EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

International Study on ASEAN Maritime Tourism Route Development in Timor-Leste



Dili, Timor-Leste

2026

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Key Findings, Proposed Tourism Gateways and Investment Opportunities

1. Strategic Opportunity

- **Advance Timor-Leste's Blue Economy, Economia Azul.** Marine biodiversity, coastal landscapes and cultural heritage provide a foundation for economic diversification, employment and responsible tourism investment.
- **Support national development priorities.** The study aligns with the **Blue Economy Policy and Action Plan 2025–2035**, national maritime spatial planning and the **National Strategic Plan for Tourism Development 2023–2030**.
- **Strengthen regional connectivity.** Proposed links with eastern Indonesia and Australia can expand tourism cooperation, strengthen ASEAN engagement and improve Timor-Leste's capacity to welcome international visitors and host regional meetings.

2. Key Finding: A Network of Complementary Destinations

- **Connect destinations at four scales: local, national, regional and international.** Each destination contributes a distinct combination of marine attractions, cultural heritage and community experiences.
- **Develop the complete visitor journey.** Maritime access should be coordinated with accommodation, land transport, trained guides, safety services and local enterprises.
- **Use scientific evidence to guide development.** Biodiversity, coastal geography, bathymetry, waves, currents, seasonal conditions and existing marine uses must inform route assessment and infrastructure design.

3. Proposed Cross-Border Tourism Connections

- **Darwin, Timor-Leste and eastern Indonesia:** A proposed wider international itinerary for suitable cruise, expedition and yacht services.
- **Timor-Leste, Alor and Flores, including Labuan Bajo:** Proposed connections that could form part of this wider itinerary, linking complementary island destinations within ASEAN.
- **Oecusse to Alor: approximately 119 km.** A potential western connection combining marine tourism and cultural heritage, with further opportunities towards other destinations in Flores.
- **Com to Kisar: approximately 33 km.** A potential eastern connection supported by cultural and kinship ties identified during stakeholder consultations.

These are proposed connections. Distances are preliminary planning estimates. Implementation requires confirmed ports, suitable vessels, commercial assessment and coordination between the relevant national authorities.

4. Five Proposed Tourism Gateway Locations

Metinaro, Dili: Proposed Main Tourism Gateway

- **Role and advantage:** A central reception and departure point for domestic tourism, with potential future international services and connections to Dili's airport, accommodation and visitor facilities.
- **Investment focus:** A phased passenger terminal, organised boarding, visitor information and integrated land transport, coordinated with existing facilities in Dili.

Ataúro: Marine Tourism and Conservation

- **Role and advantage:** Reef ecosystems and marine biodiversity support diving, snorkelling, marine education and community-based tourism.
- **Investment focus:** Appropriately scaled landing facilities, dive services, local accommodation and guiding enterprises. **Beloi and Vila Maumeta require separate designs** reflecting their landing conditions and conservation requirements.

Com, Lautem: Eastern Marine and Cultural Gateway

- **Role and advantage:** Marine tourism, cultural connections with Kisar and combined land-and-sea itineraries towards **Jaco via Valu Sere**.
- **Investment focus:** Passenger access and local visitor services, coordinated with existing port operations, fishing and community activities.

Uai Uono, Baucau: Coastal Recreation and Enterprise

- **Role and advantage:** A proposed tourism landing site near the new coastal road, linked to coastal recreation around Uatabo Beach.
- **Investment focus:** Suitable landing facilities, managed water sports, including jet skiing where appropriate, and rescue services. Accommodation should be assessed on **suitable elevated sites overlooking the sea**, subject to land suitability and environmental assessment, while preserving the natural beachfront.
- **Domestic connection:** The study estimates **Baucau to Com at approximately 76 km**. The distance from the specific proposed Uai Uono landing site requires confirmation.

West of Lifau Monument, Oecusse: Heritage-Sensitive Access

- **Role and advantage:** Maritime access linked to Lifau's cultural, historical and sacred significance, with potential regional connections towards Alor and Flores.
- **Investment focus:** Visitor reception, heritage interpretation, local products and onward transport. The candidate location **west of the monument** should be assessed to protect its setting and cultural values.

5. Subaun, Manatuto: Whale Observation and Marine Education

- **A distinct function:** Subaun is proposed for a **shore-based whale observation and monitoring post, not a tourism jetty**.
- **Community opportunity:** Local interpretation, environmental education and monitoring could support a carefully managed visitor programme.
- **Scientific requirement:** Blue-whale occurrence, seasonality and visibility from the proposed site must be verified before regular wildlife tourism is promoted.

