

MEET THE BALINESE

You might think we're nosy, but we're not. We're just friendly. NI WAYAN MURNI introduces her people.

WHERE ARE YOU going? *Ke mana?* That's the standard opening question when you meet someone in the street. To a stranger, it sounds rather nosy, but no one expects an answer. It's just a greeting in the absence of a word for 'Hello'. *Jalan, jalan* ('Walking, walking') is an acceptable reply.

You'll meet a lot of people with the same name. It's rather confusing. You get your name at birth, and it's preordained, because the name you get accords to the order in which you and your siblings are born. Everyone's position in the family is immediately clear, meaning we're all a bit pigeonholed at birth! The names are the same, regardless of whether you're a boy or girl. As you'll see below, you'll meet an awful lot of Wayans in Bali, but not so many Ketuts. I am a Wayan.

1st born: Wayan, Gede or Putu; 2nd born: Made, Nengah or Kadek; 3rd born: Nyoman, Komang or Koming; 4th born: Ketut.

In 2022, the population of Bali amounted to around 4.37 million people. About 83.5% follow Balinese Hinduism. It's evolved separately from Indian Hinduism, and the differences are clear in temple layouts, ceremonies and beliefs. Christianity, Buddhism and Islam are also practised in Bali, mostly by the Chinese community and people from other islands.

Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world, with 87% of the population identifying as Muslim. I often get asked

why Bali is unique in Indonesia for being predominately Hindu. The reason is that Islam, which entered Sumatra in the 13th century, made headway along the coasts of Java at the beginning of the 16th century, pressing inland and dealing the great Hindu Majapahit empire a fatal blow in 1527, when the last king of Majapahit was defeated and died. The aristocracy, priests, jurists, artists, artisans and all others unwilling to convert to Islam moved to the easternmost parts of Java, and Bali.

Religion is the most important thing in Balinese life. You can see this in the numerous daily offerings – in my restaurant, hotel, shop and spa, we prepare about 200 basic offerings a day. Much of our time is taken up preparing for large religious ceremonies, staged in ornate temples full of elaborate stone carvings.

The Balinese also love food. Most meals revolve around rice. We eat the best dishes on ceremonial occasions. Bali's most famous dish – *bebek betutu* – is duck richly marinated in Balinese spices, stuffed with vegetables, wrapped in banana leaves and cooked underground – often overnight – for at least eight hours. It makes my mouth water just thinking about it!

On reflection, maybe a better answer to *Ke mana?* is *Makan, makan* ('To eat, to eat').

What's in a Name?

Bali's name reflects its Indian heritage: it's Sanskrit, and much older than the name 'Indonesia'. 'Bali' means 'offering' in Sanskrit, and in High Balinese, 'Bali' is called 'Banten', which also means 'offering' – usually to the gods.

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I'M 100% BALINESE

I was born in Penestanan, now a lively suburb of Ubud that's full of yoga studios, healthy restaurants and art galleries. My parents and grandparents are from the same area. As we are Hindu, it's almost certain that our ancestors came from Java, though there are no records – it's only with my generation that birth certificates

were issued. As such, many older people have no idea how old they are. It doesn't help that a Balinese year is 210 days!

I opened Ubud's first 'real' restaurant, Murni's Warung, in 1974. It came about by chance. I used to cook lunch for myself and my husband every day in my antiques shop, where I sold

textiles, jewelry and other ethnic pieces. Passing tourists asked if they could eat what we were eating. And within a week, I was cooking local food for them! I started with just a couple of chairs and a bamboo table. Now, we can accommodate over a hundred people!