

BALI

Where to eat, pray and love in Ubud

Follow IAN LLOYD NEUBAUER'S advice to enjoy the setting of the famous film

You've read the book. You've seen the movie. Now do it yourself in Ubud, the town in Bali's central river valleys where *Eat, Pray, Love* was filmed.

EAT

When tourists began flocking to Ubud in the 1960s, they ate at "warungs" — simple family-owned eateries in lean-to huts. Things began to change in 1974 when a local lady called Murni opened a riverfront restaurant called Murni's Warung.

"At first I didn't know how to cook western food, so I only served local food like fried rice and baked duck," Murni says. "The duck is flavoured by condiments like shallots, chilli, ginger and turmeric. Back then, we cooked it with hot charcoals in a hole in the ground. It was lots of work."

Today she saves time by cooking her duck in a regular pot. But the biggest change for Murni is the competition: there are now hundreds of modern restaurants in Ubud, from cheap and cheerful cafes such as Gluten-Free Kitchen, to sophisticated fine-dining venues such as Blanco par Mandif.

Set in a glass prism overlooking the Tjampuhan River Valley, this super-sophisticated 22-seat temple of gastronomy marries traditional Indonesian recipes with French cooking techniques. From Japanese cucumber salad with micro herbs that take days to prepare and 14-day-aged duck breast with roasted pineapple, every dish is an adventure in itself.

For the latest and greatest gastronomy in Ubud, head to Aperitif, a 52-seat, 1920s inspired restaurant with an open-plan kitchen at Viceroy Bali resort on the outskirts of Ubud. There, executive chef Nic Vanderbeeken of Belgium marries exotic Indonesian ingredients most people never knew existed, luxury cheeses and meats from Europe, the restaurant's own greenhouse harvest, mad-capped creativity and top shelf wine to create an over-the-top eight-course tasting menu that boggles the mind. Afterwards, head to the Hemingway-esque bar for top-shelf whiskies, cognacs and cocktails designed by Ran Van Ongevalle, the most awarded mixologist on the planet.

"When I arrived here six years ago was one fine-dining restaurant in Ubud. Now that we have a dozen and that's changed the nature of the travellers who come here," Vanderbeeken says. "Before people came here to experience Balinese culture, spirituality and nature. Now people are coming here for the food, too. From a culinary perspective, Ubud is taking off."

■ murnis.com,
blancoparmandif.com,
aperitif.com

PRAY

In 2016, fans of *Eat, Pray, Love* mourned the passing of Ketut Liyer, the traditional healer who helped the book's author Elizabeth Gilbert find her inner peace in Bali.

Yet as Gilbert acknowledged, Ketut was a charlatan. He was blind yet made money reading palms!

To meet the real thing, join a water purification ceremony with high priestess Ida Resi Alit, a Balinese woman who is believed to be a reverent — a person who has come back from dead.

After falling into a deep trance during a water purification ceremony in 2007, Ida Resi's heart stopped. Everyone thought she was dead. But five hours later she woke up and was able to recite ancient Sanskrit chants she'd never heard before. Soon after, the then-20-year-old was named the youngest-ever High Priestess of Bali.

Water purification ceremonies with Ida Resi take place only once every few months at a water temple set in a secret location near Ubud. Ceremonies are organised by Usada, a dance, martial arts and



Saraswati Temple in Ubud. Pictures: Ian Lloyd Neubauer



Aperitif restaurant and bar chef Nic Vanderbeeken is part of the fine dining scene in Ubud.