

INDONESIA TATLER

Travel

Ubud: The Other Side of Bali

*Seeking serenity and peace of mind on the world's most exotic island?
Head to its spiritual and geographical heart.*

By Indonesia Tatler Editor on Sep 20, 2016

When living in Brazil, the mere mention of Bali evoked in me thoughts of a far-away paradise. I dreamed about a tropical island with white sands and clear blue water populated by surfers and tanned vacationers.

Then, some years later, I moved to Asia and got the chance to see this Indonesian island with my own eyes. Yes, it has surfers, perfect waves and plenty of tans, but the beaches are not exactly like the ones in my dreams. At first, I got a little frustrated. However, when I visited the region of Ubud, I realised that Bali is much more than a beach holiday paradise. And one needs to grasp its essence to fully appreciate this magical island.



Ubud, a town in central Bali, is where the spirit of the island is most evident. It's Bali's artistic hub and shares the most beautiful rice fields and ancient monuments with east and west Bali. It is also dominated by dramatic volcanoes, hillside temples and a tropical rainforest: great for soul-searchers and nature-seekers.

Yet Bali's small spiritual town has developed a large tourism industry. As you approach the centre of Ubud, the greenery gives way to streets filled with locals and tourists alike, weaving their way in and out of shops, restaurants, and temples. But not far away from the crowded centre, one can discover the timeless scene of rice farmers methodically sowing terraced emerald fields and breathe pristine air. A real untouched haven in the middle of chaos. It was here, in the outskirts of Ubud, where I had the most authentic Balinese experience with Como Shambhala Estate.



From the day bed next to the room in which I stayed, I could hear a low but constant rushing sound. It was the Ayung River, Bali's longest and most holy waterway, which flows a hundred-odd metres below where I sat. I was staying at the resort in a residence called Wanakasa, meaning "forest in the mists". It is the most private of the estate's five residences and closest to the river, perfect for those who opt to unwind. Located near the village of Payangan in rural Ubud, Como Shambhala Estate is a 9.3-hectare wellness retreat unrivalled in Southeast Asia. Founder Christina Ong acquired it and reinvented it as the flagship property for her new wellness brand, Como Shambhala, which includes other seven wellbeing centres worldwide. The estate provides a holistic and 360-degree approach that offers world-class massage therapies and beauty treatments.

Although the cuisine is always nutritionally balanced, Como Shambhala appeals not just to those with specific wellness goals in mind, but also to travellers, who, like me, are in search of pristine nature and culture. It's hard not to fall for Bali while cycling through its quiet back roads, which are lined with stepped rice fields, temples and women in bright sarongs balancing religious offerings on their heads. In this part of

Ubud, I was able to grasp the island's magic and wilderness. Adventure and cultural discovery are also part of the holistic approach.

Bali is one island with many destinations. It's more than a place: it's a mood and a tropical state of mind. I travelled to Bali in search of beautiful beaches and I ended up in the outskirts of Ubud, where I learned that tranquility cannot be found in any specific location—but with the right mindset, it can be discovered within oneself by exploring body, mind and spirit.



(Text by Nanda Haensel and photos by Nanda and Max Haensel)

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