6. Appropriate Vessels and Timorese Expertise

- **Indicative vessel capacities:** Passenger catamarans **50–150 passengers**; tourism boats and speedboats **20–40**; and small local boats **8–20**. These are planning scenarios. Actual operations must comply with vessel certification and reflect sea conditions and landing capacity.
- **International services:** Cruise, expedition and yacht opportunities require separate assessments of marine access, passenger reception and destination readiness.
- **Timorese leadership and ownership:** Local communities should play leading roles in destination management, enterprise development and decisions affecting their livelihoods.
- **Skills and recognised qualifications:** Priorities include **marine lifeguarding and rescue, diving and freediving certification, snorkelling supervision, and coastal and marine guiding**. Investment partnerships should support training, mentoring and skills transfer.

7. Shared Responsibility and Spatial Coordination

- **Build on stakeholder engagement.** Field consultations and focus group discussions brought government, communities, conservation organisations and operators into the planning process.
- **Coordinate implementation across institutions.** The **Land and Maritime Boundary Office (LMBO) Blue Economy Unit and Blue Economy Working Group**, tourism institutions including **ATTL**, port administration **APORTIL**, maritime authorities, **MAPPF fisheries and aquaculture directorates**, environmental authorities, local administrations and heritage institutions have complementary roles within their respective mandates.
- **Confirm compatibility with Marine Spatial Planning.** Routes and candidate facilities must be jointly assessed against fishing grounds, aquaculture, navigation, protected areas, sensitive habitats and customary uses. **Potential overlaps must be resolved before implementation.**
- **Maintain research and community participation.** INCT, universities, customary custodians, local enterprises and private partners should contribute evidence, practical knowledge and implementation capacity.

8. From Research to Responsible Investment

- **Learn from relevant regional experience.** Bali and comparable island destinations offer practical references for passenger services, marine tourism and community enterprise. Every approach must be adapted to **Timor-Leste's geography, coastal geomorphology, oceanography, cultural identity and maintenance capacity**.
- **Prepare a phased portfolio of viable projects.** Opportunities include passenger facilities, vessel services, accommodation, marine recreation, training and community enterprises.
- **Build investor confidence through sound preparation.** Establish demand, site suitability, environmental requirements, costs and operating responsibilities before construction.
- **Welcome partnerships that deliver national value.** Responsible investment should create employment, strengthen Timorese expertise and ownership, and protect the country's natural and cultural assets.

Timor-Leste welcomes responsible partnerships to develop maritime tourism through scientific planning, coordinated institutions and strong Timorese leadership. Our objective is to connect destinations, protect our natural and cultural heritage, and create lasting economic opportunities for our people.

