

DESTINATION



Bali Explored

WITH POSTCARD-PERFECT BEACHES, CHARMING TOWNS
AND A LUSH LANDSCAPE, THIS IDYLIC ISLAND PROMISES—
AND DELIVERS—A PIECE OF PARADISE. BY SANDRA MACGREGOR



“You know why they call Bali the ‘Island of Gods?’ ” a guide asked me once on a visit to Bali. “Because no matter what religion you believe in, this is any god’s version of heaven.”

It’s difficult to disagree. With pristine sandy beaches, aqua waters so blue they almost look unreal, bountiful hillsides peppered with rice fields and a stunning volcanic landscape, Bali offers one of the planet’s most perfect panoramas. It’s a magical destination that somehow manages to be exciting yet serene, exotic yet approachable, and has been able to maintain its charm despite growing tourism to this iconic oasis.



Mount Batur after sunrise

Gunung Batur

Consider a hike to the top of Mount Batur, which, at 5,633 ft, is regarded as a relatively easy-to-tackle trek. What will lead you to Batur is not just the promise of a stellar view, but what a friend—a frequent Bali visitor—told me about her experience hiking the mountain: “You’ll never in your life see a more unique way to boil an egg. Oh, and the sunrise is so beautiful it will make you cry.” With this intriguing promise in mind, set off for the top of Batur on one of the guided 4 a.m. group hikes, which gets visitors to the top in time to see the sunrise—weather permitting.

A still-active volcano, Batur is Bali’s most popular mountain to hike, and it’s not hard to see why. The walk to the top takes less than two hours at a relatively easy pace and affords a marvelous view of the turquoise blue waters of Bali’s largest lake, Lake Batur, below. Near the top of the mountain, pockets of heat release bursts of steam, and your guide just might boil your breakfast eggs over these fissures. Your sore feet will be forgotten as you quietly settle into your seat and watch as the sun rises over paradise.



Tanah Lot

Kuta

There is no doubting that Bali is famous for beaches, and the majority of visitors to the island succumb to the legendary lure of the renowned Kuta Beach. It may be the most touristed area on the island, but there’s a reason for that: Palm trees dot a seemingly endless sandy beach that leads out to a bracingly blue, warm sea. Though to claim a precious piece of beach-bathing real estate it may be necessary to navigate between many other sun worshipers and beach vendors selling everything from fruit to foot massages, Kuta should still be on every traveler’s must-do list.

Kuta doesn’t just lay claim to having the best beach in Bali; it also has the best shopping on the island. From high-end

to mass-market, Kuta is the place to buy almost everything imaginable (though hold off on artwork and craft purchases until Ubud). Many visitors head to the massive Discovery Shopping Mall, but a better way to get a feel for the city and enjoy more time outdoors is to walk along the main road, Jalan Legian, for bargain shopping, or Jalan Kayu Aya in nearby Seminyak, for upscale, designer goods.

At dusk, Kuta’s beach crowds head indoors to enjoy a bit of Bali’s vibrant nightlife. A variety of cocktail bars and nightclubs line the beachfront for miles, and there is nothing quite like sipping a cool cocktail while watching the sunset transform from a vibrant yellow to a gorgeous crimson over Kuta’s majestic coastline.

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Lake Batur

Tanah Lot

There is much more to this sun-soaked island than beaches. Bali's towns, temples and volcanic mountains all rightly vie for a traveler's attention.

The Tanah Lot temple on the southwest coast of Bali is a destination that's not to be missed. Like something out of a fairytale, the exquisitely beautiful temple, hugged by foamy, white waves at its base and topped with graceful, multitiered shrines, rises out of the sea almost like an otherworldly apparition.

One of the island's most stunning sea temples, the Tanah Lot temple is also among the holiest of Balinese temples and is one of the most photographed sites in Bali. Believed to have been founded by the 15th-century Hindu priest Nirartha, the temple is dedicated to the Balinese god of the sea. Non-Hindus are not permitted up the steps into the actual temple and must stay at the base, though at low tide, visitors may drink from the holy spring beneath the temple.

