



Exploring culture and tourism of Ternate Island, a prominent sultanate in eastern Indonesia : A Report

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ABSTRACT

Ternate is a city situated at the foot of the Gamalama volcano on Ternate Island in the province of North Maluku. Historically, Ternate has served as a centre of civilization for nearly all the communities in North Maluku. Its cultural landscape reflects a complex blend of historical legacies, indigenous traditions, and external influences. As a significant centre of civilization, Ternate's historical importance stems from its role in the spice trade and as the seat of the influential Sultanate. Established in the 13th century, the Sultanate merged local customs with Islamic principles, shaping its governance structures, social hierarchy, and religious practices. Despite the Islamization process, Ternate's social fabric retained a diverse ethos, with indigenous beliefs coexisting alongside Islam, reflecting a multifaceted cultural landscape. This intricate social structure is evident in Ternate's hierarchical society, where noble families interact with commoners within a structured framework, upholding ancestral traditions. Ritual practices like the *kololi kie* and *feri kie* highlight the islanders' deep reverence for their cultural roots, emphasizing a solid connection to sacred sites and ancestral spirits, reinforcing the enduring importance of tradition in shaping Ternate's collective identity. Beyond its cultural heritage, Ternate's appeal lies in its diverse natural landscape, offering a range of geographical features and scenic views. From the majestic Mount Gamalama to the serene Ngade Lake, Ternate boasts various natural attractions for exploration and admiration. Additionally, historical landmarks such as Kalamata Fort and Sultan Ternate Mosque provide insights into the island's colonial history and Islamic heritage, enriching visitors' cultural experiences.

Keywords: Ternate, sultanate, eastern Indonesia, tourism, culture.

Cite This Article: Pramana, I.M.Y. 2024. Exploring culture and tourism of Ternate Island, a prominent sultanate in eastern Indonesia : A Report. *Bali Tourism Journal* 8(1): 15-20. DOI: 10.36675/btj.v8i1.103

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Received: 2023-12-26
Accepted: 2023-02-02
Published: 2024-03-06

INTRODUCTION

Ternate is a city situated at the foot of the Gamalama volcano on Ternate Island in the province of North Maluku. Historically, Ternate has served as a centre of civilization for nearly all the communities in North Maluku. Ternate's prominence in historical records is primarily due to its production of spices. Its fertile land made Ternate a crucial producer of cloves and nutmeg in the Maluku Islands. This significance was bolstered by its geographical position along the interconnected maritime routes of the Maluku Sea, Sulawesi Sea, and Sulu Sea, positioning it as a vital part of an international trade network. Historical accounts highlight the resilience and dominance of the Ternate kingdom, which once controlled various regions comprising diverse ethnic groups. This control was not just political, but also cultural, as the Ternate kingdom's influence shaped the traditions, languages, and customs of

these ethnic groups. The cultural influence of the Ternate kingdom extended across North Maluku, particularly in the political, economic, and cultural spheres (Maricar, 2017).¹

Ternate was a prominent sultanate and one of the oldest Islamic kingdoms in eastern Indonesia. It was one of the four sultanates in North Maluku that constituted the *Moloku Kie Raha* (the four great mountains), a customary institution shared among the sultanates of Ternate, Tidore, Bacan, and Jailolo. The Sultanate of Ternate was established in 1257 CE with Baab Mansur Malamo as its first ruler (*kolano*). The sultanate held a strategic role in the eastern archipelago from the 13th to the 17th century CE, reaching its zenith in the 16th century due to the spice trade and military prowess (Amal in Pettalongi, 2012).² Ternate interacted with Islam from its inception, as many Arab traders settled there. During the reign of Sultan

Zainal Abidin (1486–1500 CE), the title Solano was replaced with the sultan, and Islam was recognized as the state religion, with Islamic law being implemented and Islamic institutions established. Since then, the Sultanate of Ternate has developed a distinctly Islamic cultural and legal framework.

