

PART TWO: BALI



5 – BALI: UBUD



Thursday, 12 July continued

Half an hour later, the ferry docked at the port of Gilimanuk in Bali at 4.30 p.m. We left the boat and headed for the bus station, which turned out to be quite a distance away. We began by walking, but quickly accepted a ride in a minibus. In the bus station we were informed that the normal public buses going to Denpasar, the capital, were ‘finished’. Because of this, the only form of transport was another minibus, into which we squeezed ourselves. I ended up sitting on a narrow wooden bench that had been placed behind the front seats; it offered no legroom whatsoever. By now, Sheila was set on staying in the notorious Kuta Beach resort, together with two hunky-looking guys whom she had just met. I had meant to show her a section of my guide book, which informed its female readers that if they wanted to ‘get laid’, they should go to Kuta. I was determined to avoid the place completely!

At five o’clock, when the minibus was filled to bursting point, we finally started the journey southwards. At first, Bali did not look any different from Java (except for a multitude of small and not particularly beautiful Hindu temples), but later we passed some fine coastal scenery and terraced paddy fields gilded by the rays of the late afternoon sun. People wearing large coolie hats worked with water buffalo in the flooded fields; the scenes, highly evocative of times past, looked magical. Soon the sun began to set and shortly afterwards we were plunged into darkness.

We had been told that the journey would last two hours, but it dragged on for three. This was surely the most uncomfortable journey that I had ever made; sitting on the hard wooden plank for so long became excruciating. I had to stand up twice, much to the amusement of the locals in the minibus. How they coped with such basic conditions was beyond me!

At last we arrived at a bus terminus in the very tatty-looking town of Denpasar. All the young people hopped into a minibus bound for Kuta Beach, but I went off in search of transport to Ubud, where I had intended to stay. I received plenty of offers to charter

a minibus, but refused them. It turned out that no form of transport went directly to Ubud; I would have to travel to a town named Batu Bulan and change to another vehicle. Because of the lateness of the hour – it was now about 8.30 p.m. – no *bemos* (minivans) were going there and I found myself waiting fruitlessly. I set off on foot to see if I could walk to the bus station mentioned in my guidebook, and was approached by several fellows on motorbikes. Again, I refused their inflated offers of transport.

En route, a young man asked me where I was going and I explained to him that I was hoping to travel to Ubud. He brought me into a nearby building and talked to some people. I was at last convinced that there would be no transport to Ubud this evening. My best option was to stay in the hotel up the road and go tomorrow morning.

The young man kindly walked with me to the hotel, where I was told that a night there would cost me 8,000 Rp. As I was being conducted to a room, I espied a young man sitting outside his bedroom and asked him if he would mind me sharing it with him. He asked me if I had an alarm clock. When I answered yes, he immediately agreed to me sharing his room, for he had to get up early on the following morning.

Ignoring protests from members of the staff, I moved in with him. To shut them up, the fellow offered them 10,000 Rp for the room with us both in it. They reluctantly agreed to this and left us alone. The young man (who was Dutch) turned out to be very pleasant and helpful, but he was fed up with Bali as he seemed to have had several bad experiences here. He kindly told me how to get to Ubud (which confirmed what I had been told) and gave me the correct prices for the bus journeys.

Having washed and freshened up, I went out in search of food. Following my new friend's instructions, I walked a short distance to a *warung*, where I ordered a plateful of *nasi goreng ayam* – chicken with fried rice. At the table were three very nice local people, a man and two ladies, who spoke to me in Indonesian and English. One lady was very friendly and chatty.

I finished my meal when they left, bought a little pastry in the shop across the road and, munching it, returned to the seedy hotel. As my Dutch friend had retired to bed, I moved quietly and settled down in the dreadful room for the night. It was quite dirty and there were obscene drawings on the walls. What a welcome to Bali!

Friday, 13 July

Because there were men talking animatedly outside for most of the night, I slept badly and was awake before my alarm clock rang at 5.30. I let my Dutch companion go before I got up. I was ready to leave by about seven, just as it was beginning to get bright. I saluted two members of the staff outside but, as they did not ask me for the balance of 2,000 Rp that I was supposed to pay, I left by the back door and quickly disappeared off the scene. I had offered to pay the Dutch fellow half the price of the room, but he had only accepted 300 Rp! I had no regrets leaving this noisy place.

