French fashion designer Agnès b. creates beyond wearable fashion. She shares her idea of beauty and joy through her artistically and culturally inspired fashion. She hopes to use her boutiques as a platform to share her inspiration with people around the world. Agnès loves traveling and photography and has traveled all over the globe. No matter where she goes, she always carries a camera. Photography is her way of documenting her travels, capturing everything she sees to share with those she loves. To Agnès, traveling is very special and intimate. She takes inspiration from each destination’s people, art, tradition, and unique way of living for new concepts and designs. She loves the idea of exploration - the idea that adventure is supposed to be free of barriers and boundaries. To Agnès, traveling is part of her life.

“LA MAISON SUR L’EAU” is a concept of traveling around the world, drifting on its oceans. Six years ago, Agnès opened the world’s first travel concept store, agnès b. LA MAISON SUR L’EAU, to share her passion for traveling and for her fans to enjoy art and culture from all corners of the world. Inside her concept stores are photographs taken during her travels. From popular places to faraway destinations, everyone can get a glimpse of the world through her eyes.

This time, we’re taking you to Timor-Leste, the first new nation of the 21st century, which literally sees its mountains rise each year as Australia’s tectonic plate crashes up into Asia. Timor’s combination of peaks descending suddenly into pristine ocean means the nation is strikingly beautiful, and rich in opportunities for adventure travel. Sports such as hiking, diving and mountain biking are in their infancy, but full of potential.

Legend has it you can’t just visit Timor-Leste once. It has plenty to capture the imagination, a long and tumultuous history, a blend of European and Southeast Asian culture, some of the most captivating scenery you’ll find in the continent, and buckets of potential.

Yet Timor-Leste, the Portuguese name for the nation, is also struggling to find its feet. The English name, East Timor, is a bit of a tautology, since Timur means “east” in Bahasa Indonesia, the language of the country’s last colonizers. The nation is also known as Timor Lorosae, which means “Timor Where the sun rises” in Tetun, the main local language.

Tetun and Portuguese are the country’s official languages, leading to a flood of bilingual paperwork. Many educated people speak their former colonial tongue, and often grew up learning Indonesian as well, particularly if they went to university. Then Timorese often speak not only Tetun but two or more local languages – there are some 32 regional dialects. Many Portuguese words have worked their way into everyday speech, albeit with Timorese spelling – “thank you” is obregadu, a table is a meza, “sorry” is diskulpa! and a coffee is a kafé. Say goodbye, and you’ll say adeus.

Business, and the Timorese economy in general, is in its infancy. The country’s main economic hope is the oil and gas reserves in the Timor Sea, between East Timor and Australia, which promises to generate billions of dollars for the government. A cooperative effort between the Timorese government and the Australian natural-resources driller Woodside recently fell apart, but Italian and Chinese companies are keen to develop the rich resources below the sea beds. Coffee is the second-most significant industry, and tourism also shows great promise. Small businesses like Ai-Funan, a soap company based in the town of Baucau, are also developing eco-friendly products using all-Timorese, all-natural ingredients.

Back in the 1960s, it was a popular honeymoon destination, particularly for Australians, and part of the “hippy trail” across Asia. Now that Timor is at peace, hopes are high that it can once again develop as a thriving destination for travellers with an adventurous bent, not to mention entrepreneurs keen to carve out a new frontier.

Photographs by Daniel J. Groshong / Text by Alex Frew McMillan
The world paid slight attention – but in 1996, Ramos-Horta and the bishop of Dili, Carlos Belo, won the Nobel Peace Prize for their defense of human rights and Timor-Leste’s independence. In 1999, Indonesia called a referendum on independence or “autonomy” under its rule. Indonesia expected to win, but the vote saw a 79 percent majority elect to form a new nation. The result spawned terrible violence across the country as Timorese and to outsiders.

As Timor climbed off the floor of war, the nation was flooded with nonprofits and a flow of United Nations workers and troops, from Fiji, Pakistan, you name it. Foreign aid drove prices high, and still makes for an unusual situation. Stall owners and small businesses typically don’t bargain – they’re used to highly paid foreigners who’ll cough up without haggling.

