

HAPPY ■



# BALI



BEAUTIFULLY TROPICAL  
ANCESTRAL RITUALS  
LAND OF BOHEMIAN PEACE  
ISLAND OF GODS

BY KARIN FISCHER-KORKMAZ



The Indonesian island offers tropical wonders, it is full of mysticism and hidden treasures: great decorative temples, religious processions, colourful and magic traditional dances.

There are exceptional landscapes and large rice terraces at the bottom of volcanoes and rainforests. The lovely black and white beaches are widely known as well as their coral reefs, which hide a wonderful submarine world...



Do not keep on reading if after this short description you do not want to pack your luggage and take the next flight to this enchanted island. However, take part in this real dream and let it be: Denpasar is the capital city of Bali, where most of its inhabitants live. Although it is a noisy and dirty city, you cannot imagine how wonderful this piece of land is. When you go out of the city, the environment changes completely: dense vegetation, large rice fields, smiley people, dozens of temples and a sense of breathing peace. Tanah Lot impresses us at first. It is a Balinese temple of the 16th century which is built by the sea on the west coast. The best time to visit it is at dusk, to experience one of the most impressive sunsets on the island.

We move to Ubud, Bali's cultural and artistic capital, which is 30 km from Denpasar. Rumour has it that, since 1920, artists of all parts of the world have met there, including a Spanish-Balinese artist called Antonio Blanco. He arrived in the fifties and after falling in love with the island and a beautiful Balinese woman, he built a small palace where he portrayed different Balinese motives on his paintings. Today, a visit to the Antonio Blanco Museum or Neka Art Museum is a must, considering that it is one of the most important art museums.

The talented sculptors, musicians, dancers and writers have made of Ubud a bohemian city. Here, art galleries come one after the other, and they commingle with shops which sell embroidered fabric, masks of painted wood, leather, bamboo, silverware, and, obviously, antiques. You can listen to music on the streets. It comes from a xylophone-like instrument. Several repeated notes, divine bells, and a persistent drum sound, which smells of cloves and other spices, mixed in the air. When you want to buy a souvenir you have to bear in mind that selling and

bargaining is a frequent practice. The official currency is the Indonesian Rupiah. However, American Dollars and credit cards are also accepted. After going shopping you can have some rest in any of the shops where you can taste the typical Balinese coffee ("Kopi Bali") or the "Panas" tea, among other herbal infusions.



**Dancers wear creative accessories on their heads and their clothes are brilliant, magic and colourful**

You have to recharge your energy to visit the beautiful Puri Saren royal palace, which was built in 1890. In that place, there is a typical Balinese cultural show every day at half past seven in the evening: the traditional dances. Dancers wear creative accessories on their heads and their clothes are brilliant, magical and colorful. You must be careful because you may find curious and dangerous monkeys which can rob disoriented tourists in temples. Talking about monkeys, it is interesting to visit the sacred woods of Sangeh, which house 200 macaques.

We keep on moving, from Ubud to the South. It seems that the path starts spiralling up to the rest of Bali.

Towns with houses made of adobe and straw and small temples at the doors are left behind. You can see women walking on the streets with nice fruit pyramids on their heads, while our car literally dodges motorbikes which carry up to five passengers. In Indonesia you should hire a driver, since people drive on the left and at high speed. Of course you can also hire bicycles or motorbikes to visit tourist attractions within the city. Rural towns are situated along the road and their inhabitants set up terrace shops in their houses facing the road. Behind the houses, doors lead to rice fields. This is how most Balinese people from the interior of the island make a living. Rice is also the base ingredient of Balinese cuisine. In addition to going to school and working on the rice fields, children generally learn the traditional dances as well as to play musical instruments such as the flute, the xylophone or the drums. Music is closely related to the Balinese culture and religion, since this is the way in which Balinese people try to reach their gods.

The large rice terraces are followed by incredible landscapes, always presided over by the Gunung Agung, the



HAPPY



highest volcano in the island, which is 3,142 meters high. We are lucky today for we can see its peak. Not only Bali but also its neighbour island Lombok are part of the “Ring of Fire” on the Pacific Ocean. This is one of the most active regions in Indonesia due to the dangerous volcanoes, seaquakes and earthquakes. However, there are two more volcanoes in Bali: they are the Gunung Rinjani and the Gunung Batur and its lake. Balinese people believe that the lake waters are protected by a god because for centuries crops have grown on the fields irrigated by them.

