



The Ngada Villages of Flores

Indonesia

The Ngada villages of Desa Guru Sina, Desa Langa, Desa Bela, and Desa Lina Tiwa are nestled between two volcanos, Gunung Inerie and Gunung Deru, in the remote inlands of the island of Flores. These communities are characterized by a distinctive form of vernacular architecture that has survived despite the globalizing forces of the twenty-first century. The number of houses (*sa'o*) and shrines for male and female ancestors (*ngadhu* and *bhaga*) in a given village is determined by the number of clans or families (*suku*) in the village, and must remain constant over time. The village of Guru Sina, for example, has 27 *sa'o*. The architecture reflects traditional beliefs, with elements, decorations, and carvings of buffalo, chickens, horses, humans, weaponry, and other forms, each with a specific purpose to protect the inhabitants and ensure a sustainable harmony with the environment, ancestral spirits, and natural forces.

While the Ngada communities have demonstrated a strong desire to protect and preserve their architectural heritage, these small, rural villages are isolated, connected only by a narrow, winding road to Bajawa, the administrative center of the Ngada District. The mountainous ravines and rainforests separating central Flores from the more visited coasts have in many ways protected these traditional settlements, but also limit opportunities for younger generations, who are increasingly seeking education and careers elsewhere. These Ngada villages are thus emblematic of the great challenges of preserving vernacular heritage in a globalizing world, as the transfer of knowledge across generations is fractured, and traditional skills and resources become scarcer. Inclusion on the Watch seeks to raise awareness about the plight of these villages, and similar traditional settlements, and to promote innovative thinking about how the tangible and intangible heritage of these cultures can be preserved.