

# B A T



The ballyhoo of Kuta and Seminyak is just one side of Bali. For those desiring leisure and luxury that respects the environment, the northern reaches of the island teem with treasures and surprises.

Words RUTH HESSEY

**B**ALI REMAINS AUSTRALIA'S most-loved holiday destination, and there's no doubt it delivers exceptional experiences to millions of tourists every year. Yet many of us associate it with traffic jams, tattoo parlours and tourists behaving badly. It seems that even in a tropical paradise, things can get unpleasant. But hand over the equivalent of \$40 to a taxi driver and you can be whisked from the airport to the mountains in the north and encounter none of that. In fact, you'll find the antithesis.

Balinese culture has evolved around the idea that wellness and prosperity have their roots in the way we achieve harmony with each other, the divine and nature. They believe — and seem to prove on a daily basis — that balancing these relationships leads to success in every aspect of life. The Balinese are forever giving thanks; you can't walk anywhere without seeing offerings at shrines and temples. This is Bali's secret ingredient, which proves far more refreshing and invigorating than many of the modern indulgences we assume will make our holiday great — and it is very easy to find in the less-travelled north.

Exploring mystical Bali doesn't mean you need to sacrifice comfort. Begin with a few nights decompressing in Ubud and, after adjusting to the change in spiritual altitude — at Maya Ubud if you are loaded, or Honeymoon Guesthouse if you want to feel as if you are — travel a half hour further to Fivelements, an upmarket sanctuary famous for its bamboo architecture, healing therapies and meditation spaces. The bungalows offer sublime serenity among waterfalls and fish ponds, and the riverside spa is famous for the most regenerating massage on the island. ➔

## DETAILS

**Fivelements** Puri Ahimsa, Banjar Baturning, Mambal; [www.fivelements.org/en](http://www.fivelements.org/en). **Gaia-Oasis Abasan Mountain Retreat** Jalan Raya Singaraja-Amlapura, Dusun Tegal Sumaga; [www.gaia-oasis.com/abasan-mountain-retreat](http://www.gaia-oasis.com/abasan-mountain-retreat). **Honeymoon Guesthouse** Jalan Bisma, Ubud; [www.casalunabali.com](http://www.casalunabali.com). **Maya Ubud** Jalan Gunung Sari Peliatan, Ubud; [www.mayaresorts.com/ubud](http://www.mayaresorts.com/ubud). **Sanak Retreat** Banjar Dinas Menagung, Desa Kayuputih, Buleleng; [www.sanakbali.com](http://www.sanakbali.com). **The Menjangan** Km. 17 Jalan Raya Gilimanuk Singaraja, Desa Pejarakan, Buleleng; [www.themenjangan.com](http://www.themenjangan.com).

## EAT & DRINK

Raw foods, gluten-free goods and other wellness must-haves including vitamin-B shots and magnesium infusions bring the healthy and wealthy crowd to **Alchemy** (75 Jalan Penestanan Kelod, Ubud; [www.alchemybali.com](http://www.alchemybali.com)). If you can get a booking, you'll find innovative, sustainably produced food at **Locavore** (10 Jalan Dewi Sita, Ubud; [www.locavore.co.id](http://www.locavore.co.id)), in a charming modern setting. Take an idyllic walk through rice fields to the open-air restaurant **Sari Organik** (Jalan Subak Sok Wayah, Tjampuhan, Ubud) and dine looking out over the scenery — pure bliss. **Bar Luna** (Jalan Raya, Ubud; [www.casalunabali.com/casa-luna-restaurant](http://www.casalunabali.com/casa-luna-restaurant)) is set downstairs in the garden of renowned Casa Luna and mixes old Hollywood glamour with Indonesian tapas.

## BUY LOCAL

If you want to take a piece of traditional Balinese culture home, the village of **Celuk**, south of Ubud, is the epicentre of the island's gold and silver smithing. For handwoven ikat and high-quality silk, visit **Berdikari** (42 Jalan Dewi Sartika), or buy a local Tibetan gong/hang drum hybrid that's easy to master and meditative to play at Fivelements. And be sure to shop with the locals at the colourful night market **Pasar Anyar II** (Jalan Gajah Mada in Singaraja) for vegetables, fruit, fish, meat, clothes and flowers.



**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT** A bedroom at The Menjangan; flower offerings; Gaia-Oasis Abasan Mountain Retreat; Sanak Retreat funds local jobs and sustainability projects. **OPPOSITE** Maya Ubud has Green Globe-certified eco credentials. **PREVIOUS PAGE, FROM LEFT** The mountains rise over Munduk's rice fields; an Ubud rice farmer's hat.



**WELLNESS AND PROSPERITY HAVE THEIR ROOTS IN THE WAY WE ACHIEVE HARMONY WITH EACH OTHER, THE DIVINE AND NATURE.**



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Its restaurant, the Sakti Dining Room, serves beautiful raw foods in a degustation menu, with healthy beverages to match.

Take a break from relaxing to explore the marvellously varied terrain of the north — from the cool spice- and coffee-growing mountains around Munduk, to the dry forests of the West Bali (Bali Barat) National Park. There are volcanoes, verdant valleys and a striking coastline surrounding Singaraja, the old Dutch capital of Bali. You'll also find ravishing waterfalls, including the series of cascades at Munduk Falls, Singsing Waterfall at Banjar (about 13 kilometres from Singaraja) and Blahmantung Waterfall near the old-world village of Pujungan.

Unfortunately, the pressures of tourism have put Bali under stress — demands on the water supply have led Lake Buyan to drop over five metres, frog and bird populations are dwindling, the luminous clouds of fireflies are also disappearing — so choosing an ethical eco-resort or hotel designed to leave a minimal footprint is a way you can help preserve the Balinese landscape.

Venture an hour northeast of Singaraja to Gaia-Oasis Abasan Mountain Retreat. With its lotus pool meditation space set amid gardens in a rural idyll, this peaceful enclave of secluded cottages runs its own water purification system.

In West Bali, The Menjangan is run like a safari park, dedicated to preserving wildlife. It offers horse riding, snorkelling and kayaking, or you can rejuvenate in the Mangrove Spa at Sentigi Beach and watch wild deer cool their hooves in the ocean from Pantai Restaurant. Set on wooden decking with the water lapping the mangroves and fairy lights sprinkled around the beach, the restaurant is a fantasy location with excellent barbecue and seafood dishes. Alternatively, order a sunset cocktail at the Bali Tower Restaurant, surrounded by the forest, and sit on an upper level to watch dusk envelop the ocean all the way to Java.

Menjangan Island in West Bali National Park — also known as Deer Island after the local wild deer — is home to unforgettable walks and waters full of coral reefs.

Sanak Retreat in Munduk is another eco-minded option. Created by a French-Balinese team, it is deeply rooted in local village life after just two years. This is thanks to income-generating programs employing and buying produce from local residents, and its ongoing collaboration with Pack for a Purpose, a group that encourages tourists to bring health and education materials with them on visits.

A discerning collection of art and artefacts from all over Indonesia enlivens the beautiful bungalows, and suspended high above a serene valley, the infinity pool is but a lazy lollipop from the restaurant verandah. That blending of French and Indonesian culture continues throughout the property, and the lemongrass crème brûlée is unforgettable. With valley views and locally made skin treatments, there's every reason to finish the day at the spa.

Of course Bali is changing, but every visitor who steps lightly is rewarded, not only by a wonderful holiday that refreshes the mind and spirit, but with the knowledge that our choices will keep Bali feeling like Eden for generations to come. 🌿

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