That bubble economy is now under serious threat – the United Nations pulled out for good in December 2012. When white U.N. SUVs once pulled out for good in December 2012. Where white U.N. SUVs once

The creation of Timor itself is a crocodile legend. A young boy found a small crocodile in arid land, parched, starving and close to death. He felt sorry for the animal and took it to the sea. “Little boy, you have saved my life,” the grateful crocodile pledged.

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Discovering Timor-Leste

You don't have to venture out of the confines of the capital of Dili, the capital of Timor-Leste, to find world-class dive sites. There are excellent dives within Dili itself, as well as more than a dozen sites within an hour's drive. Venture toward Tiliba and sacred Joss Island at the very eastern end of the country, and you will often be exploring virgin sites. Boat trips run out to Atauro Island, often encountering spinner dolphins on the way.

A five-minute drive west of the capital, you can slip beneath the waves at Talo Tolu, or “Three Seas,” an ever-changing mound dive full of small, unusual critters that locals say offers something new on every visit. At The Patch, a small cluster of coral and rocks that’s a short swim across the sand and sea grass from the shore, white seahorses mimic the shape of the tube corals they call home. At K57, rock “shelves” mark the site, layered over each other and tipping into the sea. Pick your spot right, and you can make a “giant stride” off a rocky ledge and into 10 metres of water, a pretty unusual entry to make from dry land. Under the waves, mackerel and grouper keep cloves company as they tour the coral pinnacle that’s the main feature of the site, with tobies, blennies and box fish flitting in and out of the sea fans and soft corals.

K41 is another very popular dive site to the east of Dili, named for the route marker 41 kilometers along the main road heading to Manatuto. It’s often visited from the capital on weekends or day trips. Preparing for one recent late-afternoon dive, a group of divers parked just off the road under some monkey puzzle trees and checked out the small bay that’s home to the site while they geared up. With the sun low in the sky, they slip under the water.

Dolphins are diving away to each other as they hunt for fish in deep water. The marine life is thick against the wall of reef that stretches as far along the shore as you care to explore. Against the reef, a school of midnight snappers hover next to some of the biggest dugong, the massive seagrass-munching seacow that gave rise to the tall tales Timor residents say it is their favorite site. If you’re lucky, you may come across a hawksbill turtle, huge star pufferfish, and a shelving reef that drifts as deep as you want to go.

At 27 meters, you hit a “true line” of sorts for the squamospect aethia. It’s an attractive purple small fish, with the males sporting a prominent violet square on their bodies, and one you don’t see in too many other places around Asia. It is a critter magnet,” Mark Malabuyocorosz, the director of the Dili dive company Dive Timor Lorosae, says of the site. “Every dive, we find at least one thing that blows your mind away.”

A recent survey by Australian researchers revealed that East Timor has a higher concentration of marine mammals – pilot whales, Minke whales, spinner dolphins, orcas, dugongs, you name it – than almost anywhere else on earth. Over glass-like sea conditions, the scientists spotted pods of 300 to 400 cetaceans at a time.

“The dolphins and small whales were literally jumping out of the water all around us,” the Timorese researcher Jose Monteiro, said at the time. “It was hard to know which animal to photograph.”

Timor-Leste’s dive sites are easy to reach – the vast majority are shore dives right off the beach – but as pristine and unpopulated as you’re likely to find in Southeast Asia. It’s not unusual to have a site entirely for the exclusive use of your group, without another diver in sight.

Black Rock is one of the best known dives in the country - some long-term Timor residents say it is their favorite site. If you’re lucky, you may come across a large school of yellow snappers hovering above the sea bottom, and other great photo subjects such as lion fish.

There’s another immensely rewarding dive a little further along the coast, at K57. Rock “shelves” mark the site, layered over each other and tipping into the sea. Pick your spot right, and you can make a “giant stride” off a rocky ledge and into 10 metres of water, a pretty unusual entry to make from dry land. Under the waves, mackerel and grouper keep cloves company as they tour the coral pinnacle that’s the main feature of the site, with tobies, blennies and box fish flitting in and out of the sea fans and soft corals.

Beyond K57, there’s still virgin territory, with sites that have never been dived. There are “unexplored walls that guaranteed no one has been diving on,” Malabuyocorosz notes. Diving in East Timor offers “the opportunity to discover a country and develop an industry.”