The population of the Sultanate of Ternate is a rich tapestry of cultures, making it a truly multicultural society. The inhabitants, as classified by Christiaan Frans van Fraasen (in Hasim, 2019), can be divided into two main categories: Indigenous people, such as *Tubo*, *Tobana*, *Tabanga*, and *Toboleu*, who have long resided on Ternate Island, and non-Ternate natives from other regions. These indigenous groups, forming the foundation of the Ternate kingdom, are further divided into four kinship groups or clans: *SoaSio*, *Sangaji*, *Heku*, and *Cim* (Hasim, 2019). Each clan represents a



Figure 1.⁴ An iconic view of Tidore Island and Maitara Island from Ternate.



Figure 2.⁸ Some members of the Ternate community still perform offerings to the spirits of ancestors in the form of offerings to ancient sacred places called *Jere*. *Jere* is a stone that emerges naturally, resembling a grave, thus considered a sacred tomb believed to bring blessings.

different ethnic group, adding to the cultural diversity of Ternate. The four main clans, according to Adnan (in Hasim, 2019), have traditionally held political positions within the Sultanate of Ternate, showcasing the inclusivity of its political



Figure 3.¹⁷ The painting of Sultan Iskandar Muhammad Djabir Sjah (1902–1975), the 46th Sultan of Ternate. Part of the collection at the Ternate Kedaton Museum.

structure.³

The non-Ternate native population, including ethnic groups such as Tidore, Jailolo, Loloda, Bacan, Makian, and Sanana, played a significant role in the development of the Sultanate of Ternate. Their integration into the government structure was a testament to the sultanate's commitment to inclusivity. They formed the royal council *Bobato Nyagimoi se Tufkange*, or the council of eighteen with respective titles, each ethnic group contributing to the diverse fabric of Ternate's governance. The Tidore ethnic

group was given the title *Sangaji Limatahu*, the Jailolo ethnic group the title *Sangaji Tomajiko*, the Bacan ethnic group the title *Kimalaha Labuha*, the Makian ethnic group the title *Sangaji Tokofi*, the Loloda ethnic group the title *Sangaji Malayu-Konora*, and the Sula ethnic group the title *Salahakan*. These ethnic groups, like the four main clans, continue to play a pivotal role in political recruitment and occupy key positions within the bureaucratic structure of the Sultanate of Ternate.

Customary Law, Tradition, and Life Philosophy

As a sultanate, Ternate possesses its customary law and philosophy known as *Adat se atorang* (Aksan, 2016).⁵ The people of Ternate have adhered to this customary law for generations as a moral code governing political order, governance systems, and socio-cultural norms. *Adat se atorang* has undergone acculturation with the teachings of Islam since the 13th century, during the Islamization of the Ternate kingdom. Due to Ternate's historical significance as a spice hub attracting traders from across the archipelago, such as Java and Malay, as well as foreign traders from Arabia, India, China, and even Europe, the region has been open to cultural acculturation alongside Islam. *Adat se atorang*, with its cultural values, serves as a guiding principle for Ternate's multi-ethnic and multicultural society. For instance, the practice of 'gotong royong' or communal work is a key aspect of Ternate's culture, emphasizing the importance of cooperation and mutual support (Sakka, 2007).⁶

The official religion adhered to by the majority of the Ternate community is Islam; however, animistic and dynamistic beliefs (indigenous religions) are still practiced by a significant portion of the Ternate population. To this day, some members of the Ternate community still believe in Mount Gamalama as a source of supernatural power from which assistance can be sought for safety and well-being. One such practice is the ceremony of honor and worship for Mount Gamalama, involving circumambulation of the mountain, known as *kololi kie* and *ferre kie*. Despite embracing Islam, most of the

Ternate community remains faithful to their ancestral traditions. Similarly, upon coronation, the sultans must perform the *kololi kie* and *fere kie* ceremonies (circumambulating and ascending the mountain). However, these ceremonies are no longer directed toward the supernatural powers of Mount Gamalama but toward the presence of *Allah SWT*.

