

MURNI'S VERY PERSONAL GUIDE TO UBUD



by Ni Wayan Murni

Photographs by Jonathan Copeland

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About the Authors



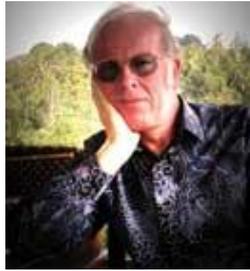
Ni Wayan Murni, born in Penestanan, Bali, is a very well-known personality on the Bali scene and a pioneer of Balinese tourism. During her career she has lived in Sanur and Ubud and has travelled widely. In 1974 she opened Ubud's first real restaurant, *Murni's Warung*, overlooking the Campuan River. Since then thousands of people have enjoyed her food and hospitality. She is still very active in the restaurant.

During her adult life Murni has been busy collecting and becoming an expert on Asian antiques and textiles and many of them are to be found in *Murni's Warung Shop* beside the restaurant. She was the first person in Ubud to have a proper gallery of antiques, textiles, costumes, old beads, tribal jewelry, stone carvings, masks and other ethnic pieces. Many of her pieces are museum quality and her fine arts credentials are impeccable. In 2007 and 2009 she exhibited part of her collection at the prestigious shows in San Francisco and gave a lecture on Balinese textiles to the Textile Arts Council at the de Young Museum. She understands and participates in Balinese culture on a daily basis and plays in a women's gamelan group at important religious ceremonies.

In the early 1980s Murni started to construct *Murni's Houses* in Ubud, a complex of four units of accommodation and open-air pavilions amid a garden full of flowers, statues, fountains, trees and shrubs lying all by itself next to open fields. It is a wonderful introduction for first timers to Bali and a dependable refuge for her many guests who return each year. Just 5 minutes walk from the main road and accessed through a traditional Balinese roofed gate, it's a place of tranquility.

Murni's architectural abilities are best appreciated in *Murni's Villas*, which are twenty minutes drive outside Ubud and a world away from life's cares and concerns. These three luxury accommodations are known as *Villa Kunang-Kunang*, named after the fireflies that sparkle above the surrounding rice terraces at night. Murni lives in one and offers the others to guests.

Murni's latest venture is the creation of *Tamarind Spa at Murni's Houses*, which was listed as the top spa in Ubud on Trip Advisor within 3 months of its opening. It is intended to bring all these aspects of Balinese art, luxury, and culture together in one healing experience.



Jonathan Copeland was born and went to school in Belfast, Northern Ireland before going to London to study law at University College London. He practised law in two major law firms in the City of London for 25 years. Throughout that time he travelled to Southeast Asia on a yearly basis and developed a passion for Indonesian culture and a strong desire to understand it.

After retiring from the law, and with some brain cells still intact, he was able to spend more time in Bali, researching and photographing all aspects of Balinese culture. The fruits of that research appear in the best selling book *Secrets of Bali, Fresh Light on the Morning of the World* by Jonathan Copeland and Ni Wayan Murni published by Orchid Press in 2010 and in its second print run.

Jonathan is now an independent, freelance photographer and writer specializing in travel photography. He lives mostly in Bali, Thailand and England and travels extensively. He is currently working on more books and more ebooks..

Jonathan's photographs have been published in magazines such as Garuda Indonesia in-flight magazine, Hello Bali, Ubud Live, and Bali and Beyond and newspapers such as the Jakarta Post, Bali Advertiser and The Times, Lombok.

He has contributed photographs to books, such as *Dancing Out of Bali* by John Coast, *Indonesian Food* by Sri Owen and *The Ethnomusicologists Cookbook* edited by Sean Williams.

He has created and maintains several web sites, including Murni's in Bali (<http://www.murnis.com>) and Secrets of Bali (<http://www.secretsofbali.com>) and his photographs are on <http://www.jonathaninbali.com>. Videos are on You Tube: JonathaninBali (<http://www.youtube.com/user/JonathaninBali>)

Murni and Jonathan have a joint blog <http://murnisbali.wordpress.com>

What they said about *Secrets of Bali, Fresh Light on the Morning of the World*

*"In **Secrets of Bali** Jonathan Copeland and Ibu Murni present a wonderfully fast moving account of Bali – from the outside in and from the inside out. **Secrets of Bali** places Bali into the warp and weft of the rich tapestry of historical context and ever changing contemporary life. It generously offers us a feast of rare and passionate insights from a man who has so obviously fallen in love with Bali and from a woman who, in so many ways, is Bali."*

