

Understand Bali & Lombok

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Bali & Lombok Today

It's not just Bali's temperatures that are hot, it's the island itself. Deluged with record numbers of tourists (nearly four million foreigners, another eight million Indonesians), there are crowds of visitors everywhere you turn. In the media too, Bali is big news, with breathless coverage every time something sensational happens to a foreigner – especially an Australian. It has many locals and others who love Bali wishing the island could just take a big time out.

Best on Film

Act of Killing (director Joshua Oppenheimer, 2013) A searing documentary about the 1965 slaughter of accused Communist sympathisers in Indonesia (including tens of thousands on Bali).

Cowboys in Paradise (director Amit Virmani, 2011) Highly entertaining documentary about the scores of male gigolos working in south Bali.

Best in Print

Paradise Guest House (Ellen Sussman, 2013) A critically acclaimed novel about one woman's trip to Bali and her search for a place to call home.

Island of Bali (Miguel Covarrubias, 1937) The classic work about Bali and its civilisation remains stunningly relevant today.

Bali Daze: Freefall Off the Tourist Trail (Cat Wheeler, 2011) Accounts of daily life in Ubud make for a fun and illuminating read.

Secrets of Bali: Fresh Light on the Morning of the World (Jonathan Copeland and Ni Wayan Murni, 2010) One of the most readable books about Bali, its people and its traditions.

Eat, Pray, Love (Elizabeth Gilbert, 2007) This bestseller lures believers to Bali every year, hoping to capture something from the book.

Developments Beyond Control

Sidemen Rd in east Bali runs through one of the most beautiful parts of the island. It's a verdant, green paradise. What isn't nice is the road itself; where once it was smoothly paved, now it has been beaten into rubble in parts because of the constant stream of trucks hauling sand and rock to south Bali for construction projects. It's the same story across the island: convoys of trucks hauling materials needed for the booming south.

Yet what may be even more astonishing – beyond the pace of new construction – is that no one really knows what's being built. Bali's loose form of central government means that the individual regencies have more say in what goes on in their parts of the island. But there is little central planning or a permission process. One of the results has been an explosion in new midrange chain hotels. Seemingly overnight dozens of these places have opened across the south, many in areas far from beaches, restaurants and nightlife, and often on very busy roads. There has also been an explosion in the number of condotels, hotels where the rooms are sold like condominiums to investors who are promised a certain return. In 2014 Bali had 5000 condotel rooms (all in south Bali) and another 8000 new ones had been advertised.

Even the head of Bali's tourism board, Ngurah Wijaya, has been widely quoted saying 'we're loving Bali to death'. And the developments continue. In a truly cynical move, it was announced that 50% of the vast mangroves around Benoa Harbour and the airport were going to be preserved. That's because there are plans to cover the other 50% with landfill and build a vast complex of new hotels, tourist attractions and even a Formula One race car track. However, this proposal seems