The tradition of *kololi kie* involves a journey on foot around the island of Ternate, either by land or sea routes, conducted before the month of Ramadan and usually accompanied by specific intentions. This journey entails visiting villages along the coast of Ternate Island, with each person carrying a container (for freshwater), jug, or bottle, stopping at every mosque to collect a little water from the mosque's tank/tap to take home. According to legend, this water was used as the first ablution water and the first breaking of fast water in Ramadan. At the end of Ramadan, they embark on another *kololi kie* journey with water for ablution for the Eid al-Fitr prayers (Leirissa in Hasim and Faruk, 2020).⁷

Meanwhile, the tradition of *fere kie*, similar to *kololi kie*, involves individuals with specific intentions climbing the peak of Mount Ternate, known as Mount Gamalama (Gamlamo), considered a blessed, sacred mountain with special powers. According to myths believed by the Ternate community, as long as the taboos and demands of the behaviour of this blessed mountain are not violated, even though there are eruptions, it will not claim any human lives (Syah in Hasim and Faruk, 2020). Thus far, there have been no casualties from the numerous eruptions of Mount Gamalama. At the peak of Mount Gamalama, several sacred graves and locations around these graves are considered by the followers of the Kie Ternate belief system (during the early Islamic period) as duplicates of Mecca-Medina and other pilgrimage sites. In these places, believers can "perform Hajj, Umrah, Tawaf, Sai, stoning of the Jamarat, and other pilgrimage rituals." Besides Prophet Muhammad SAW, the central figure in the Kie Ternate belief system is Prophet Khidir. In addition to believing in the supernatural power of Mount Gamalama, the Ternate community also

has faith in wooden statues called *wonge*. Physically, *wonge* resembles a male-female figure representing ancestors. *Wonge* is placed outside and inside a small house called *Fala Wonge*, which contains statues of their ancestors. *Fala wonge* offers yellow rice, betel leaves, nuts, tobacco, tuak (a traditional alcoholic beverage), and incense. They believe *Wonge* can ward off disasters and serve as a centre of supernatural power that can be invoked for assistance.

Another belief still held and practiced by the Ternate community is the traditional ceremony of *Joko kaha*, or ground stomping. This ceremony, which is of principle and obligatory nature, must be conducted from family rituals to the sultan's coronation. The purpose of this traditional ceremony is to pay homage to the earth as the centre of supernatural power and to aid or grant safety to humans. Additionally, some members of the Ternate community still perform offerings to the spirits of ancestors in the form of offerings to ancient sacred places called *Jere*. *Jere* is a stone that emerges naturally, resembling a grave, thus considered a sacred tomb believed to bring blessings.

Social and Political Culture

The Ternate community is genealogically organized into social groups with distinct characteristics. Each social group is called *soa* (a clan) and is headed by a *soa* leader called *kimalaha* or *fanyira*. *Soa* leaders are appointed based on lineage factors. For the Ternate community, the rules of social stratification are highly significant to uphold because they view it as a prerequisite for enhancing glory and maintaining honour. Although the social stratification of the Ternate community is hierarchical, their social classification is not as sharp as the feudal caste divisions; instead, it is based solely on lineage.

The highest stratum of social stratification in Ternate society is the *kolano*, consisting of the sultan and his family up to three generations. In the political structure of the Sultanate of Ternate, the sultan is the focal point of power, holding considerable authority. This is reflected in their ownership of heirlooms, titles, or genealogical lineages. Within the sultan's family, the first tier is

the children of the sultan, who are given the title *kaicil* for males and *nyaicil* or *boki* for females. If these children are in the third tier from the ruling sultan, they are called *jou ma datu*, and if they are in the fourth tier from the ruling sultan, they have the title *jou mamuse*. The second tier of social stratification in Ternate society is the noble class, who still have blood ties with the sultan's family, such as the sultan's grandchildren and the children of the sultan's daughters, with people from the palace environment, including nobles appointed to royal bureaucratic positions and religious groups, known as *Dano*. Meanwhile, the third tier consists of ordinary people, *bala kusu se kano-kano*.

