



10 Jun 2018
Herald on Sunday, Auckland

Author: Anna King Shahab • Section: Travel • Article Type: News Item
Audience : 83,574 • Page: 1 • Printed size: 2326.00cm² • Market: NZ
Country: New Zealand • ASR: NZD 26,917 • words: 1601 • Item ID: 966955148
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SUNDAY travel



JUNE 10, 2018
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WHAT WINTER?

Why Bali is so hot right now

spy INSIDE ● Gossip and parties ● Food ● Fashion ● Entertainment ● TV listings ● Puzzles



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BALI FOR BEGINNERS

Anna King Shahab covers some of the basics and need-to-knows for first-time Bali visitors.

PICK YOUR SPOT(S)

The island may be small, but Bali traffic can be a force to be reckoned with so unless you want to spend much of your holiday in a taxi getting to and from attractions, it can be a good idea to divide your time between a couple of areas (depending on the length of your stay) so you can efficiently use your time to explore locally. Here's a very rough guide to some popular attractions in a few areas.

Ubud: Hits the spot for Balinese culture, yoga classes and post-yoga, plant-based feasts, idyllic rice paddies, cooking classes, river rafting, jungle treks and spa treatments using handmade products.

Seminyak: Home to many high-end international hotel chains, this area is great for shopping – mostly international brands now but the daily arts market is good for crafts and local textiles. The surf is excellent and the beach clubs (places like

Potato Head and Ku De Ta) attract some excellent international acts. There is also a host of great bars and restaurants.

Canggu: While fast-evolving, this area still has a boho vibe; surf, yoga and party cultures meet in harmony. Lots of local boutique stores for rummaging and some great restaurants.

Jimbaran: Built on a long, golden sand beach that's good for a variety of water sports including beginner surfing. Being close to the airport, it makes a great place to start or finish your trip in luxury surroundings.

Uluwatu: At the southern tip of the island and home to tucked-away high-end resorts, clifftops trailing down to empty beaches, amazing sunsets and

the stunning Uluwatu temple.

Nusa Dua: A bit like Fiji's Denarau; built on package holidays, if that's what floats your boat

Nusa Lembongan: Hasn't seen too much development yet and has a laid-back charm. Great spot for diving, snorkelling, surfing and stand-up paddle boarding.

The North and East Bali coastlines:

Accommodation centres around spots like Amed and Tejakula, and the areas are still comparatively quiet, both offering great diving and snorkelling, black-sand beaches, and insights into traditional Balinese village life.

Kuta and Legian: Overrun with tourists and, in my opinion, best avoided.

GET AROUND

Marked taxis (Bluebird is the most prevalent) are plentiful in some areas, like Seminyak and Jimbaran, and although rumour has it their drivers should use meters, this rarely happens and it's usually easier to simply negotiate a fixed price. The same goes when using a touted taxi in areas like Canggu and Ubud: settle on a fare before you get in the car and bear in mind that drivers tend to claim they don't carry change.

If you want to visit multiple locations you can hire a driver for a day (or longer). Unless you want unscheduled stops at jewellery factories and coffee farms (where the civet cats that are used to produce kopi luwak are, sadly, treated cruelly), make it known to your driver that you want to stick to your planned destinations.

Hiring a scooter is a cinch (usually you won't even need to produce a licence). Prices vary from about \$5-15 a day depending on area. Areas with less traffic are much more conducive to scooter riding so try the outskirts of Ubud, Canggu away



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through your accommodation is preferable as the airport: if your accommodation offers a pick book it; many properties, especially private villas are located down little lanes (especially in Ubud, often with no car access), and it takes a driver w knows the place to deposit you there stress-free.

STAY

There is so much accommodation in Bali that it's a question of narrowing down the exact feature: location and price you're keen on. If you plan on checking out a few different areas, you may also like to mix up your accommodation type. Spend a stretch in a private villa in an area with lots of activities to check out, then if budget allows, a few nights in remote five-star luxury, relaxing and enjoying the onsite perks.

I've booked numerous villas and hotels in Bali and I rate **booking.com** for a few key reasons. Not only is there a huge range of options but I like that I can set filters to find me properties that are within walking distance of specific things like yoga studios, restaurants, rice paddies for serene walks at dawn, or I can search exclusively for villas with a private pool – a non-negotiable for our water babies. I also love being able to book easily on my phone, without any payment – it's so much tidier settling the bill by credit card at the end of the stay, with the inclusi of additional such as scooter hire, excursions, food and drink orders.

