



THE HEART AND SOUL OF UBUD

It was not so much what I saw but what I felt in the brief time that I was there. We were told that Ubud is the center of art and culture of Bali in Indonesia. Perhaps that primed my expectation. There is something about the place, a general atmosphere of calm and tranquility that envelops you, like a warm embrace.

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Tegallalang Rice Terraces



A traditional Balinese house



Kecak Dance



(left) a Hindu temple (above) Monkeys roaming in the monkey forest (below) Artworks at the Rudana Art Gallery



Over 300 meters above sea level, it is cool like Baguio in the highlands in northern Philippines. Rice fields abound and even some rice terraces, which we saw along the way. But unlike the steep Ifugao rice terraces in the Philippine Cordilleras, the rice terraces in Ubud spread out gently on gradual slopes. There is nature and lush greenery all around, which have most likely served as inspiration to many native artists who call this place home. Many villages in Ubud are known for their intricate wood and stone carvings, as well as unique bamboo crafts and furniture.

You will not be wanting in museums and galleries to visit of which there are many, big and small, in Ubud. The exhibits cover a wide range, from traditional to contemporary art. We visited the Rudana Gallery which features local artists as well

as expatriates who have made Bali their home. It is said to be the most comprehensive fine art gallery in Bali. Rudana's vision, the brochure notes, "is to promote the richness of Indonesian art to the local, national and international public, as well as invigorate the sense of cultural heritage, while bringing new artistic light into the world, conserving ancestral tradition, creating an educational environment, supporting local schools for education and appreciation, and to enhance cultural bridges between the east and west."

Most of the oil on canvas paintings on display feature typical Balinese scenes such as harvesting rice, Balinese women, and even sacred masks. The museum building itself is a work of art, built amidst peaceful surroundings. We learned that the three-story structure was designed according to the Balinese philosophy of "Tri Angga" (foot,

body and head) and "Tri Mandala" (inner court, middle court, and outer court).

We visited an original Balinese house, which typically is not just one house but a row of open-sided huts or pavilions. The kitchen is a separate structure from the main house. You enter the complex through an open stone entranceway that has no gate. We stopped to listen to an old man in one of the huts playing music on a nose flute. We also saw several temples inside the compound.

You will find many beautiful Hindu temples in Ubud. While most Indonesians are Muslims, a majority of the Balinese are Hindus. Hindu temples can be found in the villages and even in the rainforests in Ubud. You experience a heightened sense of spirituality not only with these sacred structures but also from nature that surrounds it.



We visited a monkey forest where tame monkeys roamed freely. They did not seem to mind the visitors, and appeared to even welcome us, jumping up and down and scrambling for scraps of food. It was fun, interacting with the playful monkeys. One might even say it almost felt like a spiritual experience. The fresh scent of the rainforest, with its towering trees, wet vines and moss, filled our lungs and gave us more than our average dose of unpolluted oxygen for the day. If only for that, it was a totally healthy and invigorating experience.

We had lunch at Bebek Bengil, home of the original crispy duck since 1990. There is a story behind the restaurant's name, which in English means Dirty Duck Diner. One rainy morning, while the building for the restaurant was still being built, "a flock of ducks from the rice field across the road run quacking and squawking into the restaurant and across the floor and tables," the restaurant leaflet notes. "They left their muddy webbed footprints all over the place. They were our first guests—those 'Dirty Ducks'."

The restaurant is built along the lines of a typical Balinese hut. The open pavilion has a spacious dining area with typical Indonesian seating on raised platform and cushions on the floor. It also has a modern kitchen which serves as the center of activity where Bebek Bengil's original crispy duck, for which it is famous, is prepared by skilled and loving hands.

Ubud is also famous for the traditional dance performances that are presented nightly, which are part of the rich Balinese culture. The Kecak dance and the Legong dance are two of the most famous dances that you can watch when you are in Ubud. Hindu-Balinese ceremonies also take place regularly.

For a relatively compact place, there is much to experience and discover in Ubud. Our visit was much too brief. It only made me want to go back and explore the place some more. ☑



A PLACE OF HEALING

• **What's in a name**
The Balinese word for medicine is 'obat' or 'ubad', from which the name 'Ubud' was derived. Ubud is believed to be a place of healing.

The Balinese people believe that every living thing in nature has spiritual energy that can heal. Water is believed to be a main source of purification and healing. In Ubud, two rivers flow and meet in a place where many artists have settled.

The energy of the earth, contained in the richness of the land, in its diverse flora and fauna, serves as medicine and source of healing, not only for the body but also for the mind and soul.

• **The Balinese people in Ubud**
Long before tourists discovered this laidback haven, the Balinese people have been coming to Ubud for healing. The small town has a population of about 30,000. But with the heightened activity in the area, it has increasingly become difficult to separate it from the neighboring villages.

• **Julia Roberts in Ubud**
A segment in the movie 'Eat, Pray, Love' starring Julia Roberts, based on the best-selling memoir by Elizabeth Gilbert about her journey from heartbreak to healing, was filmed on location in Ubud.

• **How to get there**
From Bali's Denpasar International Airport, take a taxi going to Ubud, just 45 minutes away. Ubud is located 35 kms northeast of the airport.

For more information visit <http://www.indo.com/active/ubud.html>



(opposite page) Legong, Dance (left) Tanah Lot (above) Buddha statue for sale