



# QUEST FOR THE CROCODILE CALLERS



Presented by **Aaron Gekoski**  
A film by **Chris Scarffe, Will Foster-Grundy and Damian Antochewicz**  
Executive producers: **Susanne Lummer, Sabine Holzer**

**1 x 50 min.**  
**4K, 5.1 and Stereo**

**In a land lost in time, mystery and mythology prevail.**

## **THE SETTING**

Timor-Leste, a country known more for its bloody past than the rich culture and biodiversity found in this now peaceful nation. But for those willing to venture onto Timor's shores, great stories are bound to be found. Despite the ubiquitous Catholic front that Timor-Leste displays, beneath the surface the indigenous animist beliefs still remain strong. The strongest of these is the concept of a totem or 'lulik', the spiritual embodiment of an animal that is to be revered and respected. None commands a greater respect than 'Abo Lafaek', Grandfather Crocodile ...

## **THE STORY**

Having spent more than a year documenting the country's underwater wonders, environmental photojournalist Aaron Gekoski is now heading into Timor-Leste's cultural heartland, on a mission to track down the anointed few with the power to communicate with crocodiles. Known as the crocodile callers, these tribal elders are the last of a dying breed of true Timorese animists practising traditions that have survived for millennia. They believe that certain crocodiles are their ancestors either by re-incarnation or living transformation. The crocodiles live free but alongside people and are treated as highly respected community elders with ritual offerings for special events.

Crocodiles form an integral part within Timorese culture, the origin story of the island of Timor is based around a crocodile sacrificing itself to provide a home for the Timorese people, with the ridges on

the crocodile's back forming the mountain ranges running through the country. The killing of crocodiles within Timor-Leste is a crime, even if they are suspected of devouring people. The belief is such that if one is unfortunate enough to be taken by a crocodile, it is considered penance for a heinous act ...

However, change is afoot. Reports of crocodile attacks are on the rise. One theory suggests that due to an extremely successful conservation strategy in Australia's Northern Territory, there are now too many dominant crocodiles for the available rivers and estuaries.

As a result, large male crocodiles are migrating north to Timor-Leste, and ultimately wreaking havoc. The crocodile callers believe they can identify crocodile friend from foe so their ancient skills and wisdom could have a place in the modern day, selecting which dangerous crocodiles to cull and which 'Grandfather' crocodiles are allowed to live, peacefully.

'Quest for the Crocodile Callers' will be produced by a team of filmmakers with unique access to one of the least known places on our planet. The documentary will examine the animist cultures that still exist in the backwaters of Timor-Leste and ask the bigger questions about how we humans choose to interact with the natural world in the modern day. Perhaps there is wisdom to be found in what on the surface seem to be defunct and outdated superstitions ...

**A production of Terra Mater Factual Studios produced by Chris Scarffe Film and Photography**