FINAL SCIENTIFIC RESULT

International Study on ASEAN Maritime Tourism Route Development in Timor-Leste

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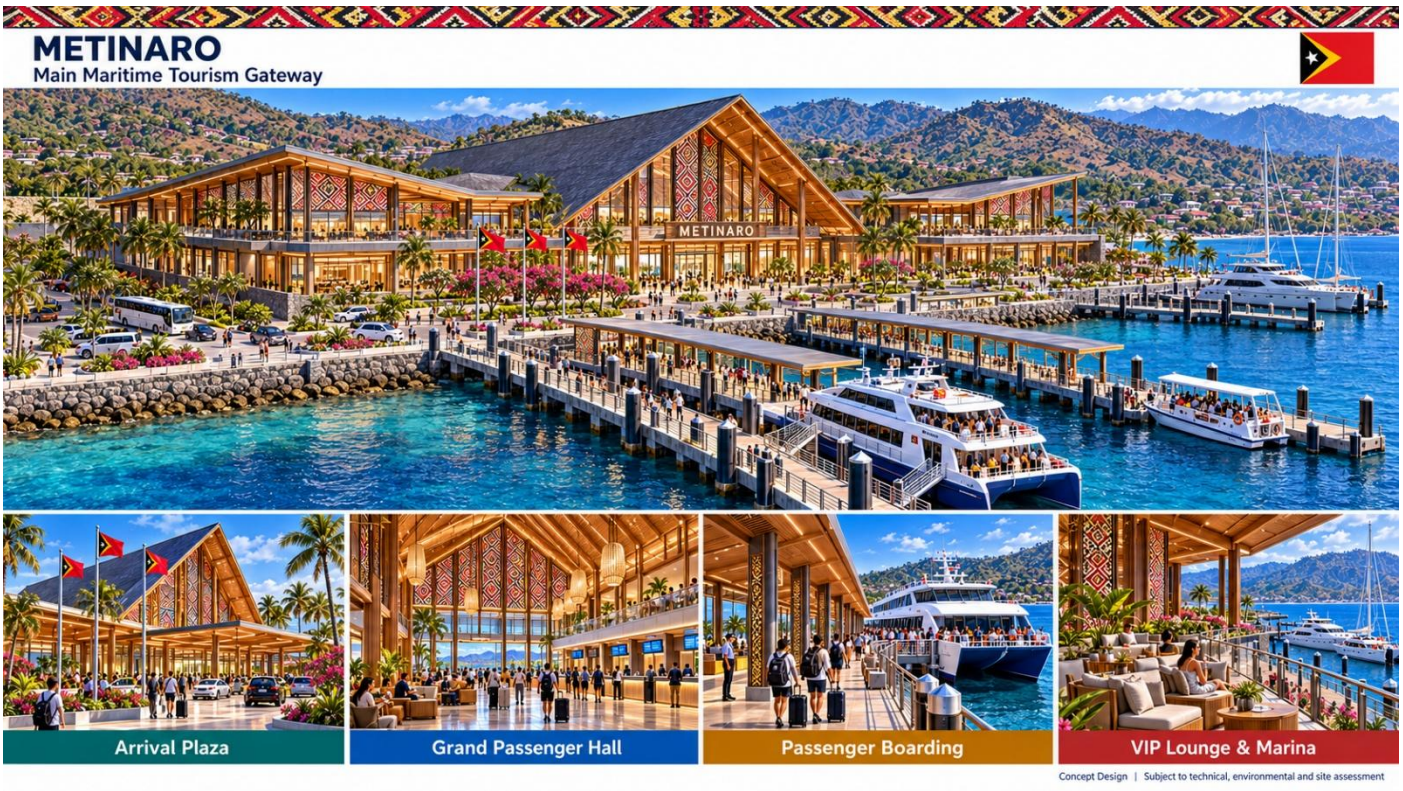
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With support from the Blue Economy Field Survey Team

