

Bali



Impossibly green rice terraces, pulse-pounding surf, enchanting Hindu temple ceremonies, mesmerising dance performances, ribbons of beaches, a truly charming people: there are as many images of Bali as there are flowers on the ubiquitous frangipani trees.

This small island – you can drive the entire coast in one day – looms large for any visit to Indonesia. No place is more visitor-friendly. Hotels range from surfer dives where the fun never stops to sybaritic retreats in the lush mountains. The shopping, from hackneyed baubles to designer duds will put ‘extra bag’ at the top of your list. You can dine on local foods bursting with flavours fresh from the markets or let a world-class chef take you on a culinary journey around the globe. From a cold Bintang at sunset to an epic night clubbing, your social whirl is limited only by your own fortitude. And when comes time to relax, you can get a cheap beach massage or lose yourself in an all-day spa.

And small obviously doesn’t mean homogeneous. Manic Kuta segues into luxurious Seminyak. The artistic swirl of Ubud is a counterpoint to misty treks amid the volcanoes. Mellow beach towns like Amed, Lovina and Pemuteran are found right round the coast and just offshore is the laid-back idyll of Nusa Lembongan.

As you stumble upon the exquisite little religious offerings that seem to materialise everywhere as if by magic, you’ll see that their tiny tapestry of colours and textures is a metaphor for Bali itself.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Shopping by day and hitting the hotspots by night in **Seminyak** (p279)
- Discovering the string of hidden beaches in and around **Bingin** (p290)
- Revelling in Bali’s elaborate cultural life in **Ubud** (p306) and surrounding villages
- Gazing in awe at the rice terraces leading to the mystical temple **Pura Luhur Batukau** (p355)
- Feeling the mist of waterfalls while trekking the lush region around **Munduk** (p354)



■ POPULATION: 3.5 MILLION

■ LAND AREA: 5632 SQ KM

■ HIGHEST PEAK: GUNUNG AGUNG (3142M)

HISTORY

It's certain that Bali has been populated since early prehistoric times, but the oldest human artefacts found are 3000-year-old stone tools and earthenware vessels from Cekik. Not much is known of Bali during the period when Indian traders brought Hinduism to the Indonesian archipelago, but the earliest written records are stone inscriptions dating from around the 9th century. By that time, rice was being grown under the complex irrigation system known as *subak*, and there were precursors of the religious and cultural traditions that can be traced to the present day.

Hindu Influence

Hindu Java began to spread its influence into Bali during the reign of King Airlangga, from 1019 to 1042. At the age of 16, Airlangga had fled into the forests of western Java when his uncle lost the throne. He gradually gained support, won back the kingdom once ruled by his uncle and went on to become one of Java's greatest kings. Airlangga's mother had moved to Bali and remarried shortly after his birth, so when he gained the throne there was an immediate link between Java and Bali. At this time, the courtly Javanese language known as Kawi came into use among the royalty of Bali, and the stunning rock-cut memorials seen at Gunung Kawi near Tampaksiring (p323) are a clear architectural link between Bali and 11th-century Java.

After Airlangga's death, Bali retained its semi-independent status until Kertanagara became king of the Singasari dynasty in Java two centuries later. Kertanagara conquered Bali in 1284, but his power lasted only eight years until he was murdered and his kingdom collapsed. With Java in turmoil, Bali regained its autonomy and the Pejeng dynasty, centred near modern-day Ubud, rose to great power. In 1343 Gajah Mada, the legendary chief minister of the Majapahit kingdom, defeated the Pejeng king Dalem Bedaulu and brought Bali back under Javanese influence.

Although Gajah Mada brought much of the Indonesian archipelago under Majapahit control, Bali was the furthest extent of its power. Here the 'capital' moved to Gelgel, near modern-day Semarapura (once known as Klungkung), around the late 14th century, and for the next two centuries this was the base for the 'king of Bali', the Dewa Agung. The Majapahit kingdom collapsed into disputing

sultanates. However, the Gelgel dynasty in Bali, under Dalem Batur Enggong, extended its power eastwards to the neighbouring island of Lombok and even crossed the strait to Java.

As the Majapahit kingdom fell apart, many of its intelligentsia moved to Bali, including the priest Nirartha, who is credited with introducing many of the complexities of Balinese religion to the island. Artists, dancers, musicians and actors also fled to Bali at this time, and the island experienced an explosion of cultural activities. The final great exodus to Bali took place in 1478.

European Contact

The first Europeans to set foot in Bali were Dutch seafarers in 1597. Setting a tradition that prevails to the present, they fell in love with the island, and when Cornelius Houtman – the ship's captain – prepared to set sail from Bali, some of his crew refused to leave with him. At that time, Balinese prosperity and artistic activity, at least among the royalty, were at a peak, and the king who befriended Houtman had 200 wives and a chariot pulled by two white buffaloes, not to mention a retinue of 50 dwarfs. When the Dutch returned to Indonesia in later years, they were interested in profit, not culture, and barely gave Bali a second glance.

Dutch Conquest

In 1710 the capital of the Gelgel kingdom was shifted to nearby Klungkung (now called Semarapura), but local discontent was growing, lesser rulers were breaking away from Gelgel domination and the Dutch began to move in, using the old policy of divide and conquer. In 1846 the Dutch used Balinese salvage claims over shipwrecks as the pretext to land military forces in northern Bali. In 1894 the Dutch chose to support the Sasaks of Lombok in a rebellion against their Balinese raja. After some bloody battles, the Balinese were defeated in Lombok, and with northern Bali firmly under Dutch control, southern Bali was not likely to retain its independence for long. Once again, salvaging disputes gave the Dutch the excuse they needed to move in. A Chinese ship was wrecked off Sanur in 1904 and ransacked by the Balinese. The Dutch demanded that the raja of Badung (southern Bali) pay 3000 silver dollars in damages – this was refused. In 1906 Dutch warships appeared at Sanur; Dutch forces landed and, despite Balinese opposition, marched the 5km to the outskirts of Denpasar.