

Sections

- News
- Letters
- Pulse
- Sports
- Stripes Accent
- Stripes Travel
- Sunday magazine

Information

- About us / Contacts
- Archive highlights
- Archive Photo of the Day
- Classified ads
- Library research
- Links
- Print Shop
- Stripes Lite

Search Stars & Stripes

Current Articles
Archives

STARS AND STRIPES.

Saturday, March 6, 2004

For tourists, there's a lot more to Bali than coconuts

By [Jeremy Kirk](#), Stars and Stripes

Stripes Pacific Travel, Thursday, October 3, 2002

From baby-blue coastline waters to Hindu temples infested with mischievous monkeys to rice paddies lined with palm trees, Bali's island mystique is inviting.

Although its main product is fat, green, semisweet coconuts, the real industry in Bali is entertaining gaggles of tourists from Europe, Japan, Korea and Russia who come to stay below the equator.

Surfing, scuba diving or simply laying on a beach. In Bali, it's all up to you.

Denpasar, the capital, isn't a real high point of Bali. With about 370,000 people, it's the center for business, with the rabid traffic problems and seeming chaos of most large cities in Asia. It may be exactly what tourists hoped to escape by going to Bali.

Still, there is fun to be found within the masses of exhaust-spewing scooters and throngs of people.

Visitors seeking to avoid shopping places that cater to, well, tourists can try the Toko Barong market, geared more toward local residents. That doesn't mean you won't see foreign faces, however. You'll just see much fewer of them.

Shopkeepers still look to visitors with eager eyes and

(Click on thumbnail for a larger version of the photo and more details. For a "slide show," click on first thumbnail, then use arrows to move between photos.)



Hindu temples like this can be found all over Bali.



A sculpture at a Hindu temple in Denpasar, Bali.

inflate prices, but the negotiating process is a bit more relaxed than say, Kuta, a city west of Denpasar that caters almost exclusively to tourists.

Bargaining in Bali is standard. And if you're a tourist, it can be prolonged as stores owners try to extract the highest price from your wallet.

In Toko Barong, you can find muslin rugs, woven baskets, wood-carved Buddhas, fabric for clothes and varieties of cool souvenirs. Prices are quoted as much as 500 times what items will actually sell for, so you have to bargain swiftly and politely.

Most of all, don't be afraid to just walk away.

Even after naming your highest price, the shopkeeper will resist. But they'll chase you down for a block after you leave, shouting lower and lower prices to draw you back.

It's entertaining at first, but bargaining can become wearisome if you intend to buy multiple gifts for friends. If you go back and forth for a while, it's probably best to be set on purchasing the item, as shopkeepers get irked with people who bargain and then don't buy.

But remember, you are the consumer, and they are the owner, so the power is on your side.

Underneath the sparkling waters of the Indian Ocean that surround Bali is a world just as pretty as the scenes on land.

Scuba diving and snorkeling are very popular, and there are many sites off the coast where divers can see coral and fish they likely have only peered at in a 50-gallon tank.

Experienced divers can try open-water entry from a boat at sites requiring a boat ride. Individuals must have experience with currents and deep diving to



An Indonesian man controls a gambling game on the streets of Denpasar.



Indonesian men play a version of roulette in the streets of Denpasar.



A woman sells flowers for Hindu offerings in the Baroong Market in Denpasar.



At a Hindu temple near Denpasar.

attempt these.

Dive shops abound, and all offer packages for people who have never donned a mask and tank.

On the north side of Bali is Tulamben, a small coastal city with neither many people nor tourists. Getting from Denpasar to Tulamben is a tumultuous, bumpy, three-hour near-death ride.

The Balinese drive by weaving all over the road while passing cars on blind curves at breakneck speeds. If you can stomach the ride, the scenery is spectacular as you ascend winding roads that take you around Mount Kintamani, a massive volcano jutting up from the island's center.

The road descends through tiered, bright-green rice paddies and arching palm trees. But the other side of Kintamani looks like a high desert, with sparse plants and moonlike rocks.

Although the volcano is dormant, the sides of the mountain are too warm for much plant life. The mountain's north side curves down to the coast, whose shore is composed of big, fist-sized volcanic rocks.

It's here that many people say the best diving on Bali can be found. In the waters about 150 feet off the coast lies the USS Liberty, a cargo ship sunk by the Japanese in January 1942 during World War II.

A torpedo damaged the ship, and it was towed to the Tulamben beach to rescue its cargo. But Kintamani's eruption in 1963 pushed the Liberty back into the water, where it rests today, making a perfect artificial reef for sea life.

Diving the wreck is a blast — hundreds of colorful tropical fish cruise by you, some ducking behind neon corals and weaving among the wreckage of the Liberty.



Two Balinese women practice batik, an art using wax to make designs on fabric.



A woman makes small baskets for Hindu offerings at a temple in Denpasar.



Two women chop coconuts, the main agricultural product of Bali.



A woman feeds a monkey on a mountaintop in Bali.

Unlike the rest of Indonesia which is Muslim, Balinese are mostly Hindu, and the architecture of their religion is seen throughout Bali.

Families must have a temple in their own compounds to honor their ancestral spirits. But there are a few main temples around Bali that have breathtaking architecture and immense history.

Because they are sacred places, temples may require you to wear a sarong, a tradition skirt worn by men and women. If you are wearing shorts, you will definitely have to wear one.

One of the most famous temples on Bali is on a high, sheer cliff nearly hanging over the Indonesian Ocean.

On the southernmost tip of Bali, Pura Ulawatu is not so much control by Hindus as monkeys. Dozens of the gray-bearded hooligans roam of the grounds, hijacking sunglasses cameras, earring and sunglasses from tourists.

They hold it for ransom. There's no negotiation. If you want your item back, you better produce a peanut.

The legend goes that a Hindu saint, Sang Hyang Nirartha, chose the place to depart from the material world. The temple itself offers spectacular views of shimmering water from its perch.

That is, if the monkeys don't grab your glasses.

If you go ...

GETTING THERE: Jakarta, Indonesia, is roughly a 6½-hour plane ride from Korea and Japan. From there, a one-hour connecting flight lands you on Bali. With immigration and airport waits, it's about a 12-hour trip.

GETTING AROUND: Taxis are inexpensive, and many are waiting at the airport. Most locals don't use taxis, so drivers tend to stop whenever they see foreigners and ask if you need a ride. English is spoken in some taxis, but you better take a map to illustrate where you want to go.

Scooters can be rented, but driving them in Bali if you don't have experience is wild riding. Helmets are the law in Bali.

CURRENCY: The currency is the rupiah, but most shops catering to tourists will take dollars. There's no real savings to using either one. If you don't like math (\$1 equals about 8,900 rupiahs), stick to dollars.

DINING: The local cuisine is delightful. Rice is a common meal, sometimes with a blend of vegetables. Indonesian style noodles are ravishing.

If you like to eat like the locals at regular places, you won't spend more than \$6 a day. Other foreign cuisine is available, but as expected, it is marketed toward tourists, so the price will be higher.

THE PEOPLE: Balinese are friendly and extremely helpful. They are accustomed to throngs of foreigners, and they treat them kindly for bringing some prosperity to their island.

[Home](#) | [Shopping](#) | [Archives](#) | [Print Shop](#) | [Stripes Lite](#)
[Ombudsman](#) | [Advertising](#) | [About Us](#) | [Feedback](#) | [Contact Us](#)
[Careers](#) | [Stocks](#) | [Press Releases](#)

© 2003 Stars and Stripes. All Rights Reserved. [Disclaimer](#) / [Web Notice](#)

Site Design by [LaserNet, LLC](#).