I now walked to the bus station and found a *bemo* about to leave for Batu Bulan. Having checked the correct price with an official and waved aside a fellow who wanted me to charter a vehicle, I hopped on board the *bemo*. After a short wait, we headed off soon after 7.30. The journey to Batu Bulan was short and uneventful. At the bus terminus, I quickly found a *bemo* bound for Ubud and clambered into it. As before, we waited until the little vehicle was full, then drove off.

The journey to Ubud was considerably longer than I had expected, and we drove through village after village. As the sun had by now disappeared behind a thick bank of cloud, everything looked dismal. En route, we passed countless Hindu temples.

At last the *bemo* arrived in Ubud and stopped in the busy but narrow main street. Following a map on the back of a card that I had been given, I now found my way to the highly recommended Arimurti and Sukadana losmen. I walked along the main street to

the post office, turned to the right, and found myself walking down a narrow but charming laneway flanked on both sides by fine houses, temples and trees. I noticed that many of the gateways to the houses had their names written in the ancient Balinese script. I had now left the noise and bustle of the road far behind. Here I could hear cicadas, hens, cocks crowing, and the occasional barking of dogs. The sun, which by now had reappeared, filtered through the leaves of the trees, and illuminated the ground with patches of light. The place was idyllic.

After a while I turned to the left and walked along a narrow laneway, swung to the left again and found myself at the losmen. It turned out to be a delightful place, very rustic in appearance. I was met by a pleasant woman who showed me to a large and very well-appointed room containing two smart single beds, a wash-hand basin with mirror, and a clean bathroom with a shower and western toilet. Outside was a veranda with a table and chairs. All this, with breakfast included, would cost me 6,000 Rp a night. I accepted the room without hesitation. As I was hungry and very thirsty by now, I ordered some breakfast. I was given a large thermos flask full of tea; shortly afterwards the lady returned with toast, a boiled egg, margarine, jam, and a bowl of fruit salad. While I relaxed and ate this, Mr Sukadana (the owner) appeared. He was a very pleasant man of a gentle disposition who spoke excellent English. He welcomed me cordially and later brought me albums of photographs given to him by satisfied customers. He also drew my attention to a note of appreciation written by Karen, the Australian girl who had recommended this place to me. He also told me about a couple of events that were taking place this evening. According to the business card that Karen had given me, Mr Sukadana was a primary school teacher, an Indonesian teacher, a Balinese teacher, and a puppeteer.

After he left me, I started to write my diary, but as I came over so sleepy, I had to retire to bed for a nap. I rose later feeling a little more refreshed, but still I felt quite exhausted.

At around lunch time I wandered out and back to the main road. I had a look around and finally ended up in the smart Nomad Restaurant, where I found a bevy of pretty Balinese waitresses. Here I relaxed and ate a delicious and well-presented sweet and sour chicken dish, followed by a dainty banana pancake. As I was feeling quite hungry, I could have done with less quality and more quantity, but the meal was excellent.

I now walked through the market, avoiding people trying to sell tickets for this evening's *barong* dance, and found my way to a small museum. It was very attractively laid out in several small buildings around a lovely garden, but the buildings only contained rather hideous examples of modern Balinese art. I wandered around the place, sat on the steps of one of the buildings to admire the garden, spoke briefly to a Canadian lady and left. I then walked to the end of the main street, then returned to my losmen.

As I still felt very sleepy, I lay down on my bed once again and had a siesta. I finally woke at about 5.30 feeling very groggy. I washed and then, pulling myself together, decided to go to the *barong* dance, which was due to start at 6.30 in the village. I bought a ticket from a fellow on the street and went into the performance area just before the event was due to start. I took a seat at one side, under the shelter of a roof, as I felt a few drops of rain falling.

The performance began with a musical introduction or overture known as a *bapang*. It was played by a Balinese gamelan orchestra consisting of quite harsh-sounding metallophones, all of which were elaborately decorated in bright red and gold. As I was expecting, the style of the music here was quite different: it was much faster and more vigorous. Consequently the style of dancing, when it started, was much jerkier than what I had witnessed in Java. I now felt that I was witnessing something from another planet!