Diving Deeper

There’s another immensely rewarding dive a little further along the coast, at K57. Rock “shelves” mark the site, layered over each other and tipping into the sea. Pick your spot right, and you can make a “giant stride” off a rocky ledge and into 10 metres of water, a pretty unusual entry to make from dry land. Under the waves, mackerel and grouper keep cloves company as they tour the coral pinnacle that’s the main feature of the site, with tobies, blennies and box fish flitting in and out of the sea fans and soft corals.

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Textiles are literally interwoven with Timorese culture. And nothing encapsulates the country better than the tais, the most important piece of traditional Timorese textile. Like a Scottish tartan, each clan or district of Timor has its own tais, its own distinctive pattern that instantly tells you where the person calls home. Visitors shouldn’t leave the country without at least one example to take back, a beautifully evocative instant memory of the country’s home-spun charms.

The word tais literally means “garment” in Tetun. This is, though, more than just a piece of clothing. The tais was traditionally used as a form of currency, often given in partial payment of a dowry. The best versions could be translated into buffalos, goats, chickens... anything that’s worth something in barrier.

The most sought-after tais are hand-woven, and can take months of painstaking, detailed work to make. The traditional garment is used for ceremonies and other special occasions, and nothing encapsulates the country’s home-spun charms.

Textiles are literally interwoven with Timorese culture. And nothing encapsulates the country’s home-spun charms.

Like the bulk of Asian nations, modern Timorese may be more keen on Western fashion than home-grown crafts. They like a Chanel bag, of course made in China, and short skirts and fancy cars. They don’t care about tais anymore,” Monnereau said. “They all think its from the past, short skirts and fancy cars. They don’t care about tais anymore,” Monnereau said. “They all think its from the past, and they don’t want to hear about it.”

Still, there’s plenty of potential for Timor’s arts and crafts to grow into strong, small-scale businesses, building back the skills and production methods that sometimes died or were lost during Indonesian occupation.

“A new picture of the country is also emerging. You’ll find many great murals on your travels around the country, and Ate Misu became the first fine-art school and artists association when it opened in Dili in 2003. The center sells the work of its students, and is open each day of the week other than Sunday.

One of the biggest issues for craft businesses in Timor is the cost of mailing the products Down Under often doubles the sales price of the goods themselves. The mall is proving so popular that the developers are adding two new additions to the complex.

Dili now has its first multistory shopping mall, normally a hive of activity, full of young Timorese surfing the Internet on their laptops via WiFi. The mall is proving so popular that the developers are adding two new additions to the complex.

The culture of Timor is gradually growing into strong, small-scale businesses, building back the skills and production methods that sometimes died or were lost during Indonesian occupation.

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Since most of Timor’s businesses are small-scale, they can’t grow into strong, small-scale businesses, building back the skills and production methods that sometimes died or were lost during Indonesian occupation.

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The Canossians of Baucau - Roots of an Idea

The cluster of young soap producers who dub themselves Ai-Funan are an offshoot of a program designed by the Canossian nuns in the market town of Baucau. It’s a now-peaceful expanse of rolling Timorese hills, looking down over palm trees and jungle forest to the northeastern shore of Timor-Leste.

The Canossians, the oldest female religious order in Timor-Leste, established the program to teach rural women essential work and life skills, out of one of Timor’s most notorious tragedies.

As the nation descended into chaos after the 1999 referendum to seek independence from Indonesia, many Timorese were unable to find even basic supplies. When the town of Los Palos sent word to the Canossians that they had been cut off for weeks, nuns in nearby towns responded by sending a team to deliver essentials and medicine.

The mother superior of Baucau, a Timorese woman called Celeste Carvalho, led the convoy with another top-ranking nun, the Italian Ermina Cazzaniqa, the mother superior of the town of Los Palos sent word to the Canossians that they had been cut off for weeks, nuns in nearby towns responded by sending a team to deliver essentials and medicine.

They were ambushed by Indonesia-supported militia at a low bridge crossing a river in thick jungle east of Baucau. The nuns, together with seven others including two priests-in-waiting and an Indonesian reporter, were killed.

