



BALI

15 Must-Try Experiences

How to make the most of your next trip to Indonesia's fabled holiday isle.



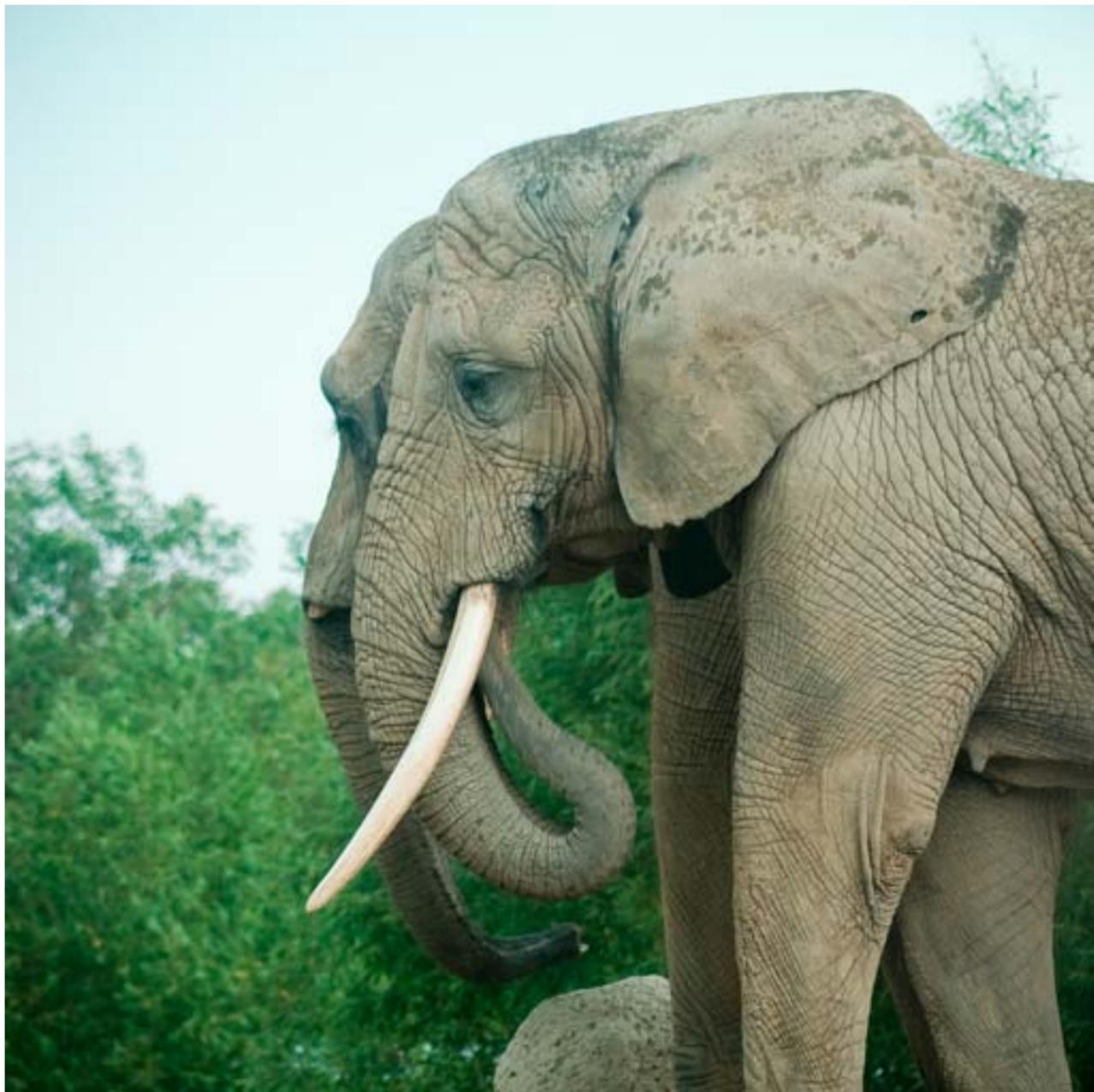
The Indonesian archipelago comprises some 17,000 islands, but for many international visitors, there is only one. Bali has long nurtured its reputation as the Island of the Gods. Blessed with sun-kissed beaches, magical scenery, rich artistic traditions, and a sublimely spiritual people, it's no surprise that it has long been Indonesia's most popular destination. (In the first half of 2011, over 1.5 million international visitors touched down at Ngurah Rai Airport.) This Hindu enclave in the world's largest Muslim country retains an allure that extends to one of the broadest tourist spectrums imaginable. From budget to bling, Bali caters to all tastes. Read on for our checklist of things to do on the island.

