



The United Colours of BALI

You can holiday leisurely and soak in the natural beauty of this stunning island. Or pack in all by going beach and temple hopping. But do leave a little time to catch the splendid colour play by the sea. **BY PALLAVI PASRICHA**

BLUE—THIS COLOUR keeps me company throughout the trip. It welcomes me grandly even before I land in Bali, stays with me at the resort and fondly bids me farewell when I'm leaving this magical island. As the plane prepares for landing I crane my neck from the aisle seat (wish I was at my favourite window seat) to see the blue outside. The sparkling sea becomes clearer and even changes colours as we descend. Thanks to *Discovery Channel* I knew that a blue sea still existed somewhere in the world, but when I reach Bali I get to see this lovely shade of water. The landing, with the runway running parallel to the Indian Ocean, is just like the island—exquisite.

Zippering from the airport in Denpasar to Nusa Dua in the south, which is home to many high-end resorts, we pass many statues and one of them even depicts a *Mahabharata*

scene. It is intriguing to see this in a foreign land, but unlike Indonesia, most of the population in Bali is Hindu. It's a treat for the eyes not to see any skyscrapers. The Balinese have taken care to ensure that they don't spoil the sight of nature's bounty through a ruling which ensures that no building can be higher than a palm tree. Thank God for that.

Within 20 minutes I reach The Laguna, a Luxury Collection Resort & Spa, Nusa Dua, Bali, my abode for the next 48 hours. This sprawling, lush property has a lovely lobby with a thatched roof and cane furniture thrown casually around. We are welcomed by Balinese dancers and sent straight to our room. There are sparkling blue lagoons everywhere I see and the 271-room resort boasts

Outside the Ocean Terrace restaurant at The Laguna Resort & Spa FACING PAGE Stunning shades at Kuta beach





seven swimming lagoons all around. I get to my cosy room and guess what I see—some more blue! The Deluxe Access Lagoon Room done up rather tastefully with carved walls and teak floor. And if I get an urge to swim, I can jump into the lagoon from the private balcony. The waters are inviting but there is a better way of getting rid of my tiredness. An exotic spa treatment awaits me at the Laguna Spa and Villa. Javanese Lulur is my treatment for the day and it extracts every iota of tiredness in my bones. First the therapist massages my body with a smooth scrub followed by a shower in the open overlooking the most gigantic banyan tree I had ever seen. She then applies a milk pack and ties me in a plastic sheet for best results. The dimly lit room and soft gurgling water all add to the charm. By the time my session ends I am famished and look forward to the drinks and dinner.

A cool breeze engulfs me as I sit at the Sands Bar by the Nusa Dua beach and sip my Raspberry Cosmopolitan. My eyes rest on the silvery tinged waves that mark their territory by leaving behind frothy white foam on the sand. It is a full moon night and its silvery reflection in the sea helps the sky in telling the world about its full-grown size. What follows is a much-awaited and scrumptious Indonesian meal at the resort's Mayang Sari Restaurant.

The next day I drag myself out of bed at an unearthly hour, 6.30am, and sip freshly brewed coffee to bring me to life.

Getting up so early and visiting a spice and fish market to buy ingredients for my lunch isn't my idea of fun, but it turns out to be quite interesting. Executive Chef I Made Putra takes us to Badung market, a traditional market located in Denpasar where we reach after an hour. We pass a row of women selling baskets of offerings for temples, spices and vegetables. A strong aroma of spices engulfs me, and brings back images of my country. Chef Putra shows us the ingredients to be used for the cooking session that afternoon, like candle nut, aromatic ginger, turmeric root, galangal root and lemongrass.

I even buy a few, even though I know I'll never go back home and cook. Winding our way through narrow lanes following Chef Putra we buy a few veggies and then make our way to Jimbaran fish market, which is close to the famous Kuta beach. Yes I love eating fish, but only when it appears on my plate. Going and selecting my meal for the day felt a bit weird initially, but then I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. The market is crammed with sellers hawking rows of every kind of imaginable seafood—prawns, mussels, squids, crabs, lobsters, scallops and fish of every conceivable size and colour. Luckily I did not faint at the stench of the creatures available. Chef Putra selects a zebra fish for our lunch that day.

Back at the resort, and I'm all geared up for the cooking session at the Ocean Terrace restaurant. I watch Chef Putra doing wonders with the ingredients we had bought. He prepares *Sate Lilit Ikan* (Balinese Minced Fish Satay with Sweet Soya and Chilli) for starters and *Ikan Bumbu Kare* (Stewed Butter Fish Curry with steamed rice and Asian



HOT DEAL
BALI GETAWAY
 Stay 2 nights at The Laguna Resort & Spa for Rs. 10,000 (approx) with airport transfer, breakfast and reflexology. Valid till Dec 20



CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW Fresh seafood also draws people to Ubud market; Jimbaran beach takes on a different look at night; stunning blue waters at Nusa Dua beach; one of the seven lagoons at The Laguna Resort & Spa; Tanah Lot temple located in the sea





Rice terraces of Tegallalang in Ubud FACING PAGE LEFT
Shops at the entrance to Tanah Lot temple RIGHT Relax at the gazebos at The Laguna Resort & Spa BOTTOM Stewed Butter Fish Curry with steamed rice and Asian vegetables

vegetables.) Staring into the ocean (yes the blue was back) and sipping a mojito, I feel completely at ease. This is what I usually do on weekends—end up watching a cooking show on television, but today I'm there to see and taste it all. The fish is so light, delicate and bursting with flavour that it melts in the mouth.

