

# TREKKING

Java is one of the most densely populated islands in the world with something like 150 million people crammed in its narrow borders. You would think that finding some open space where you can be at one with nature and the environment would be nigh on impossible. Not only is it possible, it's within a couple of hours of Jakarta. The chain of volcanoes that line Java's spine leave a rich soil that produces much of the rice needed to feed that massive population. Terraced rice fields dot the foothills of Gunung Gede and Pangrango where farmers and woodcutters live pretty much as they have done for centuries. Toiling in the fields, gathering wood, getting their produce to market, this intricate network of buyers and sellers operate in a world with traffic jams and pollution. Where transportation is by way of the feet and the road ways are narrow raised ledges that take you through the verdant rice fields. It's as if time stood still. For a city boy like me, it's like entering another world. But for long time expat Alex Koris it's home. He treks, hikes, walks. Whatever you want to call it. When he first settled in the Bogor area he would spend his free time taking the rudimentary maps that were then available and going 'bush'. For 17 years he explored the gentle and not so gentle slopes of the twin peaks far from the whiff of exhaust fumes that clog the Puncak every weekend. I joined Alex on one of his walks. Nangleng is a place most people in Bogor couldn't find. It's a one street kampong with a school, a mosque, a couple of shops, and a dead end. It nestles on the lower slopes of the Pangrango. When the road runs out its 4WD only until it narrows and then you'll need a motorcycle. Or your feet. Opposite the village warung we head down the slopes, through some undergrowth and then into an clearing. The valley lies before us, a stream bubbles gently along its floor while a metallic blue Kingfisher darts past. To our right is the ridge that Alex tells us we're going to climb but I think little of it. At first I just want to take in the beauty and solitude of the now.

*Java was often described as the most beautiful island in the world in the past. The beauty is still there, it is just getting harder to find. When you find it...enjoy it.*

After crossing the stream using a rudimentary stone bridge, one the three little goats might recognize, we headed for the trees. Initially the incline was steady but there was a lot of it and it was all in one direction. Up! As we climbed up the ridge my mind enacted Indiana Jones/Jeff Corwin fantasies but instead of running through the thick undergrowth in search of some rare animal it was all I could do to keep up with the much fitter Alex. Again and again I thanked him for the walking stick he had lent me. Occasionally, we came across a clearing in the trees. Wood gatherers used these spots to store their branches before heading back home. This is no impenetrable jungle. Rather it is home to a mini economic system and the clearings were the warehouses. While we followed the main, well worn path, off to the sides were frequent branches that connected to other smaller communities who called this patch of forest home. There are no directions in the woods. Instead an ability to map read is required or, preferably, a GPS. I was lucky. Alex had been on this route dozens of times. He knew it like the back of his hand. And we climbed onwards and upwards. At the top of the ridge we reached the halfway point after about three hours and started our return trip. We did a right turn and descended down through some thick undergrowth. The climb up was gentle and painless. Going down was steep and grueling but the views were immense. Once we broke the tree cover we looked down on the distant stream glistening silver in the sunlight. Opposite was the ridge we had just ascended, we were coming down a different one and above us, to our right, was where they joined. It probably looked spectacular but I saw nothing. I'm scared of heights and my mind was consumed by the soft soil we were on and the steep slope just inches away from us. We made it back to the warung in Nangleng. I was shattered. Shattered but exhilarated. The scenery had been impressive, we had met some lovely, smiling people and the weather had been wonderful. My legs enjoyed the experience much less and spent the next couple of days complaining about the smallest step. Each time I grimaced in pain I recalled Alex's words. That we had just completed the easiest trek! He should know. After 17 years trekking the hills and tracks he has put together a handy series of books called Puncak Trek. Each book comes with an accompanying map and details where to go and what to see. In total there are 16 treks of varying difficulty and distance covering the northern slopes of the twin peaks. His target now is to explore the southern slopes! If you are interested in knowing more about the Nangleng trek or indeed the other treks Alex has detailed feel free to check out his website [www.puncaktrek.com](http://www.puncaktrek.com) That is also the place to find out more about the books and maps.

Trek: Anthony Sutton.

Sample map 2  
Circle Route A1 from Nangleng 5,8 Km (high resolution)