COVER IMAGE

Nestled in the foothills of one of Bali's many volcanoes, 2,276-meter Mount Batukaru, the rice terraces of Jatiluwih present a scenic expanse of farmland.

01

Experiencing the sunset on the "Island of the Gods" has an almost spiritual quality to it.



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1

MEET BALI'S GENTLE GIANTS

Nestled amid the thick forests of Taro, about a 30-minute drive north of Ubud, the Elephant Safari Park (62-361/721-480; baliadventuretours.com) maintains an idyllic environment for its oversized residents. The 30 or so rescued Sumatran elephants that call the park home are doted upon by their handlers, not to mention by Australian owner Nigel Mason, who has grown the property from a few rice fields into a lush resort complete with a safari-style lodge. The unique resort features 25 rooms and a spa with taro-scented products and soaking tubs that look out on the grazing giants. And don't miss the evening safari adventures for guests, with pachyderm pick-up from the lodge followed by a 30-minute jungle trek and dinner under the stars. Day-trippers can also enjoy elephant rides, along with feeding sessions and an orchestra performed by the surprisingly talented pachyderms.

02

Elephants, it turns out, are surprisingly talented entertainers.

03

Intricate artwork is nothing new to the Balinese.

2

ENJOY AN ORGANIC FEAST

"It's simple fare, but very fresh," says Ben Ripple of the organic cuisine he whips up at his Firefly Supper Series, held on weekends from May through October. The dinners began as a way for Ripple and his wife to showcase the products of their Big Tree Farms (62-361/461-978; bigtreebali.com), which operates organic farms around Bali. The fresh food on offer, coupled with the fairytale location—amid rice paddies and jungle lit up with hundreds of candles and tiki torches on Ripple's Bali Alami farm just outside Ubud—has seen the dinner series develop a cult following. Guests are entertained by a roaming suling flute player while they get acquainted over cocktails of *arak madu*, a potent, home-brewed coconut vodka blended with fresh lemon and lime and a dollop of mango-scented honey. The six- to eight-course degustation menu features whatever is fresh that day, be it zucchini-blossom fritters, spit-roasted chicken with a tamarind and nutmeg glaze, or beets layered with organic goat's cheese and drizzled with a pepper-and-balsamic reduction. Once your meal's done, be sure to stock up on a box of Big Tree Farms' famed raw cashews or vanilla-flavored palm sugar.

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03

DISCOVER LOCAL ART

If you have time to visit only one of Bali's museums, make it the Agung Rai Museum of Art (62-361/975-742; armamuseum.com) in Ubud. Comprising a trio of tile-roofed buildings on the outskirts of Ubud, the property is enveloped by lush, landscaped gardens, best viewed from the open-air café that doubles as a theater for Balinese classical dance and music. Inside, the art on display presents a remarkable survey of Balinese and Javanese works from past and living masters, alongside pieces by foreign artists who have lived on the island. If time permits also visit nearby Gaya Fusion (62-361/979-252; gayafusion.com), dedicated to works at the contemporary end of the spectrum. It brings together art from an eclectic mix of international artists and encourages visitors to get creative themselves. It also hosts regular theater, dance, and music events.



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SEE AND BE SEEN IN SEMINYAK

The beautiful people of Bali flock to Potato Head Beach Club (62-361/473-7979; facebook.com/potatoheadbeachclub) and Ku De Ta (62-361/736-969; kudeta.net), both in Seminyak. Potato Head is the newcomer, Ku De Ta the established king of cool. Both feature creative cocktails, groovy chill-out music, and gourmet cuisine. The real draw, however, is the promise of a magical Seminyak sunset. Also check out the nearby SOS Supper Club (62-361/737-773; sosasupperclub.com), which offers a similar vista from a rooftop terrace of the Anantara hotel. Beach-facing lounge beds go fast, so book ahead to enjoy the best views. After dark, the grills are fired and creative cocktails poured, all to the beat of international DJs.

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If you haven't enjoyed a sunset cocktail by the beach amid beautiful party people, you haven't experienced Bali to the fullest.

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Bali has no shortage of excellent dining establishments.

