



Wine in Muslim Indonesia

By Trond Arne Undheim

Do Indonesians enjoy wine? Typical answer: No. Real answer: More and more. I traveled to Indonesia to check it out and spoke with local sommelier Yohan Handoyo. Yohan recently wrote *The Secrets of Wine* which won Gourmand International's award for best educational book and is now the sommelier at Decanter Jakarta in Indonesia.

"There is a growing interest in wine here, due to cheaper airline tickets so Indonesians can travel, but also because of the Internet, the influx of expats, and the proximity to Singapore," Handoyo said, "Right now, the government is the only showstopper."

Indonesian cuisine - complex, full of spice, and varied across the thousands of islands on the archipelago - pairs well with wine, at least with a particular kind. According to sommelier Handoyo: "Indonesians are not familiar neither with tannin nor with acidity. Also, they like a fair amount of residual sugar as well as wine that is chilled because of the climate."

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With Asian-aware wine commentators like **Jeannie Cho Lee**, Debra Meiburg and Ch'ng Poh Tiang, the language might slowly change from "gooseberry" and other metaphors that are foreign to Asians towards more down to earth vocabulary. Though some Asians will still have trouble pronouncing Pichon Longueville Comtesse de Lalande (what delightful stuff, though).

Muslim countries are not at all the same when it comes to wine. Whereas there may be differences between countries and cultures, some things are for certain. There are loopholes. There is curiosity. Wine education seminars and wine tastings are changing the game. Sommelier Yohan Handoyo is part of that change. For better and for worse, wine definitely extorts with the GDP of Indonesia, a secular country with a Muslim majority.