The incident shocked the nation, and spurred the nuns of Baucau into action.

“We were thinking, ‘What will we do out of the ashes?’ and we decided we will do the same as they did in war-torn Italy during Napoleon’s time.” Senora Candida de Castro Pereira recalls, dressed in the order’s traditional grey habit and white veil, a silver medallion of the order’s founder dangling around her neck.

“Sister Candida,” who has been the director of the program since 2007, is thinking back to the very origins of the Canossian order. The nuns date their time on Timor back a full 130 years, when they arrived from Maccio, a fellow Portuguese colony. They in turn traced their roots to Portugal and ultimately to Italy, where during the Napoleonic wars, Magdalene of Canossa gave up the life of a wealthy marquise to serve the poor.

The Canossian nuns in the market town of Baucau. It’s a now-peaceful expanse of rolling Timorese hills, looking down over palm trees and jungle forest to the northeastern shore of Timor-Leste.

The modern version of the scheme still teaches traditional skills such as agriculture. But it has also evolved into computer courses, accounting and other office skills. The Baucau course takes in 25 students each year, with another 25 to 30 women and men enrolled in a hospitality course that has produced hotel and restaurant workers throughout Timor.

The nuns of Baucau felt a modern version of the same concept was their calling. Since its creation in 2000, the training center known as the Centro Treinamento Integral or CTID, has seen 492 young women pass through its ranks with the year-long Teachers of the Countryside course, some going on to start their own businesses, hire family members, head to the capital for office jobs, or bring knowledge back to their home towns.

“At first I didn’t understand the work, but I have really grown into it now,” Senora Candida says. “I’ve come to understand how important it is. It offers opportunities for young and rural women who would never have a chance otherwise to improve their lives, especially economically.”

For instance, one graduate, Cecilia de Reis, now employs eight seamstresses to weave a design she conceived for tais, the most important piece of traditional Timorese embroidery. Do Reis benefitted from start-up capital and several rolling loans to get her business off the ground. The center has spun out around 20 products, often businesses that buy their raw materials from local communities. Tamarind candy is the biggest seller, popular with local school kids, and virgin coconut oil is another success.

The income – and the symbolism of Timorese women building a successful business – is all-important in a country where the United Nations says conflict left nearly half the country’s women widowed, and sole providers for their family.

“I am proud because normally women stay at home, and the job is cooking and cleaning,” Inesia Candida da Silva, 24, said. “We also have a right and an obligation to develop our nation, not just men, through small businesses like this.”

The team see themselves as ambassadors now that Timorese products are landing on the map. “I am just happy that our products can be promoted in another country,” Brigida Tornes Pereira, 25, said.

Ai-Funan and the flower also serve as a symbol of femininity.

Don’t think, though, that the Ai-Funan team are wilting violets. They see their name and product as a symbol of both female grace and power.

“I am proud because all the workers here are women,” Maritza da Costa Pinto said. “I feel women are making an important product, and a contribution for the nation.”

At 20, she is the youngest member of the team. She is supporting two sisters who are studying at university in Indonesia, as well as helping her family build a house by buying cement and roofing.

The Ai-Funan soaps are produced in a small Baucau workshop powered by four young women, all in their twenties, all supporting members of their family through schooling by selling the bars.

“Ai-Funan” means “flower” in Timor’s most widespread local language, Tetun. But there’s more to the name than the fragrance of the country’s blooms. Ai-Funan and the flower also serve as a symbol of femininity.

“If a man falls for a woman, it’s like he picks that woman,” Maritza da Costa, who advises the team of four, said. “We see Ai-Funan as a symbol of Timor that will draw other people to fall in love with Timor-Leste and its product, and share Timor’s beauty and strength around the world. That’s why we picked that name.”

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Views of Haitian town of Les Cayes, which is southwest of Port au Prince and the gateway to Haiti’s southwestern peninsula.
Tour to a Timorese Village

Though most visitors to Timor start their trip by touching down in Dili at the small Presidente Nicolau Lobato International Airport—named for an independence-era hero killed in 1978—it's in the provinces that you start to feel the true essence of the country. The pace slows, and the smiles broaden, as you head into the countryside.