**The Bali island has countless temples where offerings of rice, fruit, and flowers are deposited in honour of the gods**



It is incredible that on the side of each volcano there is normally at least one sacred temple. The group of temples known as Pura Besakih, situated on the side of the Gunung Agung, is the most amazing group in the whole island. It is a sacred place and, at the same time, an important Hinduism dissemination centre. It is believed that the ancestors' spirits live there. Here, like in any other place in the island, the three gods of the Balinese Hindu religion, Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu, are worshipped. Once a year, on a full moon, the Rajas –Bali's political leaders, take a trip to Pura Besaki in order to make of-

ferings in honour of their ancestors. It is a very special and lovely occasion. In addition, every 100 years, the “Eka Dasa Rudra,” a ceremony whereby the universe is cleansed of all the bad things, takes place. The last time it was held was in 1963, precisely the same night on which the volcano erupted destroying a large part of this group of temples, killing 1,600 people, and leaving 86,000 other homeless. Incredibly enough, before hitting the main temple, the torrent of lava

ers. Incense sticks are lit and the smell of lavender, pepper, and clove penetrate into temples, houses, and roads. Traditionally, in larger towns there are three temples: the Pura Puseh (temple of the origin), the Pura Desa (temple of the gathering), and the Pura Dalem (temple of death.) In some smaller towns there is only one temple, which, unlike significant temples, is generally not a big tourist attraction. Islanders are fervent believers of their Balinese Hindu religion.



split into two streams, each flowing down on each side of the temple without destroying it. Generally, due to religious and symbolic beliefs, the entrances of a temple are identical. One entrance represents the good; the other, the bad. Human beings are neither good nor bad. This “human attributes” are only balanced by entering the temple through the centre. At least once a day, you can observe a religious procession marching, as the orchestra plays, behind priests who bring bright-coloured offerings. Such offerings consist in tiny little banana-leaf baskets, red or black rice, fruit, and fresh flow-

It is an amazing blend of old Hinduism, primitive animism, and ancestor worshipping. Religion is synonymous with happiness and, thus, jubilant celebrations are held to commemorate the birth of a child, puberty, marriages, and cremations.



## Fancy hotels, splendid beaches, the sound of the waves breaking on the shore, glorious sunsets...

This is what the South is like Kuta is another cosmopolitan city, like Nusa Dua and Sanur. Here, the culture and faces are different: hundreds of Japanese, Australians, and lots of Italians come to this place on holiday. Its endless beaches made it a worldwide windsurfing Mecca! Out on the streets, you can find lots of hotels, prestigious Western franchises, sportswear stores, and restaurants. We sat down in order to taste the Balinese food, which is not expensive at all – something especially good when you are hungry. Just like in any other country in South-Eastern Asia, rice is the main ingredient of any dish. There are three different types of rice:

Balinese (white and glutinous), red, and black rice. It is generally served with different types of meat, such as pork or chicken (\*See information in 'Health'.) One of the most popular dishes is called Sate and consists in some kind of Kebab served with spicy peanut sauce. You can also try the delicious Betutu Bebek, which is roast duck in banana leaf. Vegetarians can also delight themselves with the taste of extraordinary vegetarian menus. As for drinks, the "Bitang" beer tastes great and is not as strong as the Balinese rice wine.

As we kept on walking on the streets, we found night clubs and discos. Right in the middle of downtown something draws our attention: a monument raised to commemorate the victims of October 12, 2002, the horrendous night on which a car bomb exploded destroying two discos and killing 202 people, most of whom were Australian. Similarly, three years later, on October 1, 2005, another terrorist attack shook the region when a bomb exploded in front of a restaurant and, at the same time, other bombs came off in Jemberan, a city located 30 km from there. It is for this reason that in Southern Bali people are afraid of fanatic radicalism.

This is the end of our trip throughout this delightful island, which, due to its past political state of unrest, has a dark side and has sown fear among its people, who do not know of violence and whose main concern is to do good, welcome tourists, and experience their religion and happiness in order to be compensated. All in all, this is an island that resembles Eden and that has many other awesome attractions that have not been described here. A compelling reason to visit in person this little corner – on the other side of the world, called Bali.

**Important warning:** Before visiting Bali, you should regularly visit the website of the Spanish Foreign Department in Indonesia : [www.mae.es](http://www.mae.es)



**Capital City:** Denpasar  
**Surface Area:** 5,561 km<sup>2</sup> (approx. like Ibiza)  
**Population:** almost 3 million inhabitants  
**Religion:** Hindu 92.3 %, Islamic: 5.7%, Christian: 1.4 %, Buddhist: 0.6%  
**Language:** Balinese and English  
**Government:** Republic of Indonesia since 1948.  
**Currency:** Indonesian rupiah  
**Industry:** Rice crops  
**Tropical weather:** Humidity up to 80%, Temp.: 27°C  
 Two alternate seasons: a dry season (from June through October) and a rainy season (from November through March)  
**Geography:** Bali is just one little spot in the immensities of the 17,000 islands that make up the Malay Archipelago.

**Health:** Since the area has registered "bird flu" cases, it is advisable to take precautions. Please, visit the website of the Spanish Health and Consumption Department: [www.msc.es](http://www.msc.es) and [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)  
**Immunizations:** Required: None - Advisable: Hepatitis B and Typhus.  
**Documents:** Passport: It must be valid for at least 6 months. Indonesian authorities require that you have your documents on you at all times.  
 Visa: Yes  
 Spanish citizens need a visa to enter and remain in Indonesia. You can obtain your visa – as of August 1, 2005 – on the border, upon your arrival in Indonesia, and in the Consulates in Spain, if you are visiting for a period not exceeding 30 days. The term of validity of the visa ranges from 7 to 30 days.