Gamelan orchestra for the Barong Dance, Ubud

The dance was about a group of girls who were performing a black magic rite under the guidance of a widow named Rangdeng Dirah. A white magic guru, Mpu Bharadh, who was the spiritual teacher of the ruling king, was asked to heal all the victims of the widow's black magic powers. He found the widow who, after failing a test set by the guru, transformed herself into the giant monster Rangda. In order to defeat the monster, the guru transformed himself into a huge *barong* or evil protector; in the end he vanquished Rangda and healed everyone who had been influenced by the widow's evil power.



The Barong Dance performance, Ubud

The monster *barong* was operated by two men. Although some of the dancing was elegant and performed by women in traditional dress, the general presentation was really startling; the atmosphere throughout was tense and electrifying.

Unfortunately the show had to be hurried up and severely truncated towards the end as it began to pour with rain. It was all over by about eight o'clock. I wandered out and bumped into the Danish lady whom I had met in Java.

I next looked out for somewhere to eat and stopped in the market area, where food stalls had been set up. As many tourists were eating here, I sat down beside a pleasant

Australian girl who was travelling on her own through Indonesia, and we chatted while we ate something. When she finished, she said goodbye and left.

Tired again by now, I walked back to my losmen and went to bed early.

Saturday, 14 July

Having slept really well throughout the night, I was very surprised to discover that it was after nine o'clock when I woke up! I heard two Swiss-German girls talking outside; when I emerged, they were finishing their breakfast. They informed me that Mr Sukadana had told them that there would be a cremation ceremony at midday today and so, knowing that this would be a very colourful and unusual occasion, we decided to go together. I sat down for a leisurely breakfast and afterwards brought my diary up to date. I then wrote some more postcards.

The three of us set off at about 11.45 and, following Mr Sukadana's directions, found our way down past the paddy fields to the Monkey Forest. The fellow at the ticket office told us where to go; he said the ceremony would be in the forest, which struck me as being rather odd. We signed our names, paid a small entrance fee and went in. We wandered about for a few minutes and looked at some bored monkeys. When we spoke to somebody, we were given contrary information as to where the ceremony was taking place – it was at the other end of the town. We walked out, talked again to the man in the ticket office, who now told us to return to the main street. We were quite annoyed at how he had tricked us into visiting the forest.



Preparations for a cremation ceremony in Ubud

We returned to the main road and walked quite a distance along it until we finally found a large gathering of people on the road. Two huge and colourful structures were displayed outside a house: a huge red horse with a mask of a demon where the head should have been, and an elaborate tower made of wood and paper. Musicians were playing noisily nearby. There was a great show of colour and confusion. All of a sudden, somebody shouted 'hello' to me – it was Heidi, the Danish girl whom I had met in Java. She told me that she had seen the two German girls, Claudia and Andrea, and moments later I bumped into them. They were surprised to see me!

All of a sudden, a group of young men wearing headbands picked up the bamboo platform on which the red horse was mounted, and violently rushed around with it, almost crashing into the crowds of tourists. I later learned that the body of a lady was inside the horse and that the violent movements were to disorientate the spirit so that it

could not find its way back home. This was possibly akin to the Japanese Shinto practice of jolting a *mikoshi* or portable shrine.



Cremation ceremony in Ubud

The red horse was placed in the main street for a while, then moved back to the house. In the meantime I was accosted by a lady who was selling sarongs which, I was told, would be necessary if I decided to attend the ceremony. Acting on the advice of a Malaysian chap whom Heidi and Nick had befriended, I chose a blue and white batik one and bargained the price down from 6,000 to 5,000 Rp. The others told me that I had got a very fine sarong at a very good price. The Malaysian chap skilfully draped it around me and dissuaded me from buying a temple scarf at an inflated price.

As the actual cremation would not take place until two o'clock, I took the opportunity to slip into a crowded restaurant for something light to eat. I ordered chicken sandwiches and a glass of pineapple juice, then had to wait quite a long time for them. Just as I was finishing the sandwiches, the family members emerged from the house next door and the procession to the cremation ground began. I quickly finished my meal, paid up and ran after it. I joined Heidi and her friends and later bumped into the English gamelan-playing girl whom I had met in Yogyakarta.

We walked briskly along the main road, left the village, turned and went up steps to some higher ground. Here we found an open space where the two 'floats' had been placed. Some music on drums and gongs was played with great vigour while the top of the wooden horse was opened and various offerings were placed inside it. Women chanted and relatives of the deceased walked around the elaborate coffin several times.