Dili may seem a small city on arrival, but it feels like a buzzing metropolis when you return from your travels east into the dry plains, south into the hilly interior or west towards the border with West Timor and Indonesia.

There's a warmth to the people of Timor that emanates from any tour of the province. People may even welcome you into their home, bring out their best cooking, and treat you to a sip of Timor's famous coffee, snacks, the kindness of their hearts.

“I'm very happy living here,” Martinho Sebastião Freitas, the chief of the tiny village Uato-Lari, says in a conversation at his home. “The community works together very well.”

The villages grow peanuts, rice, corn and sweet potatoes, and also collect the candlenuts that more or less grow wild in the area. Come harvest time, Uato-Lari takes its produce down to nearby paddies. With the rain drumming on the roof, he says with a smile, “I feel free because I can find the things I need to sustain my life and to sustain my family.”

I feel free because I can find the things I need to sustain my life and to sustain my family,” he says. “We had to go through suffering for many years before we could pass into this better life.”

The independence fight took place over four fronts—the armed efforts of the Falintil, the clandestine support of men such as da Silva supporting those fighters, covert operations coordinating communications in Dili, and the diplomatic efforts of Fretelin, Falintil’s political arm.

Da Silva, now 43, supported the guerrillas from 1991 through 1999, paying a hefty personal price. He was captured in 1998 by the Indonesian army, and tortured through 1999 by the notorious “Sector A” compound at Baucau’s airport, with electrical cables shocking his bare torso.

“I was ready to die but I saw no going to speak out anything to them,” he recalls. “I got tortured for three weeks, every day, and the rest of the days they just came to ask more information. But I never told them anything. They have no evidence in the end.”

He was transferred to police detention for one year, then released. He returned to support the 15 troops he was helping, who ambushed Indonesian troops on several occasions; killing one or two at a time, the poorly armed rebel fighters seeing their gains.

At peace now, Da Silva farms corn, peanuts, and rice in nearby paddies. With the rain drumming on the roof, he says, “I'm very happy living here.”

With its Troubles Behind It, Timor Looks to a Bright Future

The sense of community in the villages and small towns of Timor is very strong, and you can feel that everyone knows everyone else—and knows their business. Outsiders are welcomed with a wave, an eager grin from small kids, maybe a cry to a Westerner of “Malay! Malay!” or “Forogee.” Come back with a cry of “Timor, Timor,” and you’ll see a startled smile.

Working the land is not always an easy life, though, and many Timorese who are in their 20s or 30s have weathered and character-full faces carved by a life outside. The scars of Timor’s tumultuous past are still healing for the country’s population of 1.1 million.

In a small village in eastern Timor, and with a driving rain drumming on the steel roof of his house, Helen Guerreira da Silva explains how he helped Timor’s independence-seeking guerrillas, the Falantil, fight against the occupying Indonesians. He put himself in the line of danger, organizing food, supplies and logistics for the rebels hiding in the hills.

“There were two different difficulties—the first one is that the Indonesians occupied our land and then they are our enemies,” da Silva says. “The second difficulty is that when you work with your Timorese friends, sometimes if your Timorese friend is not good, he can sell you to the enemy.”

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Working the land is not always an easy life, though, and many Timorese who are in their 20s or 30s have weathered and character-full faces carved by a life outside. The scars of Timor’s tumultuous past are still healing for the country’s population of 1.1 million.

In a small village in eastern Timor, and with a driving rain drumming on the steel roof of his house, Helen Guerreira da Silva explains how he helped Timor’s independence-seeking guerrillas, the Falantil, fight against the occupying Indonesians. He put himself in the line of danger, organizing food, supplies and logistics for the rebels hiding in the hills.

“There were two different difficulties—the first one is that the Indonesians occupied our land and then they are our enemies,” da Silva says. “The second difficulty is that when you work with your Timorese friends, sometimes if your Timorese friend is not good, he can sell you to the enemy.”

The independence fight took place over four fronts—the armed efforts of the Falintil, the clandestine support of men such as da Silva supporting those fighters, covert operations coordinating communications in Dili, and the diplomatic efforts of Fretelin, Falintil’s political arm.