Dr Rob Goodfellow

Author, journalist, researcher and academic

*"Fortunately for the reader, the author of **Secrets of Bali** is not in the slightest bit secretive. The outcome is an accessible and wide ranging guide to the island's culture and history. The casual reader can dip into it to answer specific questions, whereas the enthusiast can read with equal pleasure from cover to cover."*

Professor Michael Hitchcock

Deputy Dean (Research and External Relations), Faculty of Business, Arts and Humanities
University of Chichester

"Eloquent, enthusiastic, and jargon-free."

Dr Angela Hobart

Visiting Reader at Goldsmiths College, University of London and Honorary Research Fellow at
University College London

"From Balinese Gods to Balinese gamelan, difficult subjects are simply explained in this beautifully written and illustrated work."

Bill Dalton

Author of *Bali Handbook*, USA

"In Bali they say ... when the durians come down the sarongs go up."

Julia Suryakusuma

Author of *Sex, Power and Nation*

*"**Secrets of Bali** is the best book about the island written and published since 1990 ..."*

Roy Thompson

The Bali Times, 18-24 June 2010

"This 412-page book tries to summarize every aspect of Bali. Starting from the creation of the universe from a Hindu approach (the major religion in Bali), Balinese architecture, rituals, and the arts and up to the paradigm shift among the modern Balinese. All are explained in the 60 chapters."

Ni Luh Dian Purniawati

Bali & Beyond, January 2011

*"I feel that **Secrets of Bali** will join the ranks of the definitive and authoritative volumes of reference books for lovers of Bali everywhere."*

Andrew Charles

Tropical Life, September 2011

PREFACE

Bali is famous for its unique culture and Ubud is Bali's cultural heart. As I've spent so many years living here and being involved in tourism, I've decided to set down my personal guide. Being on the spot I am able to monitor and check the information continuously unlike other guide book writers who tend to jet in for a few weeks and contribute a chapter to a larger work. The thing about Ubud is that you can go many times and always have the most amazing experiences.

Ubud was a famous source for medicine. Its name comes from the Balinese word for medicine. Until the late 19th century, Ubud was a small principality, which was subservient to the palaces of Peliatan and Gianyar. Dewa Agung Anom, who was a patron of the arts, established the court of Gianyar, which is 10 km south of Ubud, in the early 18th century. His descendants in Ubud, Peliatan and Singapadu established satellite courts. Ubud is therefore related to the Sukawati kingdom, and members of the family still have Sukawati in their title. Ubud made some good alliances in the 19th century when the rajas were warring and gained power and lands and influence.

Towards the late 1800s Ubud assisted the Gianyar court and as a result Ubud became important. Ubud and the Dutch helped the Gianyar court to defeat rival courts at Nagara and Blahbatuh. Gianyar then acknowledged Dutch power, and so did Ubud, and they were both protected by the Dutch. Gianyar was one of only two kingdoms to remain intact after the Dutch takeover in 1908, and it became the island's centre for royal patronage of the arts, with Ubud, in particular, flourishing under the rule of Cokorda Gede Agung Sukawati. Although a relatively minor court, the Ubud royal court is today very highly respected.

The Cokorda of Ubud attracted artists, sculptors and architects, who fell foul of the rulers in other kingdoms. A good example is Lempad. This tradition was continued in the 20th century when Western artists began to arrive from the late 30s onwards. This strengthened Ubud's reputation even more as an artistic centre.

Walter Spies was Bali's most influential visitor. He had come to live in Campuan at the invitation of the Cokorda of Ubud. Before he had been teaching at the Sultan of Jogjakarta's palace. He attracted a great number of Western notables and academics. Under the impetus of Spies and Cokorda Agung Gede Sukawati, the artists' co-operative, Pita Maha, was formed to maintain high standards of Balinese art. Ubud was the heart of this nucleus of painters and sculptors. Ubud is still the cultural heart of Ubud, where painters, carvers, dancers and musicians live and work.

