys and girls are separated by room; these students might find it difficult to adjust to a co-ed environment at first. In Indonesia, students are evaluated through homework, class attendance, special assignments, mid-semester exams and semester exams. Different workloads and expectations on school assignments and homework in U.S. schools may be a challenge for Indonesian students at first.

School Relationships: Students' respect for their teachers is as high as their respect for their natural parents. At school, teachers take on the roles of "parents at school." Because of this respect, students are generally taught to listen and obey their teachers in every way without question. In Pesantren, teachers also act as legal guardians. Students learn to follow and abide by the rules and sayings of their teachers, word for word. In Indonesia, it is not expected to critique or disagree with what the teacher is saying. Formal address is used when speaking to teachers: "Pak" or "Bu" ("Mr." or "Mrs."). To students, an informal relationship with teachers and calling teachers by their first names or nicknames will likely seem rude and out of line.

Extracurricular Activities: In Indonesian schools, extracurricular activities take place on Saturdays in place of regular courses. Schools offer various kinds of opportunities, such as traditional dance and music, journalism, English club, futsal (soccer-like ball game), basketball, and photography. Students in Indonesia often decide upon and arrange for their own extracurricular activities. Parents are involved indirectly in students' extracurricular activities.

School Rules and Attire: Cell phone usage is banned during classes and school hours in Indonesia, and violation of this rule usually results in confiscation of the phone and other penalties. Fighting is considered a severe rule violation and could result in suspension or expulsion. All students in Indonesia must wear a uniform, which varies for private and public schools. Generally, the uniform for male students consists of gray pants, a white shirt, a gray tie, white or black shoes, and a gray cap for ceremonies; male students wear long-sleeved white shirts on Thursdays and Fridays. Uniforms for female students are a white shirt, gray skirt (knee-length or long for students who wear headscarves), white socks, black shoes, a gray tie, and a gray cap for ceremonies; female students wear Batik shirts on Thursdays, and white long shirts and skirts on Fridays. School logos are stitched onto the shirt pocket and upper arm of the shirts, with the student's name stitched on the right chest of the shirts. Students may have difficulty determining what clothes are appropriate for school in the U.S. if uniforms are not required. If the student is wearing a headscarf, she may prefer to wear long-sleeved shirts and trousers, or skirts over trousers, and a jilbab (long coat) or headscarf to school.

Returning from Exchange: When students depart on program, they are considered to be on one year academic leave, which means have not started their 12th grade yet, and will resume the interrupted academic year once they go back to Indonesia. Upon return to Indonesia, students will have to return to the subjects they left off with when they went on their exchange year. The final year of high school is crucial for their eligibility in National Final Exams, which is mandatory for graduating from high school and for University Entrance Exams, a separate exam for entering universities.

Food and Culture



Portions in Indonesia are smaller than in the U.S., so students will typically be overwhelmed by the size of the portions in the first few months on program. Some students might feel guilty for not finishing the large portion even if they are full. It is common in Indonesia for people to ask for the restaurant to wrap any uneaten food.

Guest Culture: People will offer guests food or drink, or directly serve drinks and snacks to guests once they are seated in the living room. Contrary to American culture, it is considered polite to decline the offer at the first or second offer, as a sign of respect (the guest does not want to be troublesome to the host). Guests will, in the end, drink or eat whatever is served.

Lunch and Diets: Students typically buy food at school, both snacks (during short breaks) and lunch (if school finishes after 1 PM). It is rare for students to pack their own lunch. Natural parents give daily or weekly allowance for food and transportation.

Religion: Prayer is an important aspect of the religious life of traditionally practicing Muslims who will generally pray five times each day at specific times that are religiously-dictated. Prayers are mostly done personally, except Friday noon prayers and Eid prayers.

Holidays: Schools are closed on national or religious holidays. Ramadan is considered important. People are expected to respect anyone who fasts during this month; students who fast will do so from dawn to dusk. Eid al-Fitr is a major celebration marking the end of Ramadan, with a week-long holiday and big family gatherings. Schools and all offices are closed for the week. The big day is marked by the Eid prayer in mosques. Students will want to spend part of the evenings during the month of Ramadan reciting tarawih prayers and the Quran. Another important Muslim holiday is Eid al-Adha; Islamic schools have three days of holiday for Eid al-Adha. Christian holidays include Christmas and Easter. An important Balinese Hindu holiday is Nyepi, "day of silence," and an important Buddhist holiday is Vesak.

National holidays in Indonesia are the following: Independence Day (August 17), New Year, Islamic New Year, and Chinese Lunar New Year. It is very common for extended families to gather in one home to celebrate religious holidays. "Pulang Kampung," literally translated as "going back to your village/hometown," is a tradition that is cherished, and will be missed by students while they are on program.

Personal Hygiene



Taking baths twice a day is common practice in Indonesia. Bathrooms are fully tiled with a drain set in the floor. The student may have had very little experience using a dry bathroom and may need a bit of guidance to learn that shower curtains belong inside the tub and that bathmats are used to keep the rest of the floor dry when you've just stepped out of the shower. Muslims also complete a ritual washing before praying; students use water to wash their hands, feet, and face.