Da Silva, now 43, supported the guerrillas from 1991 through 1999, paying a hefty personal price. He was captured in 1998 by the Indonesian army, and tortured through 1999 by the notorious “Sector A” compound at Baucau’s airport, with electrical cables shocking his bare torso.

“I was ready to die but I saw no going to speak out anything to them,” he recalls. “I got tortured for three weeks, every day, and the rest of the days they just came to ask more information. But I never told them anything. They have no evidence in the end.”

He was transferred to police detention for one year, then released. He returned to support the 15 troops he was helping, who ambushed Indonesian troops on several occasions; killing one or two at a time, the poorly armed rebel fighters seeing their gains.

At peace now, Da Silva farms corn, peanuts, and rice in nearby paddies. With the rain drumming on the roof, he says, “I'm very happy living here.”

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One of Timor’s biggest problems could also be one of its biggest advantages. The country skipped many productive years during its troubled past, meaning its industry is ill-developed – but eco-business and eco-tourism are well-suited to Timor’s grass-roots culture. While oil and gas remain the country’s biggest earners, that industry is being developed by international companies. Local entrepreneurs and small-company founders are more set on building up businesses that grow from Timor’s earth itself.

Cardinal trees, which require little to no maintenance, are one crop that offers plenty of potential. The nuts are remarkably rich in oil, and can literally burn as candles if heated hot enough. They’re popular as lamp oil in Timor – but they also yield terrific moisturizers. One Timorese businesswoman, Hayna dos Céus, exports around 80 tons of 100 percent organic cardinal oil each year from her company Acédia to Hawai‘i, where they are used in Oil of Aloe vera, and lotions.

AloFura’s soaps from Baucau are also 100 percent natural, organic and made completely from ingredients sourced within the country. The team producing the soaps use Timor’s famed coffee as an ingredient for a身体-type soap, as well as coconuts, moisturizing cardamom, fragrant lemongrass, lavender, aloe vera, frangipani, gaba, sandalwood, virgin coconut oil and bamboo – all grown in and around Baucau – to make the bars.

Timor’s Talent – Being Close to the Earth

Blue whales patrol the coast off Baucau’s beaches, the largest beasts ever to live on earth coming unusually close to shore as they cruise the dropoffs and the edge of the reef. Spinner and common dolphins are an ever-more common sight. Fishermen used to catch such big marine mammals, as well as the mania keys, sharks and large fish that are, fortunately, still in reasonable supply. Now villagers are beginning to see the value, literally and figuratively, of keeping them in the water instead of pulling them to shore.

Kevin Austin, an Australian helping to develop a marine college and restaurant at the Baucau beaches (resources.com.au), sees buy-in from the community as vital. Villagers have already agreed to keep the coast development free, moving any construction at least 50 meters back from the mid-tide line, to preserve the beauty of the beaches.

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Aaa says he used to think of marine life only as a potential catch. Now it’s a draw of another kind for divers. “They’re really excited to see sharks here,” he says. “If they enjoy the diving, they will tell their friends, and more tourists will come.” The dive sites off that shore are still largely unexplored – all bar “Big Rock” remain unnamed.

Industries such as dive tourism and whaling and dolphine spotting “create a business for fishermen that is 20 times more valuable than fishing,” Dan Grohong, one of the founders of the Hummingfish Foundation, says. “It allows them to sell the same fish every day rather than throwing them in the market one time.”

If you want to capture the true taste of Timor, a cup of the country’s famed coffee is a wonderful way to start. With a piece of java, a small bun with a Portuguese bent, and some of the local jam – take your pick from pineapple, papaya, guava and more – and you’ve got yourself a great way to start the day, too.

The traditional way to brew yourself a cup of Timorese café is to take finely ground beans, put them in a small sieve, let the hot water flow through the grounds… and take in the unmissably earthy aroma before you savor your first sip. Sugar or straight up, well that’s up to you.

Coffee puts the country on the map economically during the Portuguese era, when it was Timor’s top crop – introduced in 1815 by the then-governor. At its peak, coffee made up half the country’s exports. Thousands of Timorese feed their families off the income from the refined beans – figuratively speaking, of course – for a century and a half.