Not surprisingly, an increasing number of travellers stay in Ubud or nearby, using it as an excellent base from which to visit Bali's important sights (such as Goa Gajah, Pejeng, Taro and Gunung Kawi). Nowhere is very far - the dramatic volcano Mount Batur and its crater lake are only 35 km (22 miles) north of Ubud, Tenganan in east Bali is only about a 2 hour drive. There are also spectacular walks and white water rafting. In addition, the shopping and restaurants are of the highest quality.

There is a great deal to do. You should stay at least a week, ideally longer. Increasingly people are staying several months. It's not really possible to get much of an appreciation by spending just a couple of days, but, of course, it's better than nothing.

My aim is to give a quick introduction to visitors, so that they do not waste time that could be better spent experiencing this wonderful place. I have not tried to be exhaustive, only selective, and to speak about what I've found and like. Bear in mind it's subjective; it's a very personal guide and as someone involved in many aspects of tourism I have no choice but to mention my own contribution to the scene. I will be delighted to receive comments.

Murni

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Chapter 1 ARRIVING



Map of Bali.

Bali's international airport **Ngurah Rai** opened on 1 August 1969 on the narrow isthmus of land at the south of the island. From that time jets could land and bring more tourists. It was enlarged in the 1980s and increasing numbers of tourists arrived. Even in the 1980s most people's knowledge of Bali was sparse, probably limited to the song Bali Hai, a song from *South Pacific*, which had nothing to do with Bali, and articles in the press about hippies eating magic mushrooms on Kuta Beach, and old photographs of young topless Balinese dancers.

In those days the flight took ages and touched down at many stops, scheduled and unscheduled. From London there was always a stop in Europe, often Paris, in the Middle East, usually Abu Dhabi or Dubai and always a change of planes in Jakarta. The wait in Jakarta could be considerable and then there was a four hour flight to Bali's airport. At the end of a minimum of eighteen hours flying you really felt you'd gone somewhere.

As you got off the plane you were met with a wall of heat. That was great. You were in the tropics. It was a ramshackle airport, packed with people and suitcases, hard metal chairs, the smell of clove cigarettes and the sound of chaos. All your senses told you that you were somewhere different. You were in Bali. It was a tropical paradise and there was a free 2 month visa on arrival.

These days it's much easier to fly to Bali. There are budget airlines and fast non-stop flights from most cities in Europe and America. It is cheaper to fly now than twenty five years ago. There are daily direct flights from Europe to Bangkok, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore and from these hubs it's a short hop to Bali. There are also some flights straight to Bali. It's cheaper for people in Perth to fly to Bali than to Melbourne. The airport has been expanded and modernised many times. The chairs have been changed, there are x-ray machines and sniffer dogs and smoking has been banned. Indonesia has severe narcotics laws, including the death penalty.

Shop around at home for air tickets. The rates vary considerably and bargains change from year to year. Often the internet has the cheapest deals, but check the conditions carefully as the

cheapest tickets usually have little or no flexibility or if they do it's at a price. It's worth checking with established travel agents. In the USA I recommend Jim Cramer of **Bali Advisor**¹ and in the UK I have used **Trailfinders**² and Steve Hatcher of **Cinque Ports Travel**³. They have all been helpful. Check current advice on vaccinations. At the time of writing, none are required.

There is a requirement to obtain a tourist visa, unless you are from one of eleven countries which do not require one. The **Visa on Arrival** is issued on arrival for a period of 30 days for the nationals of many countries (63 countries as at 12 January 2010) in return for a payment of US\$25 at the airport. It can be extended for another 30 days at a price and possibly longer. Check that you are on the list of 63 countries.

If you are not on the list, you will need to get a visa from the Indonesian Embassy in your country. Visas issued by Embassies abroad may be for up to 60 days, so even if you are on the list of 63 countries, it can be more convenient and cheaper to get the 2 month visa rather than extend the 30 day visa on arrival. Tourist visas are for single entry only and no working is allowed. The regulations can change with very little notice, so check the current position before you leave. Return or onward tickets are required. If you have an e -ticket, print it out in case immigration ask to see it.

Unfortunately visas on arrival means delays on arrival, sometimes a couple of hours. I recommend you try and get a seat on the plane near the exit and go as quickly as you can to get the visa. You have to go through immigration after that, so there are two queues before you get to Customs and out the door and frequently Customs want to open your bags.