When this was all over, both structures were set alight. The flimsy tower burned very quickly, but the horse containing the coffin burned much more slowly. The fire had to be helped using paraffin oil and gas flame throwers. I watched for a good while until people began to drift away. At this point I left and began to walk back to my losmen. On the way I popped into a Fuji processing laboratory and discovered that they could process slide film in one day for a reasonable sum.

Shortly afterwards I stopped again to buy some more postcards. As the post office was closed by now, I also bought stamps in the same shop. However, as I did not have enough money with me, I had to return to the losmen to fetch some more. I then went to a nearby money changer and got some more local currency.

Back again in the losmen, I was just about to have a shower when Mr Sukadana invited us all to watch his daughter giving a dancing lesson to some girls. This turned out

to be quite interesting. One of the girls looked as though she was only four or five years of age. I took a few photographs and afterwards bought a ticket for this evening's *legong* dance performance from Mr Sukadana.



Dance rehearsal and children at the losmen in Ubud

I then had a very welcome shower, trimmed my beard, and soon afterwards set off again for the town centre. I had a meal in a restaurant, wrote some postcards there, then returned to the losmen in order to take my tablets and wash my teeth. At about seven o'clock I walked with the girls to a hall in nearby Peliatan for the performance of 'Dances and Music of Bali – the classical Legong Keraon of Peliatan and other authentic dances', as it was described on the printed programme. We had been advised to go early, but when we arrived, we discovered that all the best seats had been taken. I ended up sitting at the back, where the seats were slightly elevated. I sat beside a friendly English girl who was travelling around the islands on her own, and we chatted together. As she had no flash unit for her camera and had not brought her camera with her, I took photos for her. I used the Fujichrome film that I had bought in Yogya, which I would get processed here later.

The performance turned out to be a selection of relatively short dances, obviously tailored for tourists. Nonetheless, I found it quite interesting. It was certainly colourful and full of energy. I made frequent excursions up to the stage, where I took photographs, duplicating them for the English girl.



Dance performance at Peliatan, Ubud

The performance ended at 8.45 – quite short by Indonesian standards! I asked my new companion, Cathy (not her real name), if she would like to join me for a drink and she readily accepted. Although her short and tightly-plaited hairstyle was not quite to my liking and the number of rings that she wore on her fingers was excessive, she seemed to be an interesting and intelligent person. She had been in Australia, teaching English to foreign students, and now was on her way back to England. As she did not know how long she would be staying here and had only made some vague plans, she seemed open to suggestion.

We walked to the nearby Tropicana restaurant and went upstairs for drinks; Cathy ordered a hot lemon and I a hot orange juice. We chatted about all sorts of things, discussed what one might do here in Bali and decided to meet here tomorrow morning at nine. I paid the bill, walked with her most of the way back to her place, returned to mine and, after I had chatted briefly to one of the Swiss-German girls next door, set about writing my diary. To bed by midnight.

Sunday, 15 July

This morning I rose at 7.30, washed, then breakfasted on a bowl of unusual porridge followed by a fresh fruit salad, which was very refreshing. Soon after eight I walked round to the nearby ladies' and gents' 'beauty salon', where I had my hair cut by a very pleasant young lady. Her hair was wet and she had just finished varnishing her nails when I arrived. She spoke good English and chatted to me while she cut my thick and long head of hair. She did an excellent job and asked me for just 3,000 Rp.

Well satisfied, I returned to the losmen, where I collected my bits and pieces, then met Cathy at the Tropicana restaurant at nine o'clock. She had with her an Indonesian chap who wanted us to go off on motorbikes or pushbikes with him to a nearby village, but we decided to stick to our original plan and go walking together. We got rid of the fellow, who no doubt would have proved to be a nuisance and, following the route outlined in my guidebook, set off on a cross-country walk to the village of Pejeng. After a little bit of confusion we found the correct path, which took us past muddy paddy fields, little villages and lots of delightful rustic scenery. It was now wonderful to escape the noisy traffic and bustle of Ubud. There were a few tourists here, but not many.

At one stage Heidi, Nigel and the Malaysian chap suddenly appeared on bicycles, said hello to us, and went on their way. We followed a short cut that they had taken, which took a fair bit off our journey. The houses all around here were traditional and blended in perfectly with the pleasing landscape. There were plenty of little Hindu temples here

and there. We did not hurry; we stopped in a village to take photographs, looked at a small *ikat* workshop where we saw a lady operating one of the looms, then later sat in the shade on a bridge to rest. We watched a fellow repair his motorbike, and afterwards were joined by a young American couple who had originally been in front of us, but had not taken the short cut. They walked with us to the village of Pejeng and left us.



