


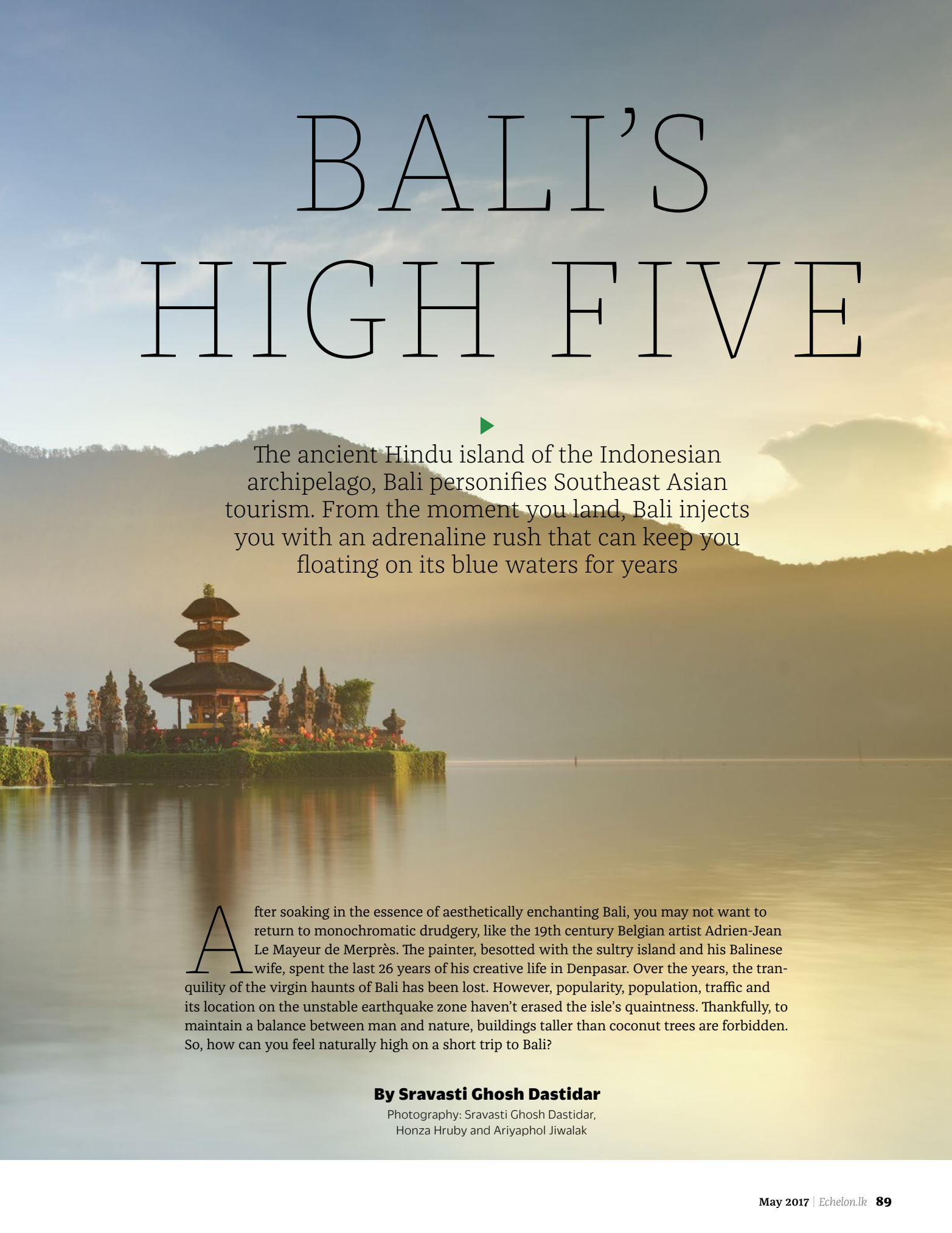


▼ Pura Ulun Danu
temple panorama
at sunrise on Lake
Bratan, Bali, Indonesia

BALI'S HIGH FIVE



The ancient Hindu island of the Indonesian archipelago, Bali personifies Southeast Asian tourism. From the moment you land, Bali injects you with an adrenaline rush that can keep you floating on its blue waters for years



After soaking in the essence of aesthetically enchanting Bali, you may not want to return to monochromatic drudgery, like the 19th century Belgian artist Adrien-Jean Le Mayeur de Merprès. The painter, besotted with the sultry island and his Balinese wife, spent the last 26 years of his creative life in Denpasar. Over the years, the tranquility of the virgin haunts of Bali has been lost. However, popularity, population, traffic and its location on the unstable earthquake zone haven't erased the isle's quaintness. Thankfully, to maintain a balance between man and nature, buildings taller than coconut trees are forbidden. So, how can you feel naturally high on a short trip to Bali?

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1 HIGH ON NATURE

BEACH

NUSA DUA

LOCATION: 12KM FROM NGURAH
RAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

High-end Nusa Dua in south Bali offers white-golden sand and palm-fringed beaches with spa and water sports facilities. Nusa Dua often hosts heads of state, and is popular for destination weddings. Nusa Dua has elite resorts with private beaches, posh restaurants, convention centres, a mall and an 18-hole golf course. It has a religious complex, Pura Mandala, with two churches, a mosque, a temple and a vihara. It is pleasant to walk down the well-maintained avenues along manicured lawns decorated with mythical statues.

