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Pope Francis, seated in a wheelchair, greets an airport worker as he prepares to board an ITA



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Jakarta, Indonesia — September 3, 2024
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Pope Francis — who has made interreligious dialogue a hallmark of his pontificate — arrived in the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation of Indonesia on Sept. 3, kicking off an 11-day swing through southeast Asia and Oceania that is likely to test the physical limits of the 87-year-old pontiff.

Francis left Rome in the early evening of Sept. 2 and during the more than 13-hour flight thanked reporters for joining him on the longest trip of his 11-year papacy. Despite mobility issues, the pope walked around the cabin of the plane for 25 minutes to individually greet the more than 70 international journalists accompanying him on the journey.

The resilient pontiff was all smiles, even if looking a bit fatigued, as he arrived on the aircraft in Rome, seeming to take delight in embarking on a trip that many in the Vatican seemed skeptical of, both in terms of distance and demand.

During the four nation Sept. 2-13 tour, Francis will clock some 20,000 miles over more than 40 hours of flight time as he visits Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor

Leste and Singapore.

The trip, which marks the pontiff's sixth visit to Asia, will provide him an opportunity to continue his efforts to encourage the growing Catholic community throughout the continent, where despite often being a minority population, the church is still growing.

Upon his midday arrival at Jakarta’s Soekarno-Hatta International Airport on Sept. 3, a handful of the country's bishops and two young children in traditional dress greeted the pope, who remained seated in his wheelchair, and presented him with flowers.

Following a brief welcome ceremony that lasted under 10 minutes, the pope was whisked away to the Apostolic Nunciature in the center of the capital, where he is expected to spend the day resting. He will begin his first full day in the country tomorrow with a private meeting with Indonesian President Joko Widodo, followed by an address to government and civic officials, in which he is expected to address climate change and the country's socio-economic development.

Later in the day, he will meet with more than 100 members of Indonesia's large Jesuit community, and in the afternoon, he will address the country’s bishops, priests, deacons, seminarians and consecrated members at the city's neo-Gothic cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption.

Here in the Indonesian capital — known as the "sinking city" due to dramatic rise in sea levels — the pope was met with humid temperatures and thick air pollution. One journalist accompanying Francis on the flight presented him with a mini-handheld electric fan to help keep him cool during the days ahead. The pope roared with laughter at the gift — and its color: white, to match his papal cassock.

This story appears in the **Francis in Asia and Oceania** feature series. View the full series.
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