After several visits, I've settled on a few favourites. On the quiet outskirts of Ubud in the middle of rice paddies, but walking distance to lots of attractions, Devi's Place keeps drawing ou family back. From one-bedroom cottages to the large, airy three-bedroom pool villa we hired this year, Devi's Place has a range of

affordably priced options, with traditional Balinese design touches and always scrupulously clean. Owned and run by local man Ketut and family, the business has enabled his children to go through university. Ketut and son-in-law Kadek offer driver services, and also have scooters for hire.

For all-out luxury, we were seriously impressed with the level of attention at Four Seasons Jimbaran Bay; wherever you are on the 14ha from the main road, and Nusa Lembongan. To travel between areas, arranging a transfer

killer cocktails, their signature being the negroni.

Smokehouse BBQ is an all-out Texas-style joint putting out seriously good smoked meats from the huge pit-smoker, served with the classic sides.

On the coast, seafood is so affordable it's hard for me to go past it at most meals. At Jimbaran, dine with your feet in the sand at any of the dozens of seafood restaurants that line the beach; fish, crab, lobster, clams and calamari are grilled at intense heat over coconut husks to give a whisper of extra sweetness on the flesh. At Sundara's Sunday brunch – where you pay a fixed price for delicious free-flow tapas dishes – the seafood options are especially bountiful.



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they'll know exactly where to collect you and will load your luggage. The same goes with arrival a property, staff greet you by name. In a world of anonymous, white-on-white hotel design, Four Seasons stands out for being unmistakably Balinese, designed like a traditional village with tall stone walls around each villa, complete with a nook beside the lofty wooden entry doors to place daily canang sari offerings. The breakfasts were amazing, the spa treatments heavenly. If you're going to splurge, this is where to do it.

SUSTENANCE

There are myriad options to suit all palates and budgets. Warungs dot roadsides, offering Balinese fare. Popular dishes include nasi goreng (fried rice), nasi campur (rice, meat, tempeh, vegetables and sambal wrapped in a banana leaf or paper parcel), sate lilit (minced fish or chicken grilled on skewers of lemongrass), babi guling (suckling pig with excellent crackling). To explore wider Indonesian cuisine in stylish surroundings, head to Kaum in Seminyak and Hujan Locale in Ubud. Eateries with wholefoods or plant-based menus are mushrooming. Great examples are Yellow Flower Cafe, Alchemy, Dumbo and Moksa in Ubud. In Canggu check out Shady Shack, Quince Cafe and Betelnut, and on Nusa Lembongan, Ginger & Jamu, right on the beach.

No matter what you're craving, you will probably find a darn good version of it in Bali, and eating out, even in the higher end places, is generally great value. Da Maria has Maurice Terzini (of Sydney's Icebergs fame) behind its Southern Italian sass, turning out woodfired pizzas (kids are invited to make their own alongside the chefs), pastas and beautiful seafood dishes as well as

MONEY STUFF

Bali currency is the Indonesian rupiah and NZ\$1 roughly equates to IDR\$10,000. So you pretty much just lop all the zeros off (most menus quote prices without those pesky thousands anyway).

Restaurants, bars and hotels add taxes to quoted prices (often 10 per cent vat and 11 per cent service, but it varies). Additional tipping is not expected but is of course appreciated.

ATMs are found in most places mentioned here, except Nusa Lembongan, which you should visit with enough cash to cover your stay. Some ATMs have a maximum withdrawal of IDR1.5 million (\$150) whereas others will go up to IDR2.5 million.

CULTURE

Balinese speak Bahasa Bali and often Bahasa Indonesia but it's generally easy to get by in English. Ceremony and tradition suffuse the daily lives of Bali's predominantly Hindu population, but in general there aren't strict rules that visitors need to adhere to avoid causing offence, just stick to the basic social mores and respectfulness.

Be aware that outward expression of anger isn't a done thing in Balinese culture and, if visiting a temple, cover the legs and arms (a sarong in the backpack comes in handy).

Balinese culture is expressed through dance, puppetry, music, weaving, pottery, painting and martial arts, into all of which visitors can readily get an insight.



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FACT BOX

Emirates new direct service from Auckland to Bali begins on June 15, and will run year round. Return fares from \$899. Surfers can check in their boards for free. emirates.co.nz



Above: Lembongan. Photo / Anna King Shahab
Below: Private pool at Devi's Place in Ubud.
Bottom: Breakfast bowl at Yellow Flower in Ubud. Photos / Anna King Shahab



Pura Ulun Duta Bratan, Hindu temple on Bratan lake. Photo / Getty Images