The noble group, with the sultan at its apex, is the topmost layer with higher social, political, and economic status. They dominate leadership in Ternate society, especially the sultan, who inherits traditional authority as a hereditary leader. Beneath the sultan are noble groups in Ternate society, distinguished into central and regional nobles. Central nobles are noble groups from the Soa-Sio clans (Soa Marasaoli, Limatahu, Tomagola, and Tomaito). This noble group holds inherent political functions, such as the right to occupy positions in the *bobato madopolo* (council of ministers) and *bobato nyagimoi se tufkange* (legislative body) and appointing and dismissing the sultan. Thus, from ancient times to the present, these clans have held an esteemed position after the sultan's relatives and are considered to have higher nobility status than regional noble ranks.

Regional nobles are descendants of the Sangaji and Salahakan clans, usually serving as the sultan's representatives (district heads) tasked with governing and administering the Sultan's interests in areas far from the kingdom's centre. The placement and appointment of Sangaji and Salahakan depend heavily on the purity of their noble bloodline as a stipulation because, in the governmental structure of the Sultanate of Ternate, nobles from the Sangaji clan cannot and must not exercise authority over the higher-ranking Sio clans. This social stratification of Ternate society significantly influences the political leadership system, especially at the kingdom's central level (the sultan). The

people exhibit absolute obedience based on the political culture (*Jou kasa ngom ka ge*), meaning wherever the sultan is, there we are. Refusal of the sultan's decisions (*iddin kolano*) would bring disaster, a belief also held by the nobles, alleviating the need for them to control their subjects. According to Radjiloen (in Hasim, 2019), the belief in a close relationship between *Jou* (the sultan) and *Bala* (the people) creates a cultural order that is permanently adhered to and preserved, as it is perceived to have magical power in protecting the existing social and political order.

Following the independence proclamation and in line with the modernization process, the position of the noble class underwent a transition. On the one hand, the traditional elite nobles desired to maintain the status quo and viewed the changes as threats to their status. On the other hand, there were changes in the requirements for entering the bureaucratic sphere and broad opportunities for all layers of society to acquire higher education, enabling new elite groups to hold leadership positions and demanding change. In their development, these changes influenced Ternate society's social and cultural order. Thus, the convention stating that the noble elite was at a higher stratum and entitled to power over lower groups has faded. It is not uncommon today for a bureaucratic official to come from ordinary people, while their subordinates may be individuals with noble blood. However, the nobles persisted in their traditional status, so nobles from hereditary backgrounds still dominated positions in the Sultanate of Ternate.⁹

Traditional Houses of Ternate

For the people of Ternate, houses serve not only as shelters after activities but also as places to return to upon leaving the world (Ibrahim, 2017). This is evidenced by the desire of nearly all Ternate residents who migrate away from Ternate to return to the island in their final days, or at least to be buried there. Based on their primary function as dwellings, houses in Ternate are known as *kadato* and *fala* (Ibrahim, 2017). *Kadato* refers to residences for the sultan, while *fala* refers to houses for ordinary people or anyone other than the sultan. In terms of architectural

form, Ternate houses include *fala gaku* or elevated houses, commonly referred to as stilt houses, *fala boga* or houses with broken roofs resembling typical North Maluku dwellings, and *fala mafana romtoha* or houses with hipped roofs forming five lines when viewed from above. Based on dominant materials, there are *fala gaba-gaba*, made primarily from sago palm trunks; *fala tabadiku*, made from bamboo; and *fala seng*, houses with roofs made from corrugated iron.

When classified according to their structural system, there is the term *fala kanci*. These houses are constructed with wooden frame structures interlocked without nail joints, instead using pegs called *pen*. The *fala kanci*-type houses are still commonly found in Ternate, scattered across various parts of the island (Ibrahim, 2017). At first glance, *fala kanci* houses resemble wooden houses in several regions, such as Sulawesi and Sumatra, or Malay wooden houses. However, there are differences in the materials used for wall fillings. Malay houses typically use wood as walls or room dividers. In contrast, *fala kanci* houses generally use woven bamboo called *patate* coated with a mixture of lime (*kalero*), sand, tree sap, and egg. The *kalero* production process is traditionally done by burning pumice stones. Some *fala kanci* houses also use sago palm trunk strips (*gaba-gaba*) as wall fillings, along with boards.¹⁰

Another characteristic of these houses, besides their wooden structural materials, is their generally hipped roof shape, with the height not exceeding one-third of the roof width. The floors of these houses usually consist of smoothed cement mixtures. Some houses use tiles. *Fala kanci* houses have elongated layouts, divided into two rooms, left and right, corresponding to the width of one timber joint. This division pattern always follows a sequence, with the living room and bedroom in the front and middle and the dining room at the back. The kitchen is usually separate or, if integrated, always positioned at the farthest rear near the dining area.

