

## BALI: BEAUTY AND WISDOM

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A Balinese man picking fruit just in time for our breakfast. Ubud, Bali.

**I**n October 2009, my husband and I travelled to Bali. Bali is arguably one of the most beautiful places in the world, loved by artists, SCUBA divers and honeymooners alike. However, what I discovered exploring this lush and wondrous island is that its beauty is not only found in its natural landscape and intricate architecture, but most of all it permeates throughout its people. Their peaceful, generous and hospitable nature stems from their deep connection to family and is centered around their genuine faith in karma.



*Barong and Kris Dance. Ubud, Bali.*

Balinese flavor of Hinduism is full of wondrous stories depicting battles of good over evil. These are performed in colorful costumes to mesmerizing music. Above is a scene from the *Barong and Kris Dance*. Barong is a mythical lion-like creature (big furry beast in the back) who struggles against Rangda, a vengeful widow practicing dark magic. In this scene Rangda has bewitched the king's soldiers and ordered them to commit suicide by stabbing themselves with their own kris (sword). However, this story has a happy ending. Barong and a priest cast another spell over these men, making their bodies impermeable to the sharp swords. They are placed in a trance while the Barong battles Rangda. The Barong is victorious and Rangda runs away as all evil spells are broken.





An elderly woman at a traditional family compound in Ubud. She is preparing the daily offering.

Traditional Balinese families live in multigenerational family compounds. For them the idea of children moving out is foreign and impractical. The elderly are revered and everyone takes part in raising the little ones.



Batubulan Temple, Bali

Daily life revolves around work, raising children and worship. Each village is centered around a village temple and each compound has its own private family temple, as well. Every temple is architecturally stunning, adorned with carefully crafted detail. The stone carving and wood carving skills of the local artists and artisans are passed on from one generation to the next.





Batubulan Temple, Bali



Batubulan Temple weathervanes, Bali





Working the terraced rice fields in Pupuan, Bali.

Outside of tourism, the traditional occupation available to most families is growing rice. Rice is the bread and butter of the region, and in fact, owning rice fields is a measure of a family's wealth.



At the silver factory.

The intricate details found in Balinese art and architecture also finds its way into their silver craft, another major economic force on the island. Each piece is carefully created by the hands of a patient and thoughtful artisan.





School children practicing for a festival on Monkey Forest Road, a main thoroughfare in Ubud.

Like in most cultures, holidays and festivals are a favorite pastime. In Bali they are joyous, colorful and noisy, depicting Hindu gods and narratives.



Sangheh Monkey Forest, Bali

There are at least two sacred monkey forest sanctuaries in Bali and many smaller habitats inside temple grounds. The monkey native to Bali is the macaque. Monkeys who live in these sanctuaries are considered to possess a positive energy in that they protect these holy sites from evil spirits.





