TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

pcgn
The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names

East Timor

Country name in English	East Timor[1]
State title in English	Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste
Country name in official languages	Timor-Leste (*tet*, *por*)[2],[3]
State title in official languages	Repúblika Demokrátika Timor-Leste (*tet*) República Democrática de Timor-Leste (*por*)
Name of citizen	East Timorese
Official languages	Tetum (*tet*)[4], Portuguese (*por*)
Script	Roman
ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	TL/TLS
Capital	Díli
Population	1.34 million (2022 census)
Area	14,919 km²

Introduction

The island of Timor[5] is the easternmost island of the chain between mainland Malaysia and Australia. It was a combination of Portuguese and Dutch possession from the 16th century, until the 1859 Treaty of Lisbon divided the island between the two. The western half of the island became known as Dutch Timor until 1945 when it became part of Indonesia, while the eastern half was known as Portuguese Timor. Portugal withdrew from Portuguese Timor in 1974, and Indonesia invaded shortly thereafter; this annexation was unrecognized by most of the international community. In 1999, East Timor declared independence from Indonesia and in May 2002 was internationally recognized as an independent state.

East Timor includes the islands of Ataúro and Jaco, plus the enclave of Oecussi-Ambeno[6], a Special Administrative Region, situated on the western (Indonesian) part of the island.

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[1] Note that the name Timor-Leste should be used in place of East Timor in official correspondence with East Timor; see also *Geographical names policy* section.

[2] ISO 639 codes are given for the languages mentioned in this Factfile.

[3] The Tetum language name *Timor Lorosa'e* (meaning "Timor of the rising sun") is sometimes seen.

[4] Also spelled Tetun, Tétum or Tettum.

[5] Derived from 'timur', the Malay word for 'east'.

[6] The name form used for the exclave is inconsistent: Oecussi is the usual Portuguese spelling, Ambeno was the name under Indonesian administration. It is frequently seen in the combined form Oecussi-Ambeno, including on the government of East Timor website: http://timor-leste.gov.tl.

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Geographical names policy

PCGN recommends using place names as found on official Portuguese-language sources. Although Tetum names are also official, official Tetum-language map sources are unlikely to be found. Tetum names may also be shown on maps if required, in the style Portuguese/Tetum, however PCGN would usually suggest simply showing the Portuguese-language names, as these are the names most frequently encountered.

The US Board on Geographic Names (BGN) Geographic Names Server (GNS) database is a good source for geographical names.

Traditionally, the indigenous geographical names of the island have not had a standard written form, so have principally been written with the Portuguese alphabet. There were few colonially-imposed Portuguese names, most of which have not been used since 1975 (e.g. Vila Salazar, the former name of Baucau). During the Indonesian occupation, many spellings were revised to reflect the Indonesian language. In particular, the sound /k/ was changed from 'c' or 'qu' in Portuguese, to 'k' in Indonesian e.g. Viqueque was re-written as Vikeke. In not recognizing the Indonesian occupation, these changes were not reflected by HMG.

PCGN recommends using the most commonly-used English-language name for countries for general purposes. For this country, this is felt to be *East Timor*, although the Portuguese form *Timor-Leste* is also used in some English language contexts, including by the UN. In formal contexts, PCGN reflects the official state title used by the state itself: *Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste*.

Language

The Constitution of East Timor states that the official languages are Tetum (*tet*) (a Malay-Polynesian language) and Portuguese (*por*). The Tetum language is spoken by around 30% of the population. Portuguese was the language of administration during the colonial era until 1975. Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia) (*ind*) and English are classed as working languages alongside the official languages. Apart from these, there are many other indigenous languages including Mambai (*mgm*), Makasae (*mkz*), Kemak (*kem*), Galolen (*gal*), Tukudede (*tkd*), Bunak (*bfn*) and Fataluku (*ddg*).

The Portuguese alphabet uses 23 letters of the Roman alphabet: K, W and Y are used only in foreign loan words. The Tetum alphabet uses all 26 letters of the Roman alphabet, as does the Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia) alphabet.

Inventory of characters (and their Unicode encodings[7]):

Tetum
In addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman alphabet, the **Tetum** language contains the following letter-diacritic combinations:

Upper-case character	Unicode encoding	Lower-case character	Unicode encoding
Ñ	00D1	ñ	00F1

Portuguese

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[7] See www.unicode.org

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In addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman alphabet, the **Portuguese** language contains the following letter-diacritic combinations:

Upper-case character	Unicode encoding	Lower-case character	Unicode encoding
À	00C0	à	00E0
Á	00C1	á	00E1
Â	00C2	â	00E2
Ã	00C3	ã	00E3
Ç	00C7	ç	00E7
É	00C9	é	00E9
Ê	00CA	ê	00EA
Í	00CD	í	00ED
Ó	00D3	ó	00F3
Ô	00D4	ô	00F4
Õ	00D5	õ	00F5
Ú	00DA	ú	00FA

Administrative structure

East Timor has 14 municipalities (*munisípiu* (*tet*), *município* (*por*)) and one Special Administrative Region (*rejiaun administrativa espesiál* (*tet*), r*egião administrativa especial* (*por*)), Oecussi-Ambeno, at the first-order administrative level (ADM1).