On the other hand, noble houses in Ternate have front and back porches as wide as the house, with stone wall structures joined together with lime (*kalero*), which also serve as load-bearing

walls. At the same time, the roof is extended to the front and back to form front and back terraces supported by colonial-style columns. The saddle roof is relatively high, distinguishing it from other houses. It has a symmetrical layout with red ceramic floors, while the foundation is made of stone arrangements. The windows and doors are made of wood and have carved flower motif ventilation. The kitchen is always separate at the back, equipped with a large stone hearth called a *forno*. Wells are always available next to the kitchen; some noble houses uniquely have an additional well in one corner of the front yard. This well is created for semi-public use, serving guests or passersby for ablution or cleansing purposes. An exciting feature of noble houses is the entrance gate to the yard, made of stone and lime and arranged with a roof. In the Ternate language, this gate is called *Fala Jawa*. The noble houses of the Ternate Sultanate, with their load-bearing wall and column structures, were influenced by colonialism and are estimated to have been built since the 18th century.^{11,12,13}

Traditional Costumes of Ternate

The history of traditional Ternate attire originates from the heyday of the Ternate Sultanate in the 15th and 19th centuries. Ternate traditional attire became a symbol of social status and wealth possessed by the nobility and royal families. Initially inspired by Arab, Indian, and Chinese attire, Ternate's traditional clothing has evolved and adapted to local culture and the environment. Materials used to make traditional Ternate attire include silk, *songket*, and traditional fabrics such as *ikat*. Ternate traditional attire is worn by the nobility, royal families, and ordinary people during traditional events such as weddings, circumcisions, and religious ceremonies. Ternate traditional attire also symbolizes unity and togetherness in Ternate society.

Ternate traditional attire consists of several types representing the wearer's social status and age (Intan, 2023). The first type is the attire of the sultan and queen. Ternate Sultan and Queen traditional attire is made of silk with bright colors such as red, green, and yellow. On the chest are ornaments in the form of suns, flowers, and

birds of paradise, adorned with sequins, beads, and gold. Meanwhile, the sultan wears a crown on the head while the queen wears a headpiece called *toli-toli*. The next type is the attire of the nobility. Ternate Nobility's traditional attire consists of long shirts and silk or *songket* fabric pants. The colors used are more diverse than those of the Sultan and Queen, such as blue, purple, and pink. On the front of the shirt, there are decorations in the form of gold or silver threads forming flower or bird motifs. They also wear head ornaments such as *dodot* or *tambang* adorned with diamonds and diamonds.

The next type is the attire of the sons and daughters. Teenage Boys' traditional attire consists of long-sleeved shirts and long pants with striped or checkered patterns. The colours used are brighter, such as yellow, green, and blue. Meanwhile, Teenage Girls' Ternate traditional attire consists of long-sleeved shirts and long skirts with bright colours and feminine motifs such as flowers and leaves. Both wear head ornaments called *kufi*, made of gold or silver. The last type is the attire of the ordinary people. Common People's Ternate traditional attire is made of traditional fabrics such as ikat and sarong cloth. Men's traditional attire usually consists of short-sleeved shirts and shorts with simple motifs such as stripes or dots. Meanwhile, women's traditional attire consists of long-sleeved shirts and long skirts with various motifs, such as flowers or geometric shapes. Neither wear elaborate head decorations, only wearing cloth wrapped around their heads as hair coverings.^{14,15,16}

Infamous Tourist attractions in Ternate

The holiday experience in Ternate City, North Maluku, presents some captivating attractions that cater to diverse interests, ranging from those inclined towards natural wonders to enthusiasts of historical landmarks. Among these attractions is the Kedaton Ternate, also known as the Museum Kedaton Kesultanan Ternate. Situated atop Bukit Limau, this museum offers a fascinating journey into the heritage of the Ternate Sultanate. Constructed in 1813, the museum's distinctive octagonal

structure resembles a sitting lion, with its front paws facing the sea against the backdrop of Mount Gamalama. A sacred crown adorned with human-like hair is noteworthy among its collections, offering a glimpse into the sultanate's cultural and regal traditions.