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GET A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

The words "exclusive" and "Kuta" are rarely used in the same sentence. Unless, of course, you're viewing the famed surfing beach from the comfort of a privately chartered helicopter hovering well above the crowds. When you tire of aerial beachcombing, flit off to Tanah Lot or the temples of Uluwatu, or spend a couple of hours buzzing around Bali's highest and holiest peak, Mount Agung. "It's a very exclusive way to see the island and surrounds," says Marius Cloete, the general manager of Air Bali (62-361/767-466; airbali.com). Cloete, who has organized choppers for the likes of Anna Kournikova and Enrique Iglesias, has seen his fair share of marriage proposals. "People don't realize there are so many romantic, secluded beaches in Bali," he says. With 12 helipads around the island, Air Bali has access to most of those stretches of sand.



6

VISIT A VILLAGE

In the mid-1990s Jaringan Ekowisata Desa (62-361/737-447; jed.or.id) launched a series of unique eco-tours to four very different villages: Sibetan, Tenganan, Ceningan, and Pelaga. “A lot of our ideas came from the community,” says JED manager Gede Jaya. Working with locals, Jaya has overseen the establishment of various village-based activities, from guided hikes to organic cooking classes and even a spot of seaweed farming or fishing in coastal Ceningan. In Pelaga, an hour’s drive northeast of Ubud, visitors are guided through coffee plantations and fields ripe with cinnamon, vanilla, peanuts, papaya, ginger, and lemongrass before rubbing elbows with villagers preparing an organic meal using freshly sourced ingredients. Overnight accommodation in local houses (or a small bamboo ecolodge in Ceningan) is simple but comfortable.



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DISCOVER THE WONDERS OF WEAVING

“Our mantra is that we want quality over quantity,” says William Ingram, one of the founders of the Threads of Life (62-361/972-187; threadsoflife.com) gallery and its associated foundation, Yayasan Pecinta Budaya Bebali, both headquartered in Ubud. The nonprofit YPBB sends a roving team of workers into the field every year to help educate various weaving communities in skills such as sustainable use of dyes, land tenure, and forestry. The team returns to Ubud with bundles of intricately woven textiles—all naturally dyed, and some many generations in the making. Scarves, baskets, and wall hangings for sale come with detailed historical documentation, while workshops demystify the bewildering array of textiles produced around Indonesia. Look out for the natural dye and batik classes held on the grounds of the YPBB on an impromptu basis.

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CHECK OUT CLASSY CERAMICS

Wondering where your hotel got its gorgeous ceramic tableware? Chances are good it came from Jenggala Keramik (62-361/703-311; jenggalashop.com), whose Jimbaran showroom stocks a dizzying array of bowls, plates, vases, and assorted decor items. Richly lacquered signatures (including the “frog” line that helped establish the brand) are color-themed across endless shelves, with newer lines of bespoke cutlery and glassware also making an appearance. Those inspired by the display can try their hand at the Paint a Pot workshop, where raw ceramics await glazing. An adjoining café and gallery showcase local art in rotating exhibitions.

06
A brush with pottery at Jenggala Keramik.

07
Horsing around on the beach with steeds from Umalas Equestrian Resort.

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SADDLE UP SEASIDE

Hippophiles can pair their passion for horses with the beaches of Bali thanks to Umalas Equestrian Resort (62-361/731-402; balionhorse.com). Just outside of Seminyak, the facility is home to a stable of horses, available for early-morning and late-afternoon gallops along the beach. Two- and three-hour rides begin with a stroll through nearby villages and rice fields, and end either with a picnic brunch or Champagne sundowners on the beach. Serious riders can also take courses in dressage, lunge, and vaulting.



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SAVE A TURTLE

With support from the WWF, the Turtle Conservation and Education Centre (62/813-3841-2716) on Serangan Island has the ambitious task of saving Bali's turtles from extinction. Declining both in number and species due to pollution, habitat destruction, and poaching, the island's turtle population has dwindled despite the ongoing efforts of the TCEC team. Says operations manager Wayan Sakura, "Most people don't realize there's a problem, and so can't help." Sakura and a handful of locals educate visitors in areas of conservation at the makeshift information center, replete with a turtle hatchery, breeding tanks, and a clinic for sick and disabled turtles. Visitors who call ahead can arrange to release hatchlings into the ocean; otherwise, they can support the cause through donations or the purchase of turtle-inspired artwork.