Timor’s coffee is grown organically, partly for pragmatic reasons – farmers can’t afford pesticides or fancy technology – but that also makes for a very robust, aromatic Arabica bean. It has caught the attention of Starbucks, where it is marketed as a Timore blend and also used to bolster weaker brews from places such as Colombia.

Climb the winding switchbacks of the road south of Dili, and you gradually come across more and more deep-green coffee plants, with their dark-red berries, often thick in the woods of the hills. The air gets cooler and damper – good conditions for the crop – as you head towards the center of the country. The clouds gather thickly around Mount Ramelau, at 2,963 meters the country’s highest peak.

Coffee takes well to the hilly interior, and the plants grow on slopes that would be hard to tend for other commercial crops. Despite those natural gifts, the large plantations fell into disarray during the Indonesian occupation – production dropped to a low of 45,000 tons per year in the Portuguese era to a mere 6,000 tons by 1994.

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The top coffee company the Co-operative Cafe Timor, is the largest private employer in the country, and supplies Starbucks, CCT, as it’s known, a nonprofit set up in 1994 with backing from the economic aid agency USAID.

The cooperative has a permanent staff of around 300 that works to sell low-grade coffee at cheap rates. There’s still a lack of sophisticated refining equipment and growing techniques in the hard-to-navigate hills – which means there’s plenty of potential to improve quality and quantity, too.

Other initiatives are also seeking to improve production, replanting and refining techniques. The Hummingfish Foundation, for instance, is supporting another cooperative in remote Lualualei district, training a boutique organic coffee, Maubere Mountain Coffee. The aim is to build an all-organic brand that will give farmers the drive to tend to tradition, instead of modern, less economically sound crops.

Taste testers in Hong Kong such as Billy Lee, Hong Kong’s biggest trader of single-origin coffee, rate it highly enough to suggest that, with the right improvements in the processing procedure, it’s on the path to becoming another world-class brew.
Even though he felt it was his calling from a young age, it took time for Daniel J. Groshong to find his way into photography. Ultimately, though, the professor has taken him around the world, into some of the hottest war zones on the planet – including post-9/11 Afghanistan – and onto the pages of publications such as Time, Stern and The New York Times.

“Photography was the only thing that I was interested in doing when I was a teen-aged,” Groshong remarks. Pictures are worth a thousand words, though, and he could have written a couple of novels by now if he had started making photography pay.

By his own admission, Groshong was a rebellious kid growing up in Oregon, in the American northwest, and his career path wasn’t made any easier by getting kicked out of his home, his Catholic school and having to work two full-time jobs – a dishwasher at the Holiday Inn and as a sculptor’s assistant – to make ends meet in summer, he would bale hay and pick fruit.

After high school, Groshong found his way into the Navy, where he joined the Seabees – the force’s engineering corps. That helped pay his way into the art college and the San Francisco Art Institute. After getting his degree in photography, he started working part-time for Greenpeace, shooting their protests.

“I would take pictures before the cops arrived, and when the cops arrived, and then send them to the San Francisco Chronicle, the Associated Press, Reuters and UPI,” he says. Those military days came in handy. “One of the guys who worked with UPI was a ex-army Seabee, and he took me in and showed me the ropes.”

Stints in Albertville, France and Barcelona – to cover both the winter and summer Olympics – proved to be a big story, and it’s going to last a long time,” he remembers. “So I packed up my life and arrived in January of ’96 with two suitcases, got a room at the YMCA in Hong Kong.

He had heard the handover was approaching, “and I thought this is the perfect opportunity – it’s going to be a big story, and it’s going to last a long time,” he remembers. So I packed up my life and arrived in January of ’96 with two suitcases, got a room at the YMCA in Mong Kok, and just started working.”

Jobs for agencies and magazines followed, taking him to the first democratic election in 5,000 years of Chinese culture in Taiwan, to Cambodia to cover female de-miners, to Somalia and Mogadishu, shortly before the violence erupted from the jungle around the strip, the advance wave of peacekeepers sent to stop the violence. The pilot “stopped right in the middle of the runway, threw our stuff out and took off – he didn’t even turn around,” Groshong recalls. Slowly, camouflaged Australian special forces emerged from the jungle around the strip, the advance wave of peacekeepers sent to stop the violence.