Another landmark of historical significance is the Sultan Ternate Mosque, located on Jalan Sultan Khairun. Believed to have been established during the reign of Sultan Zainal Abidin or Sultan Saidi Barakati in the early 17th century, this mosque serves as the region's Islamic heritage and architectural prowess. For those intrigued by Ternate's colonial history, the Kalamata Fort and Oranje Fort offer compelling insights into the island's tumultuous past. Built in 1540, the Kalamata Fort witnessed fierce battles between the Dutch and Spanish colonial powers vying for control over the lucrative spice trade. Similarly, the Oranje Fort in Ternate Tengah stands as a poignant reminder of Ternate's colonial legacy and its role in shaping Indonesia's history.

Moreover, attractions such as Ngade Lake, Laguna Lake, and Angus Rock Geological Park showcase Ternate's natural beauty. Nestled amidst verdant landscapes, these destinations offer serene retreats for visitors seeking tranquillity amidst breathtaking scenery. The Ngade Lake, with its proximity to the sea and freshwater allure, serves as a haven for tourists and local communities engaged in freshwater aquaculture. Additionally, geological marvels such as the Angus Rock Geological Park, formed from volcanic rocks following the eruption of Mount Gamalama in 1673, provide visitors with unique insights into the island's geological history. Similarly, Tolire Lake, formed from the same eruption in 1775, offers visitors an opportunity to marvel at nature's resilience and beauty amidst the backdrop of Mount Gamalama. Finally, Nukila Park, situated along the coast, provides a serene setting for strolls amidst coastal flora and recreational activities for families. With its natural beauty, historical landmarks, and cultural heritage blend, Ternate offers visitors a multifaceted holiday experience that promises enrichment and relaxation.¹⁸

CONCLUSION

The cultural landscape of Ternate reflects a complex blend of historical legacies, indigenous traditions, and external influences, notably Islamic and colonial. As a significant centre of civilization within North Maluku, Ternate's historical importance stems from its crucial role in the spice trade and as the seat of the influential Ternate Sultanate. Established in the 13th century, the Sultanate merged local customs with Islamic principles, shaping its governance structures, social hierarchy, and religious practices with a distinct Islamic flavour. Despite the Islamization process, Ternate's social fabric retained a diverse ethos, with indigenous beliefs coexisting alongside Islam, reflecting a multifaceted cultural landscape. This intricate social structure is evident in Ternate's hierarchical society, where noble families interact with commoners within a structured framework, upholding ancestral traditions. Ritual practices like the *kololi kie* and *fere kie* highlight the islanders' deep reverence for their cultural roots, emphasizing a solid connection to sacred sites and ancestral spirits, reinforcing the enduring importance of tradition in shaping Ternate's collective identity.

Beyond its cultural heritage, Ternate's appeal lies in its diverse natural landscape, offering a range of geographical features and scenic views. From the majestic Mount Gamalama to the serene Ngade Lake, Ternate boasts various natural attractions for exploration and admiration. Additionally, historical landmarks such as Kalamata Fort and Sultan Ternate Mosque provide insights into the island's colonial history and Islamic heritage, enriching visitors' cultural experiences. Meanwhile, recreational areas like Nukila Park offer ideal settings for leisure activities amid coastal beauty. Whether exploring geological formations in Angus Rock Geological Park or immersing in cultural exhibits at Kedaton Museum, visitors embark on an enriching journey that captures Ternate's historical legacy, natural splendour, and cultural richness. As Ternate embraces modernization while

cherishing its past, it continues to enthrall travellers seeking to uncover the layers of this ancient island enclave.

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