Dili, Timor-Leste



ATAÚRO

Vila Maumeta | Marine Tourism & Conservation





Island Arrival



Dive & Snorkel Briefing



Local Boat Landing



Kayak Access

Concept Design | Illustrative only; subject to site assessment

BAUCAU

Coastal Recreation & Tourism Access





Visitor Pavilion



Recreation Jetty



Water Sports & Rescue



Elevated Accommodation

Concept Design | Illustrative only; subject to site assessment

COM | LAUTEM

Eastern Marine & Cultural Gateway





Visitor Pavilion



Tourism Boat Boarding



Community & Culture



Local Boat Area

Concept Design | Illustrative only; subject to site assessment

OECUSSE | LIFAU

Heritage-Sensitive Tourism Gateway





Coastal Arrival



Heritage Reception



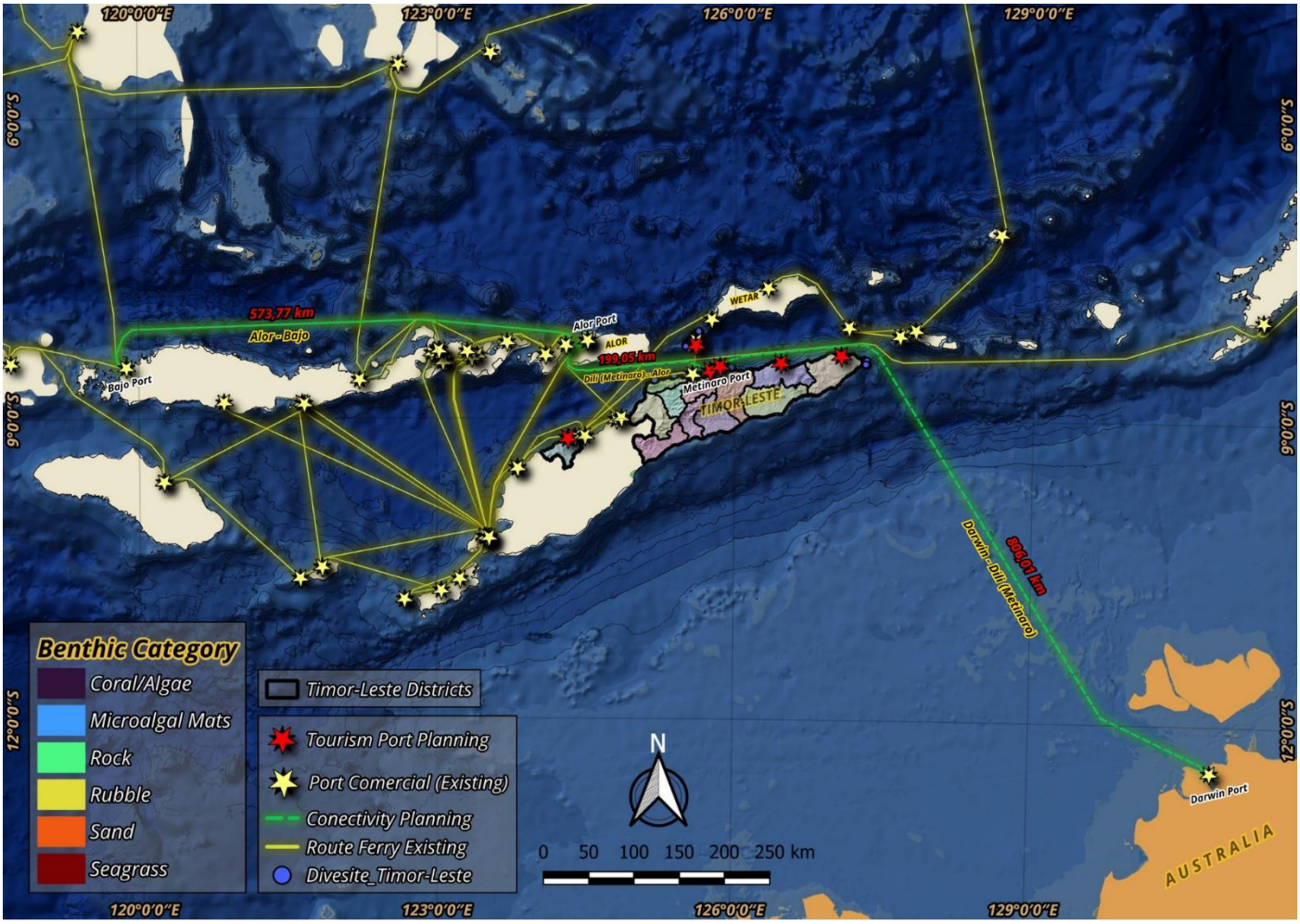
Tourism Boat Landing



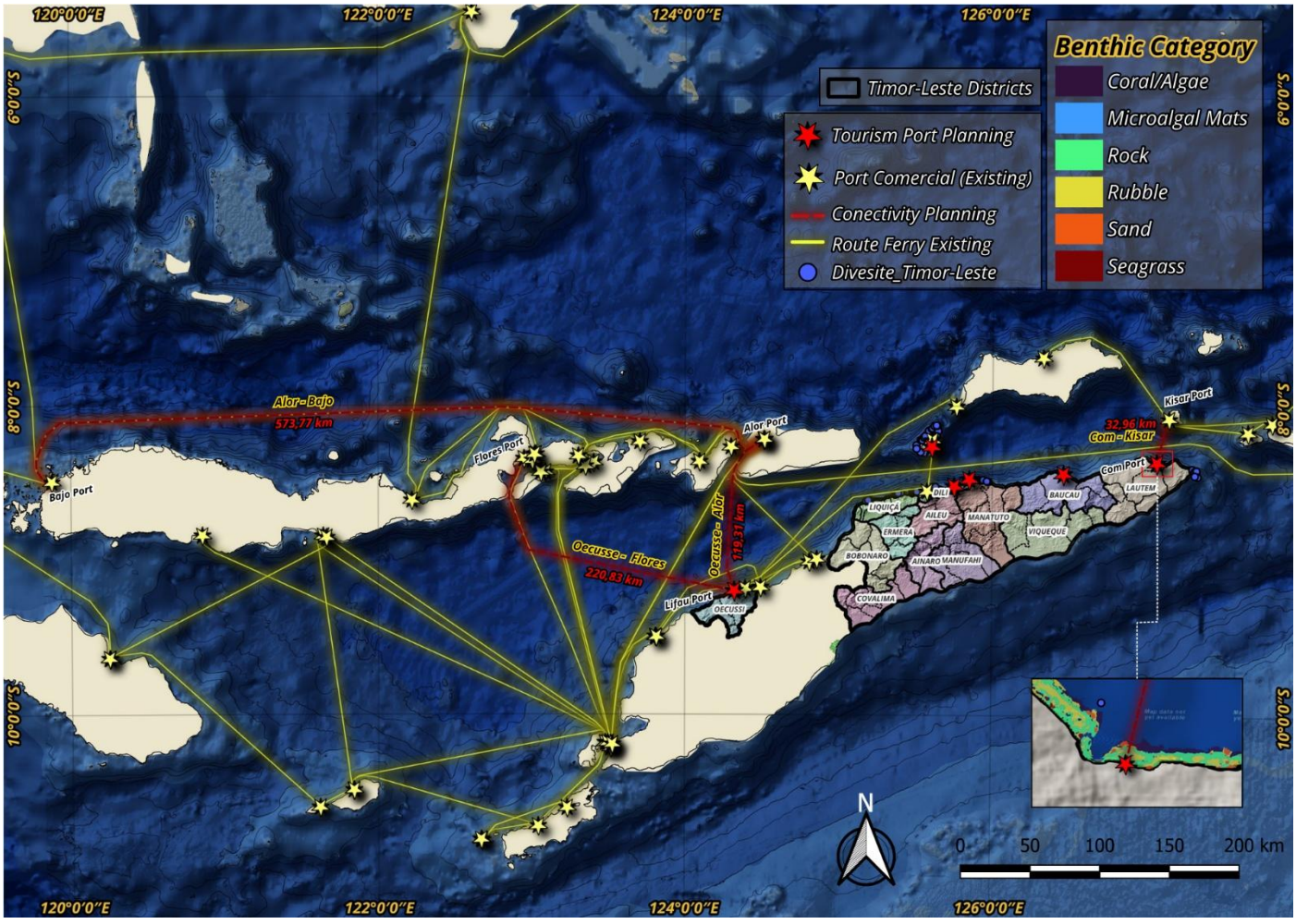
Tais & Local Crafts

Concept Design | Illustrative only; subject to site assessment

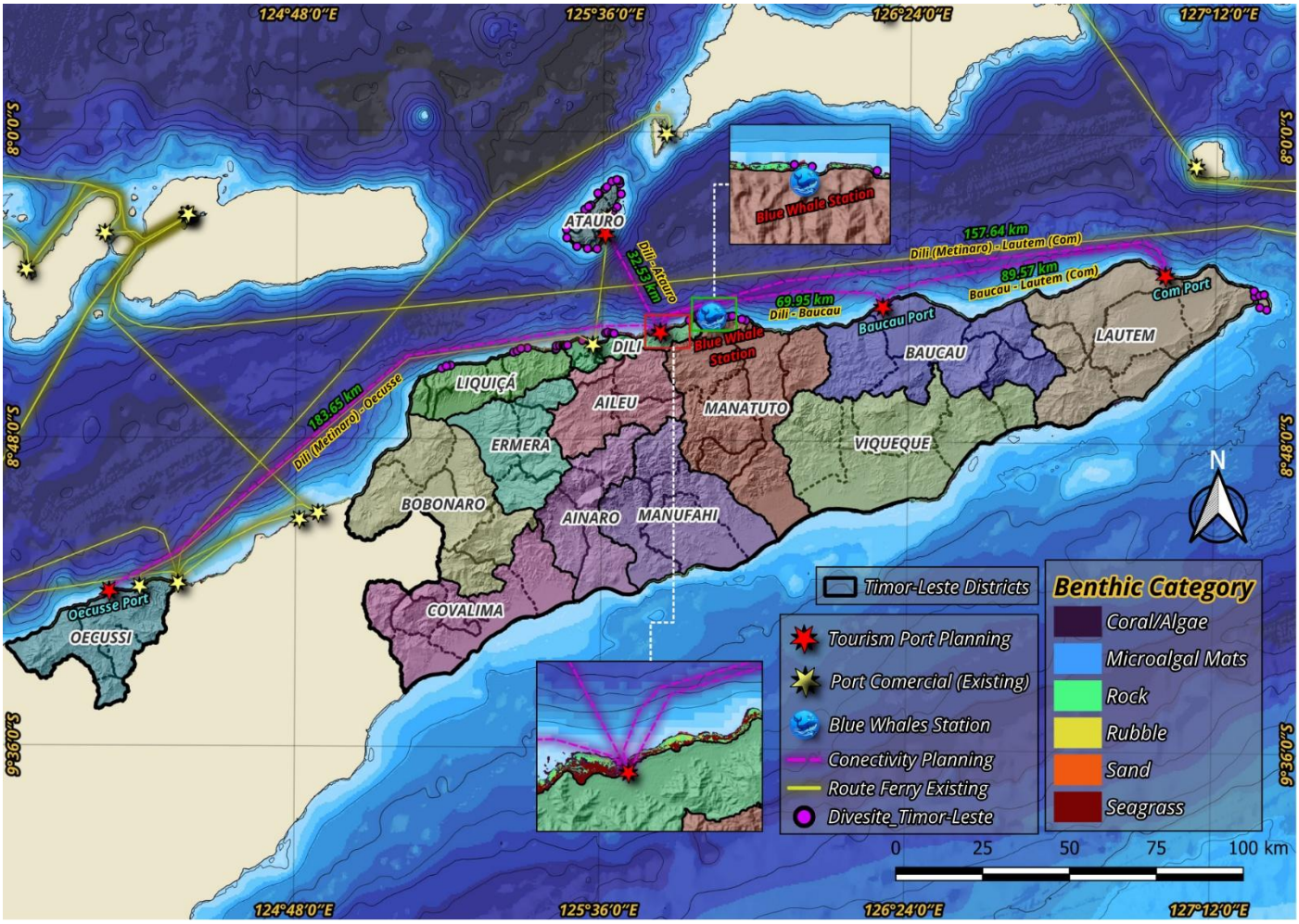
Proposed International Maritime Tourism Route Scenario