As the fighting subsided, a love affair with the people and the country began. “What struck me was the level of courage that the Timorese people have if you vote for independence, you are dead,” he says. “My anticipation was that the violence would end, but it didn’t. The violence just continued. The violence just continued.”

Risking his life, he stayed in Timor to cover the murder and mayhem that followed the vote. His deserted hotel was robbed by machine-gun fire at night, but he photographed the violence and the desperate plight of thousands of refugees, until he was finally forced to flee.

Following September 11th, 2001, Groshong was assigned to Afghanistan, for the German magazine Stern. Having shot some of the first images of the frontlines and American bombs decimating the Taliban, he happened to be out of the country sending his images when the rest of his team were killed.

The birth of his son soon followed, and Groshong decided it was time to retire from war zones. He longed to return to a no-war peaceful Timor. Realizing there were no books on the country that didn’t focus on the war, he compiled the first coffee-table book of the country, Timor-Leste Land of Discovery, which took him three years to photograph.

Later assignments in India’s Kerala Province, where poachers had turned of the jungle guides, and in Bali’s rural communities, where former fishermen had turned to dive tourism and were protecting rather than plundering the reefs, planted the seed of The Hummingfish Foundation.

“When I realized that nature-based tourism could help alleviate poverty and add value to the ecosystem as well, I thought that was a very interesting idea,” he says. “That’s when I realized a photographer could play a role in helping the environment.”

When the Shanghai Expo came in 2010, Groshong was charged with the huge task of preparing all the promotional leaflets, brochures and posters to promote Timor’s pavilion. With US$9,000 left from the budget, he decided to take Timorese goods – and the Australian soap soaps Groshong had been sold in Australia as a souvenir – to the show. They rushed off the shelves. And an idea was born.

The Hummingfish Foundation now works to support eco-tourism initiatives and environmentally friendly, small-scale businesses so that impoverished communities can support themselves.

“We are an environmental organization, and we want to see natural resources,” Groshong says.

Australian soaps have landed not only in a Timor store but also on Cathay Pacific’s in-flight magazine. And despite its cash-strapped resources, The Hummingfish Foundation is also working to develop eco-projects in Cambodia, Haiti, China and Thailand.

Groshong admits the foundation has grown organically itself, sometimes in ways he didn’t predict. But the goal is ever more clearer.

“One of the most destructive forces is poverty,” he says. “If people are using pesticides and chemical pollutants, that’s not going to be very good for nature-based tourism either. We want to eliminate poverty and link that sustainable growth to the green economy.”
There are many reasons to love London. Avid trend followers would love Brick Lane; shopaholics can indulge in the likes of Liberty and shop till their hearts content on Bond Street; laid-back types can enjoy an afternoon at Hyde Park. Those who crave a bit of traditional English luxury can head over to Claridges for afternoon tea, or get inspired by the art and designs at the V&A Museum. Older generations can step back in time at The Theatre... and the list goes on. It doesn't matter what your age or class or personality, there's something for everyone within the multifaceted city of London.

In the East End of London is the ever changing Shoreditch. Shoreditch is a small district just north of London's city central, neighboring Brick Lane and Hoxton Square. Since the 12th century, this district has gone through countless transformation - starting from a monastery to becoming a theatre district, all the way to the time when Queen Victoria reigned when textile industry flourished. During that time, the area also became a centre for furniture design. But, like they say, the good comes with the bad. By the end of the 19th century, the area was full of crime, prostitution, and poverty. It wasn't till after The Second World War, when the British government stepped in to reform the area, that Shoreditch transformed into the trendy district we know today.

Once an industrial sector for the working class, Shoreditch, today, is a creative nook packed full of artistic vibe. Each year in September is the London Design Festival, where 32 museums, boutiques, workshops, bars and restaurants from the district join to make up the Shoreditch Design Triangle. The Triangle is primarily located within the district's three main streams of Old Street, Great Eastern Street, and Shoreditch High Street. During this time, participants of the festival would extend their opening hours to hold special events and parties to share their crafts with both passerby and friends within the art circle for an unforgettable evening.

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In the eyes of Agnès b., boundary never exists between fashion, art and culture. They are all living elements constantly enriched by new influences, nurtured by their times around music, cinema, photography and her taste for travel.