

## Bali Travel Guide and Review - Part 1

### Bali Introduction: The Geography

Bali is a small volcanic island covering around 5000 square kilometers, just south of the equator. Central Bali is dominated by the island's major volcanic peaks, from which the land steadily descends all the way down to sea level on the northern and eastern coasts; the southern Bali peninsula is largely flat. There are four major volcanoes in Bali, the highest being Mt Agung at 3124m. Agung erupted violently in 1963 and although many people died in the eruption it has since been a blessing to the Balinese in providing some of the richest soil in Indonesia. The next four highest mountains are no longer alive but the smaller Mt Batur (1717m) is one of the most active volcanoes in the region, puffing regular clouds of ash into the air. Bali, being such a small island, has little space to create rivers of any notable size. Rather it is riddled with small creeks that are channeled into the intricate irrigation system that feeds Balinese rice paddies. Nevertheless, some major rivers do flow, namely the Sungai Pakrisan ("Kris River"), the Sungai Petanu ("Cursed River") and the Ayung, Bali's longest river.

### Bali Introduction : The History

Many years ago Bali was divided into eight Hindu kingdoms. These small kingdoms were powerful but prone to fighting each other, which weakened their resistance to foreign invasion. As early as the sixth century, Javanese kings conquered parts of Bali although Balinese princes often continued to rule as puppets with Javanese sovereignty pulling their strings. Nevertheless power continued to bounce between various kingdoms of Bali and Java. As links with Java strengthened, Javanese script, sculpture and temples began to appear on the island. Late in the tenth century, ties between the islands were solidified with the marital union of a Balinese Prince and a Javanese Princess. The Javanese Majapahit kingdom conquered Bali in the thirteenth century by vanquishing the semi-demonic king of Bali at the time, 'Dalem Bedulu', and attempting to eradicate the 'vile' Balinese princes and their 'barbaric' customs. Ironically, the supreme Majapahit ruler gave a Balinese the position of 'King of Bali', a position that gained little respect from the majority of Balinese who continued to refuse to recognize Javanese sovereignty. The Majapahit presence in Bali turned out to be short and turbulent and during the ensuing centuries, much of the unique Balinese Hindu culture and traditions that we see in Bali today were created. This was possibly a result of a community determined to protect their individuality and not be overcome by imported Javanese culture.

Contact with the west began when a Dutch fleet stumbled across Bali in 1597 and felt they had found 'paradise'. Many of the crew refused to return home but stories of a magical place leaked back to their homeland. With Dutch royalty eager to establish relations, Dutch ships bearing gifts for the Balinese kings were dispatched. However, from a trading perspective, Bali had little to offer so the opportunity to develop international relations was restricted at first. Originally, its primary export was slaves but as the world slave trade was curtailed, the Balinese Kings turned to other commodities such as coconut oil, thereby putting Bali in a position to enter the world trading market.

Dutch interest in the Indonesian islands changed into the seventeenth century and the merchant ships gave way to war ships. The Dutch had overcome many Javanese kingdoms through ancient principles of divide and conquer and the same approach was taken in Bali. As the Balinese continued to resist, the Dutch became more and more aggressive. Stories of their barbaric tactics were not received well in their homeland and protests led them to complete their invasion more tactfully. Surprisingly, once the Dutch secured control, they protected the island from outside influences and encouraged them to maintain much of their culture and traditions. Grateful of this as we are today, their reasons were not purely benevolent: they considered the Balinese controllable with their peaceful religion but were wary should that religion change to a more fundamental variety.

World War 2 brought a new era as Japanese armies took over from the Dutch. The Japanese presence in Bali was short lived and they left without a trace as they lost the war. The Dutch tried to return to the Indonesian islands, but their desperate attempts to regain power in the colony were condemned all over the world. Together with the rest of the Dutch East Indies archipelago, Bali was handed over to a new independent Indonesian government that emerged in 1949. Bali had finally lost its liberty and fell to its destiny of economic and political dependence on neighboring Java.

### Bali Introduction : The Population

Bali is bursting, with an estimated population of over three million people. Through the controversial transmigration program, Balinese communities have developed in the outer regions of Indonesia such as Sumatra and Sulawesi, in order to relieve the islands' already stretched natural resources.

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### About the Author

Bali Travel Guide is a comprehensive guide to the island of Bali, a collaboration by Jenifer Bird and Dave Waldheim. A complete Bali introduction with

travel tips and reviews of all major bali resorts and [bali hotels](#) such as the [Jimbaran Puri Bali](#). You can collect the parts of this travel guide here from this website or download it as a complete ebook with maps and fotos at the [Bali](#) website. A Bali travel site featuring articles, island infos and monthly hotel review updates.

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