

# Welcome to Bali & Lombok

*The mere mention of Bali evokes thoughts of a paradise. It's more than a place; it's a mood, an aspiration, a tropical state of mind.*

## Island of the Gods

The rich and diverse culture of Bali plays out at all levels of life, from the exquisite flower-petal offerings placed everywhere, to the processions of joyfully garbed locals, shutting down major roads as they march to one of the myriad temple ceremonies, to the otherworldly traditional music and dance performed island-wide. Almost everything has spiritual meaning. The middle of Bali is dominated by the dramatic volcanoes of the central mountains and hillside temples such as Pura Luhur Batukau, while the tallest peak, Gunung Agung, is the island's spiritual centre.

## One Island, Many Destinations

On Bali you can lose yourself in the chaos of Kuta or the sybaritic pleasures of Seminyak and Kerobokan, surf wild beaches in the south or just hang out on Nusa Lembongan. You can go family-friendly in Sanur or savour a lavish getaway on the Bukit Peninsula. Ubud is the heart of Bali, a place where the culture of the island is most accessible, and it shares the island's most beautiful rice fields and ancient monuments with east and west Bali. North and west Bali are thinly populated but have the kind of diving and surfing that make any journey worthwhile.

## Bali's Essence

Yes, Bali has beaches, surfing, diving, and resorts great and small, but it's the essence of Bali – and the Balinese – that makes it so much more than just a fun-in-the-sun retreat. It is possible to take the cliché of the smiling Balinese too far, but in reality, the inhabitants of this small island are indeed a generous, genuinely warm people. There's also a fun, sly sense of humour. Upon seeing a bald tourist, many locals exclaim '*bung ujan*', which means today's rain is cancelled – it's their way of saying that the hairless head is like a clear sky.

## Lombok & the Gilis

Almost as big as Bali, Lombok is the completely different island right next door. From its volcanic centre to idyllic beaches, it rewards travellers who want to explore. Many are drawn to mighty Gunung Rinjani, Indonesia's second-highest volcano. Rivers and waterfalls gush down its fissured slopes, while its summit – complete with hot springs and a dazzling crater lake – is the ultimate trekker's prize. In the south, you encounter one superb beach after another. The fabled Gili Islands are three exquisite droplets of white sand sprinkled with coconut palms and surrounded by coral reefs teeming with marine life.



## Why I Love Bali & Lombok

By Ryan Ver Berkmoes, Writer

In 1993 I visited Bali for the first time. When I went through immigration, the officer glanced at my passport and said in the sweetest voice possible: 'Have a wonderful birthday on Bali.' Who wouldn't fall in love? I spent a lot of that trip slack-jawed with wonderment. I remember dancers and musicians materialising from across the rice fields to perform in Ubud, I remember driving little back roads of east Bali and being unable to comprehend all the green. Since then, these places – like me – have changed greatly, but their essence still evokes love.

**For more about our writers, see p416**