

COMMON



SURABAYA

CURES

The mountains of
East Java are home
to the ancient
healing art of jamu

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amu, Indonesia's traditional medicine, is definitely having a moment in the sun. High-end resorts are introducing its heady

tonics to wellness enthusiasts from around the world, while health cafés in cities like Surabaya and Yogyakarta are raising its profile among millennials. Jamu's herbal and often bitter ingredients are finding their way into the cocktail lists of stylish bars, and modern factories are starting to mass-produce jamu pills that can be purchased from pharmacies.

But this ancient art has been embedded in Indonesian life for centuries, touching people from all backgrounds. Just ask Dari Yani, one of countless jamu street sellers found across Java, who operates a rickety stall in a neighbourhood in Yogyakarta. Her workspace overflows with bowls of powdered spices and pounded pastes, from which she concocts made-to-order tonics for everyone from young mums to aging grandfathers. Dari, who learnt her recipes from her mother, shares that the needs of her customers vary; some require a remedy for an enduring cough, others need a pick-me-up, while many simply consume the tonic as a preventive measure.

Jamu can be much more complex than that, though. The alternative practice, a mix of science and spirituality said to be over 1,200 years old, is rooted in the belief that "where there is darkness, there must be light; where there is disease, there must be a cure; and ultimately, where there is poison, there must be an antidote". The approach, which is said to have originated in the royal palaces of Yogyakarta and Surakarta (the historic capital of Java), treats the mind and body holistically, eschewing the one-pill-fits-all thinking of Western medicine.

And while it is most famous for its turmeric-tinted orange potions and tonics, jamu can also involve physical exams, behavioural observation, massages, acupuncture and even communication with ancestors – all used to treat complaints that range from the common cold to cancer.

GINGER

Over 200 different species are used to combat nausea, inflammatory issues, and general aches and pains.



LEMONGRASS

Used to fight jet lag and cellulite, while promoting healthy blood circulation

RIGHT
DARI YANI IS A
JAMU STREET
SELLER IN
YOGYAKARTA



**TURMERIC**

Believed to ward off evil spirits, it improves blood circulation and treats stomach aches, fevers, arthritis and asthma

CLOVE

Treats toothache and aids digestion

CINNAMON

Fights against infection and repairs damaged tissue. It also works as an anti-inflammatory

BLACK PEPPER

Reduces joint inflammation, controls obesity and works as an anti-cancer agent

CARDAMOM PODS

Can alleviate coughs and rheumatism, maintain normal blood circulation and prevent osteoporosis

“The ancient art of jamu has been embedded in Indonesian life for centuries”

Mas Joko, a gifted 50-year-old healer also based in Yogyakarta, explains that new treatments are constantly evolving. Despite practising for over 40 years, he occasionally experiments with new concoctions when presented with a difficult case. He even claims to have received visions from his ancestors suggesting he try an ingredient that has never been used, whether it's a pulverised mineral or a rare flower that only blooms once a year.

With his smiling eyes and friendly openness, he quickly puts patients at ease. And thanks to his reputation as one of Indonesia's most knowledgeable healers, Mas Joko regularly sees patients with life-threatening diseases. Recently, he treated a Japanese businessman – with an abnormal heartbeat that put him at risk of heart failure – who couldn't be cured by Western medicine. Besides prescribing a daily jamu tonic, he applied massage techniques – a decision that also involved the use of clairvoyance – to remove a blockage in the coronary artery. According to the healer, when the businessman returned to Tokyo for an electrocardiograph several days later, he discovered that he was cured.

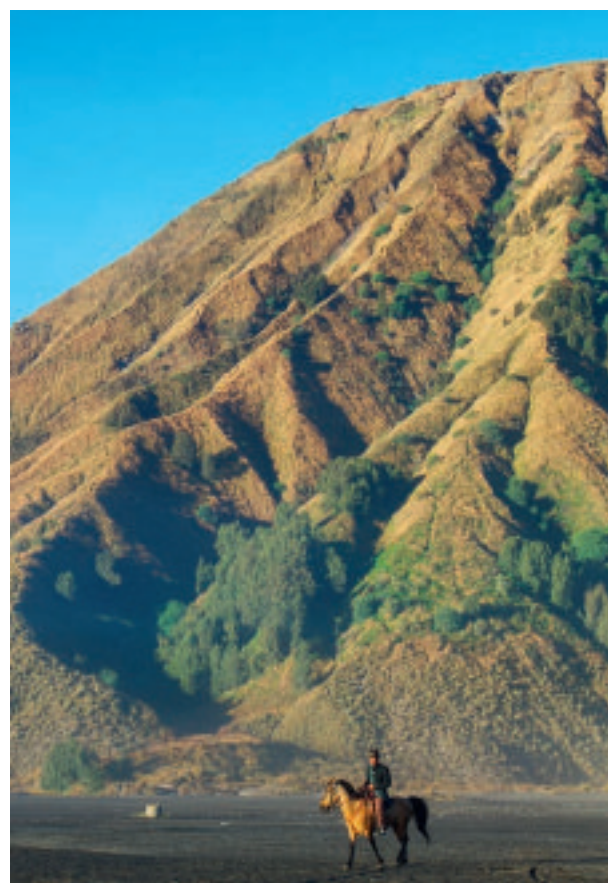
In most cases, however, jamu is anything but a quick fix. First, an initial diagnosis is carried out through touch to feel the temperature and elasticity of a patient's skin, as well as their pulse rate. Then, the healer does a reading to analyse a person's vibrations through his or her aura, mannerisms and demeanour.