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HEAD FOR THE HILLS

Piled high with gourmet picnic hampers, the luxe Waka Land Rovers take you off the beaten track in style. The full-day Waka Land Cruise (62-361/723629; wakaexperience.com) expeditions leave the main roads behind, making their way through Bali's glistening terraced rice fields and the lush foothills of Mount Batukaru. Mountain-grown coffee and homemade cakes are served beside a temple, while lunch is an indulgent spread of local dishes paired with a perfectly chilled Chardonnay at a private restaurant deep in the bamboo forest.



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Take a Waka Land Cruise to get away from the main roads and into the heart of the island.

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A beachside bed at Hotel Tugu Bali.



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BED DOWN ON THE BEACH

There are few settings dreamier than a beachside bed in Bali: flute of bubbly in hand, canapés on call, and a sunset imminent. With all these ingredients at their disposal, Hotel Tugu Bali (62-361/731-701; tuguhotels.com) at Canggu Beach north of Seminyak, and the Four Seasons Resort Bali (62-361/701-010; fourseasons.com) in Jimbaran have crafted creative seaside offerings. Surrounded by hundreds of candles and roaring tiki torches, the single canopy bed at Canggu Beach adjoins one of Air Bali's helipads, allowing guests to, quite literally, drop in for the evening. Enveloped by swathes of chiffon, couples indulge in a gourmet picnic-style feast, and are blindfolded when it comes time for the "surprise" dessert. With the Beds on the Beach series at the Four Seasons, oversized mirrors, artworks, and candles dot the soft sands of Jimbaran, while jazz musicians strike a note after dark. Call on your personal waiter to refresh your Champagne or to serve the next course of the creative tapas-style menu.

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WELL, WELL, WELL

Bali's wellness offerings are endless—not surprisingly, given the island's abundance of idyllic beach and forest settings. Head to the acclaimed Como Shambhala Estate at Begawan Giri (62-361/978-888; cse.como.bz) for a week-long yoga retreat under the guidance of an internationally renowned yogi. Or learn tricks of the trade with a Jari Menari (“dancing fingers”) massage course (62-361/736-740; jarimenari.com). And don't miss the annual Bali Spirit Festival (balispiritfestival.com), where you can experience “ecstatic energy” through dozens of wellness workshops, including karma yoga and African dance.



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GET COOKING

Australian-born Janet de Neef, owner of Ubud's Casa Luna Bali (62-361/973-282; casalunabali.com) and author of foodie memoir *Fragrant Rice*, has been feeding hungry tourists for close to 20 years. Adjoining her Casa Luna guesthouse, de Neef's cooking school offers classes exploring the intricacies of Balinese cuisine. Meanwhile on the island's southeast coast, Alila Manggis (62-363/41-011; alilahotels.com) runs themed half- and full-day cooking classes, including one that sees guests pluck ingredients from the resort's private organic garden and prepare the vegetarian feast seaside.

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Spa-goers and the yoga-minded can breathe easy in Bali, where sublime natural settings and top-notch facilities offer a balm for both mind and body.

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A cooking class at Alila Manggis.

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TIE THE KNOT, ISLAND-STYLE

Saying “I do” on the Island of the Gods is big business, and thousands of couples flock to the beaches of Nusa Dua, Jimbaran, and Seminyak to tie the knot every year, taffeta and tulle in tow. The island is peppered with all manner of wedding solutions, from rustic beach huts to swank resort facilities like the Conrad Bali's triangular Infinity Chapel (62-361/778-788; conradbali.com), which seems to float on water next to the Indian Ocean. For added bling, try the Bali Diamond (62-361/287-501; thediamondbali.com) on Sanur Beach, a 15-meter-high glass structure crafted to resemble a larger-than-life blue diamond.

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ABOUT “BALI: 15 MUST-TRY EXPERIENCES”

This guide is based partly on the article “Bali's Bright Ideas” by Natasha Dragun, which appeared in the August 2008 issue of DestinAsian, with added and updated information. **PHOTO CREDITS** Cover, 04, 05, 07, 10, 11: Martin Westlake. 02, 03: sxc.hu. 08, 09: Waka Land Rover. 01: Alila Villas Soori. 12: Alila Manggis. **CONTRIBUTORS** Natasha Dragun, Isabel Esterman. **DESIGNER** Shirley Lai. Published by DestinAsian Media Pte Ltd. All rights reserved. www.destinasian.com