Many visitors try to arrive before sunrise, even before most of the vendors, and are rewarded with a stunningly vibrant amber-orange sun slowly appearing to chase off the night sky.

It's also worth visiting the nearby town of Pejaten, the center of Bali's ceramics and tile industry. There, you can buy exquisite pieces of art for much less than you would pay in the rest of Bali.

Ubud

To view some of Bali's man-made wonders, head to Ubud, one of the island's most picturesque and popular towns. Made famous in the best-selling novel *Eat, Pray, Love*, Ubud is the island's artistic and cultural capital. Ringed by terraced rice paddies, lush hills

Holy water for purification



Ubud market

and verdant swaths of jungle, this fertile landscape feeds the imaginations of the area's many artists and craftspeople.

Ubud's streets are lined with galleries, artists' workshops and a never-ending variety of stores selling handcrafted furniture, jewelry, batik fabrics and an array of gorgeous craftwork. Ubud is also a popular spot for spas, yoga classes and holistic health clinics.

The creative energy here is so intoxicating that even someone who is not artistically inclined may be inspired enough to indulge in some form of craftsmanship. Ubud offers many opportunities to take classes in Balinese cooking, cloth-making, woodcarving, painting and dancing. One of the most popular artistic pursuits among visitors is to create a piece of jewelry at the silversmith class at Chez Monique Jewelry.

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Jatiluwi

The town is also home to another of the island's beautiful Balinese Hindu temples, Pura Dalem Agung Padangtegal—temple of the dead. Located in Ubud's Monkey Forest (officially known as Mandala Wisata Wenara Wana), the striking ochre temple is adorned with carvings and statues of the monstrous Rangda, queen of the witches in Balinese tradition. Monkey Forest is also home to a large and somewhat overly friendly troupe of 300 macaques who are believed to be sacred and spiritually linked to the temple.

Jatiluwi

While Ubud is also famed for its picturesque rice fields, a more authentic, less-crowded experience awaits those who venture away from the coastline and into the center of Bali to the Jatiluwi area. Getting to the island's farming heartland is half the fun: Narrow, winding roads lead through miles of lush landscape punctuated with traditional villages, circuitous rivers, banana and vegetable farms, and coffee plantations.

But it's the rice fields that are the most awe-inspiring sight. Jatiluwi's steep, never-ending terraced rice paddies are presently under consideration as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Pack a lunch and enjoy a stroll through these paddies whose unimaginably vivid green, fecund fields mirror the intense, azure blue of Bali's waters.

Still relatively unknown among tourists, this is a rare, unfrequented oasis. Jatiluwi is also one of the best regions for bird watching and the site of Bali's second largest mountain, Gunung Batukaru, towering overhead as a backdrop. The 7,467-ft-high monster is popular with both amateur and professional climbers and is said to offer some of the best views of Bali for those willing to attempt the climb. **PL**

Where to Stay

THE MULIA, MULIA RESORT & VILLAS – NUSA DUA, BALI

Just opened in 2012, the opulent The Mulia, Mulia Resort & Villas – Nusa Dua, Bali is found in the island's exclusive Nusa Dua area, a region renowned for its breathtaking beaches and dramatic coastline, and which is centrally located to easily explore the island. Comprised of three properties, The Mulia, Mulia Resort & Villas – Nusa Dua are set among 74 acres of the region's most exquisite landscape just steps away from Nusa Dua Bay's pristine, white-sand beachfront. All properties feature bespoke, contemporary furnishings, inspired décor and lavish amenities. The properties also feature a selection of fine dining restaurants, a state-of-the-art fitness facility and a beautifully crafted spa offering indulgent signature treatments that promise to refresh, renew and revive. Some of the accommodation options include individualized butler service, private hydrotherapy pools in each of the exquisite villas and a Jacuzzi on the balcony of each of the suites at the resort.



The Mulia, Mulia Resort & Villas – Nusa Dua, Bali

For further information and reservations, visit PreferredHotelGroup.com