The appointment can take up to two hours, and treatment is not always administered immediately.

VIEW FROM THE TOP

Standing at 2,339m, Indonesia's iconic Mt Bromo is just an hour's drive from the Seloliman Nature Reserve and half a day's travel from Surabaya. Travellers tend to make their base at the scenic hamlet of Cemoro Lawang, which is dotted with alpine-type hotels and B&Bs.

Make the pre-dawn trek (by jeep or on foot) to witness Java's most spectacular sunrise. You can also take a horse ride across a desert-like plain to reach the 250 steps leading to the thunderous crater west of the peak, which emits a constant plume of sulphur.



Healers may need to contemplate a patient's problem for a day or so before deciding on the most effective remedy. A daily tonic might be given to improve general health, but for more serious ailments, the healer will prescribe a therapy that encourages the production of antibodies to fight the sickness.

Massage techniques are also used to assist the body's absorption of medicine into the damaged cells. As the cure works gradually to rebuild the body's defences, there are usually no side effects. But as some jamu is made with potentially poisonous herbs, finding an experienced healer is imperative. Depending on the diagnosis, treatments can be prescribed for long periods of time – even years.

Needless to say, jamu requires years of specialised study. One of the key centres for its practice is the Seloliman Nature Reserve, situated in the sleeping volcanic eye of the sacred Mt Penanggungan in Mojokerto, East Java. Just over an hour's drive from Surabaya, the peaceful sanctuary is an NGO education and research centre that promotes environmental sustainability. This includes teaching guests from all walks of life about the healing effects of the various medicinal plants and herbs used in jamu.

Over 400 species of flora used in jamu flourish in the fertile volcanic and compost-enriched soil of this sacred Hindu site, which is also home to over 80 temples. In this idyllic spot, surrounded by sleepy villages and sloping rice terraces, visitors can find balance away from the pressures of modern life.

Huts are tucked away in private nooks, decorated with individual animal carvings on each roof, and

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
THE DRAMATIC BEAUTY OF MOUNT BROMO; VISITORS CAN EXPLORE THE VOLCANO ON HORSEBACK; SAFI'I ARACHMAN TEACHES AT THE SELOLIMAN NATURE RESERVE; ESTEEMED HEALER MAS JOKO

simply equipped with outdoor bathrooms. Narrow tree-lined pathways, punctuated by birdsong, lead to languid streams and ancient ruins; other cobblestone pavements point the way to the reserve's immaculate herb garden, where each plant is accompanied by a detailed description of the ailments it treats.

The reserve can accommodate 60 students in shared lodgings and 32 guests in hillside bungalows. Aside from teaching the science of jamu, it also runs conservation programmes. What's more, guests can dine at Alas, its in-house restaurant, which does away with processed food and palm oil.

Safi'i Arachman, a spiritual healer with shiny shoulder-length hair and a gentle demeanour, has worked on and off at the reserve since 1982, when he





first started as a volunteer. It can take up to 30 years to become a healer; today, Safi'i is one of the centre's principal figures, leading visitors through the extensive grounds. Alongside imparting the art of traditional healing, he also educates visitors on the positive health effects of jamu and teaches local communities how to alleviate poverty and be self-sufficient through sustainable conservation.

Prior to working at the reserve, Safi'i ran an alternative health clinic, treating patients on a daily basis. "A doctor gives a person three months to live," he explains, "but a healer makes them healthy again... and changes the lives of all the family members."

He believes that jamu can cure many ailments, but that the patient must first be open to changing his or her lifestyle and looking inwardly at the yin and yang balance of the mind. Generally, it's believed that mental imbalances can affect the body; if a patient is willing to examine factors such as stress and anger, he or she can then begin to heal.

"Some patients have to change their whole life, take a good look inside to better everything on the outside," Safi'i says, patting his heart.

Alongside recent moves to bring jamu into the modern world, the educational work being carried out at Selioman Reserve and by traditional healers such as Safi'i will ensure that the future of jamu remains bright, bringing light where there is often darkness. ■

ABOVE
THE FERTILE SOIL OF SELOLIMAN NATURE RESERVE GROWS MANY OF THE HERBS AND PLANTS THAT ARE USED IN JAMU



SilkAir flies daily between Singapore and Surabaya

TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

Intrepid Travel (intrepidtravel.com) offers itineraries that include visits to Seloliman Nature Reserve and Mt Bromo. If you'd prefer to drive yourself, you can take the Sidoarjo and Ngono highways from Surabaya.

Alternatively, Patrick Vanhoebrouck (javanese wisdomandhealing.wordpress.com) conducts tours that focus on Javanese healing and spirituality, in and around Yogyakarta.

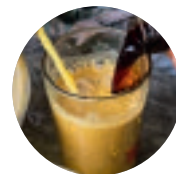
POPULAR TONICS



BERAS KENCUR

Used to alleviate fatigue, this invigorating tonic improves circulation and

appetite. Its ingredients include rice, *kencur* (a type of ginger), turmeric and sugar – giving it a taste like spicy milk of magnesia.



KUNIR ASEM

With anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, this general tonic is

also used to treat obesity and thrush. Made from tamarind, raw sugar, ginger, turmeric and water, its sweet-spicy taste makes it one of the more palatable jamu drinks.



WEDANG SECANG

Known as the royal tea, this recipe is derived from the sultan's

family in Yogyakarta. The bright red tonic is made from ginger, lemongrass, cinnamon, cloves, cardamom, sugar and water; secang wood is added for colour. Best served hot, it has a strong and bitter taste.