Due to terrorist attacks, security is tight at the three beautifully structured entrance gates, which can make you feel confined. The area has an antiseptic look and is not a Bohemian getaway.

Being a private area, public transport isn't easily available. Going around Bali is, otherwise, easy as there are ample tourist cars, taxis, bemos and buses. Be wary of drivers who charge 10 times more than the

actual rate. For environmental reasons, hotels in Nusa Dua are not on the shoreline. Efficient shuttle buses take you to the beach, located 5 minutes away from all buildings. A walking path connects the long stretch of Nusa Dua and Tanjung Benoa beaches. There are no pesky vendors, as the beaches are private. The hotels have also appointed masseurs to serve the guests on the beach.

Balinese dance performances are routinely held during evenings at most hotels and restaurants. With no significant nightlife, Nusa Dua makes up with exotic beach clubs serving mind-blowing cocktails and food.



VISIT:

THE WATER BLOW (NEAR NUSA DUA BEACH), GEGER BEACH AND MUSEUM PASIFIKA ARE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

► **The Water Blow** is similar to the Humanaya blowhole in Sri Lanka. Seawater is blown upwards and crashes into the rock wall

► **Geger beach** is not as sterile as the rest of Nusa Dua. It has local restaurants, beach chairs, umbrellas and masseurs

► **Museum Pasifika** has one of the finest collections of Southeast Asian art, especially by European artists like Le Mayeur, Paul Gauguin and Arie Smith

Hours: 9am to 5pm

Tickets: \$5



HIGHLANDS UBUD

LOCATION: 37KM FROM NGURAH
RAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Natural architectural splendour is aplenty in Ubud, Bali's historical and cultural capital. Ubud's cooler highland climes are a contrast to the heat of the plains. The noon sun and humidity can sap energy, and visiting hilltop temples and monasteries involves plenty of climbing. All of them may not have wheelchair access. Many artists' workshops and galler-

ies line the roads leading to Ubud city. These sell quality artefacts at lower prices than in town. The Ubud Market, however, gives stiff competition to the oldest and most famous Sukawati Art Market. The abundance of home accessories, clothing, souvenirs and handicrafts can be overpowering. Steep ravines, lush paddy fields and quiet villages surround Ubud town. The green-terraced rice fields of Tegallalang and the Campuhan Ridge Walk are quieter getaways. The highlands also offer bike tours, white water rafting and canyoning facilities.

In contrast, the city centre abounds with temples, museums, shops, spas, houses and tourists. It's amazing how, despite Dutch colonial rule, Ubud (and Bali) has retained its traditional art, architecture and culture. The ancient temples and the Ubud Palace are examples of structures standing strong against mindless modernization.

VISIT:

► The 9th century Goa Gajah or Elephant Cave, famous for its rock carvings and statues wrapped in red, yellow and black cloth

Location: 6km from central Ubud

Hours: 8am to 4:30pm

Tickets: \$2

► The Tirta Empul Temple in Manukaya, dedicated to Lord Vishnu, is a holy spring water temple. Pilgrims and tourists of all faiths respect religious norms and have a dip in the sacred waters

Location: 15km from central Ubud

Hours: 7am to 5pm

Tickets: \$3

► The Puri Saren Palace (Ubud Palace), home to previous Ubud princes, comprises a cluster of Balinese houses with intricate stone and wood carvings amid lush gardens

Location: Ubud city centre

Hours: 8am to 7pm

Entrance: Free

Balinese Dance: 7:30pm onwards

Some of Asia's top spas are located in Ubud. They offer relaxing and firm Balinese massage therapies, with acupressure, reflexology and aromatherapy. Ubud has a traditional and balanced nightlife – neither as hippie as Kuta nor as high class as Seminyak. It does have bars and pubs, like Bar Luna, No Más and Bunute Kafe.



Balinese worshippers pray in the water at the Tirta Empul Temple in Bali, Indonesia



PURA TANAH LOT

High on a rock in the sea and high on the tourism list, the iconic 16th century Temple of Tanah Lot appeases the sea god, while being protected by poisonous sea snakes inhabiting the crevices at its base. Relentless waves crashing against the rock make it impossible to access the temple at high tide. The sunset, with the temple in the background, can be breathtaking if not spoiled by rain. Shops and vendors selling 'I love Bali' souvenirs lead up to the temple. It is not a flattering sight, but has become increasingly intrinsic to all tourist places.

Location: 13km south-west of Tabanan

Hours: 7am to 7pm

Ticket: \$5

▲ Lotus (Saraswati) Temple in Ubud, Bali at sunrise

2 HIGH ON FAITH

Bali is also known as the 'Land of a Thousand Puras'. Whether open to the public or in the *karangs* (compounds) of private houses, intricately patterned shrines seemingly outnumber houses. They

have typical Balinese-Hindu architecture, with public spaces of worship, surrounded by artistic walls and gates carved with mythological figures. The sanctum sanctorum is for Hindu worshippers only. It

is mandatory to tie a sarong and a sash before entering. Buddhist influence is also evident in black and white checkered cloths wrapped around Hindu deities and the golden fish in temple ponds.