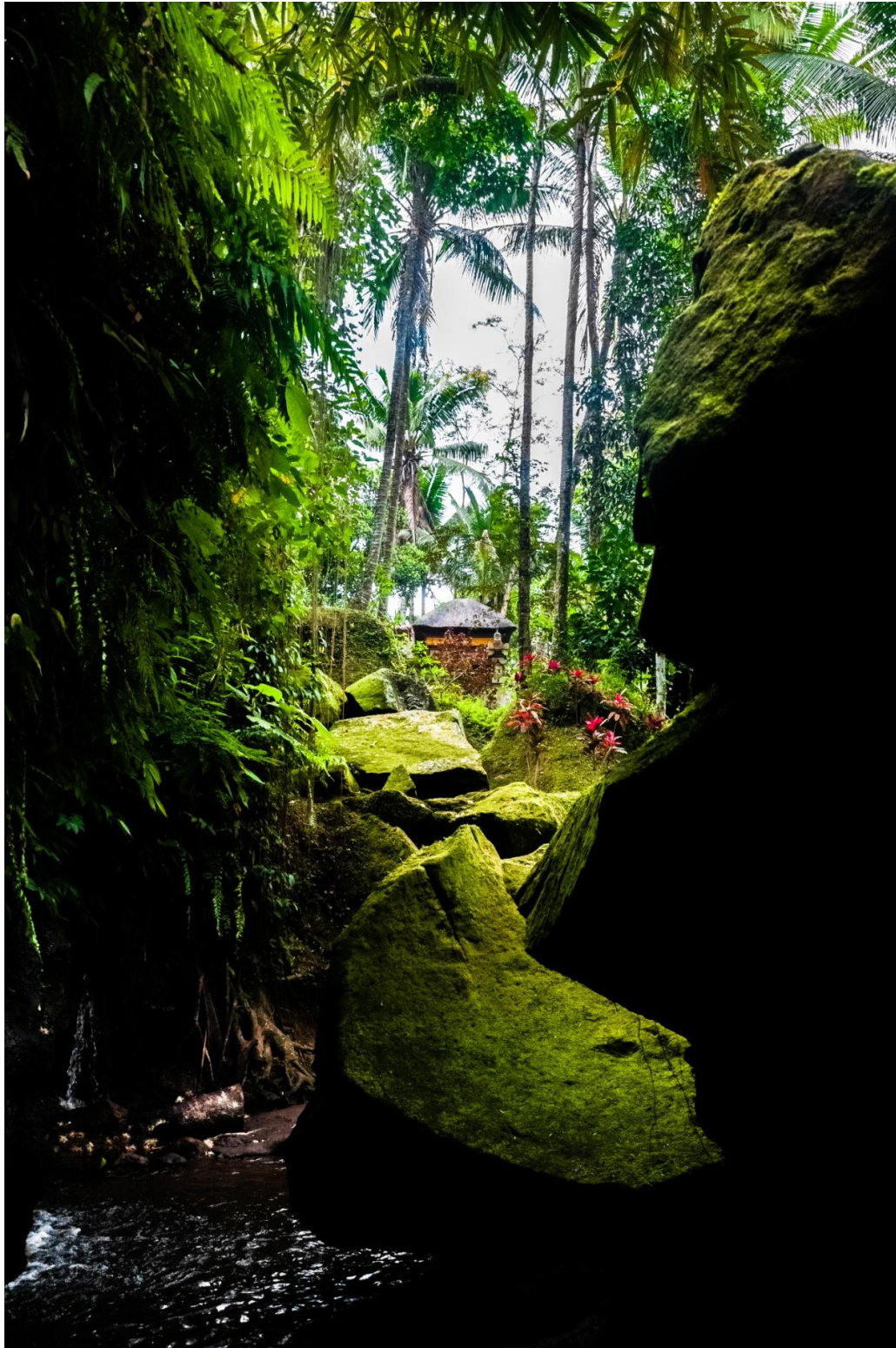
Sangeh Monkey Forest, Bali



Lake Bratan, Bali

Bali landscapes are magical and mesmerizing. At the heart of each beautiful vista is a Hindu temple. These temples “float” amidst serene lakes, they are nestled in the lush beauty of the island’s jungle, and they are “suspended” on the creamy glistening of the sea’s waves.





Elephant Cave Temple grounds, Bali



Pura Tanah Lot.

Pura Tanah Lot is one of the most important sea temples in Bali. At high tide, it looks like it's floating on the water. In the cave beneath the temple, there lives a holy snake. Inexplicably, it disappears every day before the high tide comes in, and returns at the next low tide.





Local's beach, Bali.

At the end of the day, the local Balinese youth like to frequent a public beach of their own, away from the hustle and bustle of the city and the curious eyes of the tourists. Unfortunately, one local guide told us that this beautiful oasis was under a looming threat of foreign development. The wonder and pull of Bali lies in that so much of it has remained genuine and serene, unspoiled by outside forces. I hope that its essence perseveres over time. ■



\* **OLGA BENTSMAN KUNDRA BARRON** was born in Russia and spent the second half of her childhood in New Hampshire. Her interest in photography was first piqued by her family's purchase of an Olympus OMG camera which she took on her hikes around New Hampshire and later to Israel and the Nepal Himalayas. Eventually, Olga traded New Hampshire's White Mountains for the Colorado Rockies, where she lives full time with her husband. She is an avid hiker, runner, skier, SCUBA diver and photographer.