After lunch we leave for a long drive to see the famous rice terraces in Ubud, a town in central Bali. Some of my fellow travellers fall asleep while I look out as we pass through the longest handicrafts market I have ever seen. The Ubud Art and Crafts market is an endless row of handicrafts, pots, utensils and colourful artwork. While I'm busy making a mental note of what I am going to buy, the car stops in the middle of the road and we wonder where the rice terraces are, till the guide tells us to look at the right. A few steps down and all I see are green rice terraces of Tegallalang that cut the rolling hillsides into lush steps. The blue was lovely, but the green is equally soothing. Wherever I move my eyes I see these lovely green terraces that go back about 2,000 years and tall coconut trees.

Having heard so much about the gorgeous sunsets of this island, I long to see the sun go home at the most popular spot in Bali, Kuta beach in the

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AFTER THE SUN GOES DOWN

Kuta comes alive when the sun goes home. Nightlife in Bali starts and ends at Kuta beach. There are several nightclubs, pubs and discos such as Bali Peanuts Club, Hard Rock Cafe, Double Six, Ku De Ta, Ocean Beach Club and others where people can relax with a beer or shake a leg till wee hours of the morning. When it comes to drinking, locals swear by Bintang, Indonesia's most popular beer and even Bali Hai, the local beer of the island.

south, that comes alive at night. But it is too late to chase the sun, so instead we decide to go to Ubud market for some shopping. My eyes are fixed on a colourful batik t-shirt and when I ask how much is it the woman says, "50,000". I nearly faint out of shock. But you need time to register that they are not talking in rupees. It is actually 50,000 Indonesian rupiah which is equal to Rs. 250 (approx). I put my bargaining skills to test and emerge a winner, by buying all sorts of junk.

The scene is transformed a few hours later. Candles, the golden sand, music and of course the ocean give a magical setting to dinner that night at Jimbaran beach. When I turn my head I can even see planes descending on the land jutting into the Indian Ocean. The tide is high and each wave is whiter than the previous one. The sound of the rhythmic waves is resonating in my ears and the breeze flirts with my hair as I dig into freshly prepared seafood. But this is just the beginning of a beautiful night.

A moonlight spa treatment at the



PHOTOGRAPHS BY PALLAVI PASRICHA/WWW.INDIATODAYIMAGES.COM

gazebo by the beach is waiting for me at the resort. I lie down and a heavenly Balinese massage follows soon. I've had massages before, but this is truly divine. I get slightly conscious of people around me, but the full moon, waves and stars soon make me forget about rest of the world. After the treatment I lie down at the gazebo, sip a sparkling glass of champagne and nibble on white chocolates and strawberries. I don't want to get up from here. If someone gives me a duvet I will happily make the canopy of stars my roof for the night and listen to the lullaby of the waves. But alas that does not happen.

I have a promise to keep to myself in the morning. This time the alarm goes off even earlier—5.30am—and I rush to the beach. I may have missed the sunset but I'm not going away without watching the sunrise. The colour play I see there is imprinted in my mind forever.

The sky is cloudy. A pinkish tinge is spreading all over the sky and the sea, giving a hint that the sun is about to make an appearance. I walk on the sand but something is different. Within minutes I realise that I am walking on the sea bed. Due to low tide the sea has receded at least 50 ft away. It is a stunning sight with the waves far away. I saunter till I reach a point where there is a hut on a strip of land jutting into the sea. I sit there and watch the sky change colours in front of my eyes. The pink changes to a slight orange hue, and becomes darker with each passing second till the clouds clear the way for the sun to appear grandly. A red ball of fire is all I can see initially, but slowly it changes to a bright orange, and soon



the sands and the world around me acquire a golden tinge. Just a daily chore for the sun but a miracle for me.

Tanah Lot, an ancient Hindu temple, located on the west coast is next on the agenda before I bid farewell to this quaint island that is dotted with temples. Situated in the middle of the sea, on a huge rock, to reach the temple one has to walk through the sea. But the high tide prevents me from going there. I spend my last morning in Bali counting the various shades of blue that emerged from the sea that day. By the time I leave I point out the hues of turquoise, azure, cyan and cobalt that stay in my mind forever and leave me with happy memories. ●

FACTFILE

GETTING THERE

Fly Delhi-Bangkok-Denpasar on Thai Airways. (Fare: Rs. 33,000 approx) You can fly Singapore Airlines or Malaysia Airlines also.

WHEN TO GO

July to February is the best time to visit Bali.

PLUS SAYS

STAY

The Laguna Resort & Spa, Nusa Dua, Bali; tel: +62 361 771327; www.starwoodhotels.com

EAT

Fish Satay at the Ocean Terrace restaurant in The Laguna Resort & Spa.

SHOP

Art work in Ubud Market and handicrafts at Kuta Art Market.

SEE

Rice terraces in Ubud and the sunset at Kuta beach.