Proposed ASEAN Maritime Tourism Connections between Timor-Leste and Eastern Indonesia



Proposed National Routes and Local Tourism Routes



Proposed Vessels & Passenger Capacities

Indicative passengers per vessel, except canoe/kayak occupants

METINARO



Passenger catamaran
50–150



Speedboat / tourism boat
20–40



Yacht
6–20

ATAÚRO

Beloi



Passenger transfer
40–150



Local boat
8–20

Vila Maumeta



Motorboat
8–20



Sailing craft
8–25

Canoe / kayak
1–2 occupants

OECUSSE / LIFAU



Tourism boat
20–40



Passenger catamaran
50–150



Yacht / sailing craft
6–25

COM / LAUTEM



Tourism boat
20–40



Passenger catamaran
50–150

BAUCAU



Excursion boat
8–20
Local recreation services

Indicative planning capacities, not certified limits. Final selection depends on vessel certification, sea conditions and landing facilities.

Implementation Roadmap

Timor-Leste Maritime Tourism | 2027–2035

Proposed phases. Progress depends on readiness, evidence and funding.



01 2027
PREPARE & COORDINATE

- Confirm roles through LMBO's Blue Economy coordination framework.
- Verify routes, sites and MSP compatibility; assess demand and feasibility.
- Assess workforce needs and engage local communities.

Milestone: Agreed priorities and project briefs.



02 2028
BUILD SKILLS & PILOT SERVICES

- Improve Dili–Ataúro services and access at Beloi and Vila Maumeta.
- Train and certify lifeguards, dive and freediving professionals, snorkelling supervisors and marine guides.
- Test safety, demand, costs and local business participation.

Milestone: Trained teams and evaluated pilot services.



03 2029–2030
DELIVER PRIORITY INVESTMENTS

- Develop Metinaro in phases where feasibility supports investment.
- Improve access at Oecusse and Com; test selected domestic routes.
- Secure approvals, operating partners and maintenance funding.

Milestone: Viable facilities and service agreements.



04 2031–2032
EXPAND DESTINATION EXPERIENCES

- Develop suitable coastal recreation and visitor services in Baucau.
- Assess Subaun for shore-based whale observation, not a jetty.
- Expand Timorese enterprises and routes where demand is demonstrated.

Milestone: Diversified, locally managed experiences.



05 2033–2035
CONNECT REGIONAL MARKETS

- Advance Oecusse–Alor and Com–Kisar where viable.
- Assess wider Darwin–Timor-Leste–Indonesia itineraries.
- Launch services only when operators, border arrangements and safety systems are ready.

Milestone: Operationally ready cross-border partnerships.

THROUGHOUT ALL PHASES

Conservation • Timorese leadership • Skills development • Safety • Monitoring

Cross-border preparation may begin earlier. Review each phase before committing further investment.