Municipality name	Name in other local languages (for reference)	ISO 3166-2 code	Municipality centre[8]	Centre location
Aileu	Aileu (*tet, ind*)	TL-AL	Aileu[9]	08°44'S 125°34'E
Ainaro	Ainaru (*tet*) Ainaro (*ind*)	TL-AN	Ainaro	09°00'S 125°30'E
Ataúro[10]	Ata'uro (*tet*) Pulau Kambing (*ind*)	-	Vila Maumeta[11]	08°16'S 125°36'E
Baucau	Baukau (*ind,tet*)	TL-BA	Baucau[12]	08°29'S 126°27'E
Bobonaro	Bobonaru (*tet*) Bobonaro (*ind*)	TL-BO	Maliana	09°00'S 125°13'E
Cova Lima	Kovalima (*ind*, *tet*)	TL-CO	Suai	09°19'S 125°15'E
Díli	Dili (*ind*, *tet*)	TL-DI	Díli[13]	08°34'S 125°34'E

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[8] It was former practice for all the centres to bear the same name as the municipalities.

[9] Previous name during Portuguese administration: Vila General Carmona.

[10] In January 2022, the island of Ataúro, a former administrative post of Díli, became the 14th municipality.

[11] Sometimes called Vila or Ataúro.

[12] Previous name during Portuguese administration: Vila Salazar.

[13] Previous spellings: Delhi, Deli, Dilli and Dilly.

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Municipality name	Name in other local languages (for reference)	ISO 3166-2 code	Municipality centre[8]	Centre location
Ermera	Ermera (*ind*, *tet*)	TL-ER	Gleno	08°43'S 125°26'E
Lautém	Lautein (*tet*) Lautem (*ind*)	TL-LA	Lospalos	08°31'S 127°00'E
Liquiçá	Likisá (*tet*) Likisia (*ind*)	TL-LI	Liquiçá	08°35'S 125°21'E
Manatuto	Manatutu (*tet*) Manatuto (*ind*)	TL-MT	Manatuto	08°31'S 126°01'E
Manufahi	Manofahi (*ind*) Manufahi (*tet*)	TL-MF	Same	09°00'S 125°39'E
Oecussi-Ambeno	Oé-Cusse (*por*) Ambeno (*ind*) Oekusi Ambenu (tet)	TL-OE	Pante Macassar[14]	09°12'S 124°23'E
Viqueque	Vikeke (*ind,tet*)	TL-VI	Viqueque	08°51'S 126°22'E

Other significant locations

PCGN recommended name	Name in other local languages	Location	Feature type
Ilha de Ataúro (*por*)	Pulau Atauro (*ind*)	08°13'S 125°35'E	Island
Ihéu de Jaco (*por*)	Pulau Jaco (*ind*)	03°25'S 127°19'E	Islet
Tatamailau (*por*)	Foho Tatamailau (*tet*)	08°55'S 125°29'E	Mountain
Ira Lalaro (*por*)	Danau Iralaloro (*ind*)	08°27'S 127°08'E	Lake
Ombai Strait	Estreito de Ombai (*por*) Estreitu Ombai (*tet*) Selat Ombai (*ind*)	08°30'S 125°00'E	Strait
Wetar Strait	Estreito de Wetar (*por*) Estreitu Wetar (*tet*) Selat Wetar (*ind*)	08°20'S 126°30'E	Strait

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[14] Sometimes referred to as Pantemakasar or Pantemakassar (or even Oekusi, Oekussi or Okusi) during Indonesian administration.

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Useful references

- BBC Country Profile (no longer updated): https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-14919009
- CIA World Factbook https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/timor-leste/
- FCDO Travel Advice: https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/timor-leste
- Government of Timor-Leste: http://timor-leste.gov.tl/?lang=en
- ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/
- Languages: www.ethnologue.com; www.omniglot.com
- PCGN Country Names list: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/country-names
- National Institute of Statistics Timor-Leste (2022 Census): INETL, I.P - National Institute Of Statistics Timor-Leste
- Unicode www.unicode.org
- US Board on Geographic Names (BGN) Geographic Names Server: GNS Search & Download WebApp (nga.mil)

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