Countryside near Ubud and the Hindu temple at Pejeng

At Pejeng, which turned out to be a rather nondescript village on a main road, we visited the local Hindu temple. Because Cathy was wearing shorts, she had to borrow a sarong, and both of us were asked to wear a temple scarf wrapped around our waists. We signed our names in a book and left a donation. The temple was mildly interesting, like many of the others that we had seen. Some Americans came in with a local guide and so we were able to listen to the explanations. We learned that the drum in the tower, which was the oldest in the country, had been made in Vietnam.

Later we continued our walk by heading south along the tedious main road to the sweet little village of Yeh Puluh, which was just off the road. Once again we were able to step back in time. The path came to an end at a small group of traditional buildings overlooking a pretty little valley containing paddy fields. Some local fellows tried to get us to hire sarongs and scarves so that we could visit the local temple, but we declined and instead sat down in a little restaurant to enjoy the view and eat something. It was wonderful to be here as it was so peaceful.

Later, when we had relaxed and eaten, we left the restaurant and made our way down to the little valley. We walked to a small temple, where we could see carvings in the rock at the side of a hill. As Cathy's legs were not covered, I went into the temple, where I was nabbed by an elderly lady and told to give a donation of 1,000 Rp. I was a little annoyed at this, but paid up. At least I had established that the path went no farther.



Yeh Puluh, near Pejeng

I rejoined Cathy outside and we began to wander back, but stopped to sit in the shade by a little stream and waterfall. Here we chatted for a while and were then approached by a wild young man with long unkempt hair, whom we had encountered briefly in the restaurant. One of his companions had quietly told us that the fellow had been born in Amsterdam, where he had presumably got hooked on drugs. Although he spoke with a very heavy Dutch accent, his English was quite fluent. He seemed to be a kind fellow; he brought us over to a picturesque little shack that we had been admiring, where he showed us his little garden of vegetables. He sat us down and offered to make tea and cook some corn for us. We politely refused his kind hospitality and let him continue talking. He rambled on, non-stop, about his own philosophy and religion, which seemed to be Hindu. Cathy eventually stopped him in his tracks, saying that she needed to use a loo urgently and wanted to use the one in the restaurant as it was very clean. By this means we escaped and walked back. Later, when we left the village and began our return journey, a woman emerged from a nearby building and began howling. There seemed to be a lot of strange people here! We were glad to leave the village.



Making Balinese coffins, Ubud

We were now forced to take the main road back to Ubud, which was horribly dirty and noisy by comparison. At one point we passed some highly dramatic scenery. Later we managed to get off the road and walk along a path, which was much more pleasant.

At the beginning of the laneway to Cathy's place, we found a large group of people, mostly men, constructing elaborate Balinese coffins out of wood. We wondered why there was so much frenzied activity. We stopped briefly to take some photographs and then continued. After a long and tiring walk we finally reached Cathy's 'homestay', and she invited me in. I sat with her outside her room, drinking tea and discussing plans for the next few days. I suggested that she move to my room for the time being, which would make it considerably cheaper for her, and she readily agreed to this plan.

Somewhat refreshed and relaxed, I left after we had bought tickets for this evening's *kechak* dance, but then decided to attend tomorrow's performance instead. I walked back to the town centre, where I left the roll of film that I had bought in Yogya to be processed. I was told that it would cost just 5,000 Rp and that the slides would be ready in two days' time. I returned to my losmen, where I relaxed, read for a while, and then had a welcome shower. Afterwards I wrote a little more of a letter home and then set off to meet Cathy at the corner at seven o'clock. We walked to the Nomad restaurant together, where we had an excellent meal. I chose the chicken Kiev, which was very hot and artfully presented. Afterwards we both had fruit with yogurt and honey – delicious! We chatted a little afterwards and then I brought Cathy to take a look at my losmen. She liked the look of it. As she was feeling tired by now, she did not stay long. I walked back with her to the beginning of her road, bought a bottle of water, then returned to my losmen, where I took my tablets, wrote some of my diary, read a little, then went to bed reasonably early.