

THE EVOLUTION OF A TOURIST DESTINATION

Mt Rinjani is at an interesting crossroads in its evolution as a tourist destination. The number of National Park visitors has boomed in the past two years, growing from 19,000 in 2012 to 50,000 in 2014. While this is certainly a positive development for the economy and local jobs, the destination has grown more quickly than the infrastructure, and the Park is straining to manage waste.

"We weren't prepared for this and we didn't have the budget," says Agus Budiono, head of Rinjani National Park. "We have difficulties with water resources. The toilets are always broken and people can't use them anymore. And we are under the Ministry of Forestry, yet this is also a Ministry of Tourism issue. We try to combat problems, but we need time."

For visitors to Rinjani National Park, the excess of rubbish does affect the experience. "The contrast is difficult," says Luciano. "The people and landscape are lovely, and this place could be stunning, but what will affect change? It's hard, because you don't want to travel to a place and say: 'this is how you should do things', impose your values, you know?"

So what can be done? Our World Expeditions guide, Meldy, has seen a lot of change in the five years he's been guiding in Rinjani National Park. "People want to see Rinjani. That is great!

Great for the people who want to have this adventure, great for the locals. But change is difficult. It's everyone's responsibility [to manage it]: the government, the porters, the visitors; I believe there needs to be more education."

Positive steps are being taken. The good news is that, according to Mr Budiono, the budget for the park will be increased from just over 1.5 billion rupiah [approximately \$165,000 NZD] to 10 billion rupiah [approximately \$1,000,000 NZD] next year. "This is very positive news," he says. "With increased budget, we'll have better trekking, better facilities. In the next two or three years, there might be plans to regulate visitors. I hope in the next five years we can do better and overcome the problem. I think it's a problem that everyone has, but it's really important because Indonesia is so unique. It's a really special place."

In the end, it is every individual visitor who makes a significant difference. "Any beautiful landscape will attract travellers," says Tim Loftus, Kathmandu's Marketing Manager for Brand, who travelled to Mt Rinjani with the crew. "It's about infrastructure catching up, and in the meantime it's down to individual travellers. It may seem like one more lolly wrapper or tissue won't make a difference to the problem, but it's the compounded effect of that – 50,000 times over.

I would most certainly encourage people to come experience Lombok. It's a stunning location with remarkable people and beautiful scenery. The Mt Rinjani climb itself was a great challenge, a great adventure. Visitors just need to be mindful about travelling responsibly and respectfully."