PURA LUHUR ULUWATU

One of the six holiest places in Bali, the 11th century sea temple Pura Luhur Uluwatu rests on a limestone cliff hanging over blue waters. It is one of the nine directional temples protecting Bali. The mellow sunset, playing a game of light and shade along the boundary wall, reflects the holiness of the temple. The temple is, however, not half as fascinating as the setting. But you may feel disheartened seeing

tourists jostling around with selfie sticks and umbrellas.

Beware of monkeys while walking to the temple. The primates supposedly came to the island during Lord Rama's time. The Kecak Fire Dance or the Ramayana Monkey Chant, performed after sunset, portrays the battle of Ramayana. It is unique for its vocal accompaniment instead of the gamelan orchestra.

Location: 22km from Kuta

Hours: 8am to 6pm

Ticket: \$3

Kecak Fire Dance: 6pm to 7:30pm; costs around \$7



▼ Path leading to the Uluwatu Temple



Art and culture literally come out of the woodwork in Bali. Deeply entrenched in Hinduism, the Balinese cultural and artistic highlights centre religious events.

HANDICRAFT

Shops selling brilliantly carved handicrafts depicting Hindu and Buddhist figures are found in abundance throughout Bali.

◀ A roadside home accessories store on the way to Tanah Lot Temple

3 HIGH ON CRAFT

VISIT:

► The crafts villages around Ubud

► **Batubulan** or **Singakerta** for stone carvings

► **Celuk** for innovative and handcrafted gold and silver jewellery. Beware of the silver jewellery available in kiosks of popular markets, as many of them are silver-coated brass trinkets

► **Batuan** for paintings

► **Mas** for teak wood carvings

► **Bono** for bamboo furniture and accessories

► **Klungkung Market** for songtek (brocade)

► Village shops are open

every day, and prices are negotiable

► Boutique shops and kiosks are more concentrated in touristy areas like Tanah Lot Temple, Kuta and Ubud

► The **Sukawati Art Market**, **Ubud Market**, **Seminyak Village Square**, **Bali Collection** in Nusa Dua and the **Agung Bali** outlets are more than enough to give your family a high while draining your pockets

The drivers and guides usually take you to shops from which they get a commission. So, bargain away!

4 HIGH ON GASTRONOMY

BALINESE CUISINE

Like most tropical islands, Balinese food is primarily rice, seafood and coconut-based. Feel appeased with an affordable variety of lip-smacking dishes like:

► **Sate Lilit** - minced and spiced pork, chicken, fish or beef wrapped around a bamboo or lemongrass stick and grilled over charcoal;

► **Nasi Ayam** - chicken rice, with chicken that is steamed, and then fried or roasted;



► **Nasi Campur** - chicken rice served with different meats, vegetables and sambol;

► **Lawar** - a spicy dish with a mixture of vegetables, coconut and minced meat;

► **Bebek and Ayam Betutu** - stuffed duck or chicken steamed or roasted, with rich seasoning; or

► **Babi Guling** - stuffed spit-roast pig.

Try strong Balinese coffee with batterfried, stuffed *tahu* (tofu) and tempe snacks, or some *jajanan pasar* (traditional cakes) served in most *warungs* and restaurants in the island. For the unadventurous traveller, eateries offering international cuisine are common, too.

5 HIGH ON LIFE

NIGHT-LIFE

You name it, they have it - from cultural performances to beach clubs, nightclubs, rooftop bars, beer and whisky pubs, sports lounges, shisha bars, and themed joints. A mind-boggling array of top-class world cuisine is served with popular music in the modish Kuta, Legian and Seminyak hangouts.



SEMINYAK

LOCATION: 7KM FROM NGURAH
RAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Although Kuta and Legian are more famous for nightlife, over the last 10 years, Seminyak has become popular for its greyish beaches with beautiful sunsets, perfect for mid-level tourists and glittrati alike. It's also less crowded than Kuta.

Laidback Seminyak has an artsy and witty character, replete with the choicest hotels, villas, spas, restaurants, gay bars, shopping arcades, designer boutiques and antique shops.

The current spa capital of Bali, Seminyak has some of the

most lavish and sophisticated spas, with traditional Balinese massages and beauty treatments, detox programmes, and Romanesque Jacuzzis and saunas.

It's easier to walk around or rent a two-wheeler. Attention-grabbing restaurants with trendy names and walls with witty graffiti are aplenty.

Most dining venues double as nightlife hangouts after sunset. The food, drinks and electronic music have a distinct European flavour. The Ku De Ta, Potato Head Beach, Jenia and Mirror are popular venues to let your hair down and dance to industrial, deep bass, house or hip-hop.

Hours: usually till 3/4am (busiest from Thursday to Sunday)

You will not feel like sleeping until dawn breaks. Or, maybe you will be so high on life that you venture off to watch the sunrise.