A new procedure called **Immigration on Board** was introduced in February 2010 whereby immigration officials process visas on the plane on Garuda International flights from Tokyo to Denpasar and Jakarta. You buy a visa on arrival voucher at the check-in counter and immigration officers on the plane issue the visa on arrival. You drop off a card with immigration officers on the ground before leaving the airport. This immigration on board service was extended to Garuda International's Amsterdam – Dubai – Jakarta route in June 2010 and may be extended further.

In common with most countries it is a strict requirement that you have at least six months unexpired on your passport by the date you leave. Immigration will stamp your passport with your permitted length of stay. Check to make sure that no mistakes are made. Also check the white embarkation card is also stamped. Make sure you don't lose it as you have to show it to immigration when you leave and if you don't have it you will have problems. Shopping in Bali is irresistible but make sure you keep enough money in rupiahs to pay the airport tax when you leave.

There are a number of money changers as you leave Customs on your way out of the airport. After a long journey it's probably the last thing you want to do, so it's best to change some money in your home country, but not too much. The rate of exchange will probably be better in the money changers outside the airport. The high numbers are confusing and some of the bank notes look alike, so be careful. Also be aware that there are many sleight of hand stories by money changers on the streets, especially around Kuta.

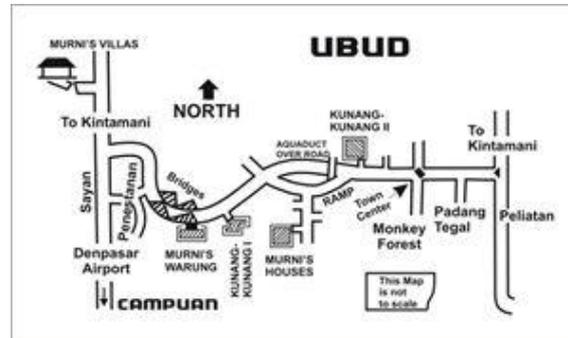
If you are lucky you will be picked up by a hotel representative or friend, but if not there are many taxis with fixed rates to many places. To be on the safe side tell the driver clearly where

you want to go and agree the price. Accommodation is not usually a problem in Bali, especially outside the high season, but it's best to have at least the first few days booked, otherwise the drivers will take you to places where they get commission. After a long flight it's not fun checking places out.

Ubud is about an hour's drive from the airport. There are several routes. If you are driving in daylight, ask the driver to use the back roads as it's much more attractive because you drive through a number of villages and rice fields.

Welcome to Ubud. You are 600 metres above sea level.

Chapter 2 UBUD'S ROADS



Map of Ubud.

Ubud is a simple place to navigate. The main landmark is the crossroads at the town centre. The Royal Palace is called **Puri Saren Agung** and it's at the crossroads. It's the collection of buildings with the big gate and pavilion to the left of the gate. It's usually a hive of activity.

Opposite is the Market called **Pasar Ubud**. Jalan Suweta (Jalan means road) runs alongside the left hand side of the Royal Palace as you face it. Ubud's meeting hall is called the **Wantilan** and it is on the corner of Jalan Suweta and the main road.



Murni's Warung, Campuan.

The main road is called Jalan Raya and it runs east to west. As you face the Royal Palace walk to the left for about ten minutes and you will reach Campuan, which means 'the meeting place of two rivers', the River Cerik and the River Wos, where my restaurant **Murni's Warung**⁴ is. Murni's Warung is a famous landmark and was the first real restaurant in Ubud.



Old Dutch suspension bridge in the 1970s, Campuan.

Cross the bridge (or one of them as there are two, the old suspension bridge over the ravine was built by the Dutch) and walk a further ten minutes and you will be in Sanggingan, which has recently become a busy place with restaurants, galleries, shops and hotels.

Alternatively, you can walk from the Royal Palace in the other direction to the end of Jalan Raya at the T junction. You pass Padang Tegal, another area, on the right. At the T junction, there is a big statue of **Arjuna** with his arrow riding an elephant protected by two naga serpents. Arjuna was the greatest warrior on earth, one of the five Pandawa brothers, heroes in the great Indian epic, the **Mahabharata** of the 8th or 9th century BC. He was an ambidextrous archer. You have reached the area called Peliatan. Turn left and you go to Andong. In the old days these were separate villages but now they've all merged into Ubud and the boundaries are not clear.



Big Arjuna statue at the end of Jalan Raya, Ubud.