



Vital Statistics: COMO Shambhala Estate, Bali

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| Address: | COMO Shambhala Estate Banjar Bengawan, Desa Melinggih Kelod, Payangan, Gianyar 80571, Bali, Indonesia |
| Telephone: | +62 361 978 888 |
| Email: | CSestate@comohotels.com |
| Website: | comohotels.com/bali/como-shambhala-estate |
| Opening Date: | December 2005 |
| Owning Company: | COMO Hotels and Resorts |
| General Manager: | Gede Suteja |
| Executive Chef: | Dewa Wijaya |
| Interior Designer: | Koichiro Ikebuchi |
| Architect: | Cheong Yew Kuan |
| Location: | Ubud, Bali |





Getting there:

These airlines service Bali's Denpasar airport, a 90-minute drive from COMO Shambhala Estate:

Singapore Airlines (singaporeair.com)
Emirates (emirates.com)
Turkish Airlines (turkishairlines.com)
Cathay Pacific (cathaypacific.com)
Garuda (garuda-indonesia.com)
Jetstar Airways (jetstar.com)
Malaysia Airlines (malaysiaairlines.com)
Qantas (qantas.com)
Qatar Airways (qatarairways.com)
Thai Airways International (thaiair.com)
Virgin Australia (virginaustralia.com)

Accommodations:

30 rooms, suites and villas, including:

5 Residences, each with four or five suites and a large swimming pool:

- Bayugita ('Windsong')
- Tirta-Ening ('Clear Water')
- Tejasuara ('Sound of Fire')
- Wanakasa ('Forest in the Mist')
- Umabona ('House of the Earth son')

4 One-bedroom Pool Villas: Our one-bedroom pool villas are a mix of cool and contemporary style together with traditional Balinese design elements and peerless forest views. There is also a private pool, Jacuzzi and outdoor deck for lounging and leisure.

3 Two-bedroom Pool Villa: The two-storey, two-bedroom pool villas each boast a private swimming pool, Jacuzzi, and large living and dining areas. Each floor is an exclusive space unto its own, with views of the verdant valley below. Both bedrooms feature their own personal entrances for an extra touch of discretion.

2 Three-bedroom Pool Villas: The three-bedroom pool villas feel like private homes with residential style, expansive living areas and a fully equipped kitchen. The villas each have two master bedrooms and one guest bedroom, as well as a private garden, an infinity pool and Jacuzzi.



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Room Facilities:

King- and queen-size beds
Individually controlled air conditioning
Direct dial telephone
Wi-Fi
Satellite TV
Electronic personal safe
Private bar
Yoga mats
COMO Shambhala bathroom amenities
Hairdryer
Coffee, tea and bottled mineral water

Guest Services:

Personal assistant
Travel and tour assistance
Car services
Multilingual hotel staff
Fitness centre
Airport transfers
In-room dining
Laundry and dry cleaning service
Resident doctor (on-call after hours)
COMO The Shop
Babysitting services
Guided walks and excursions
Concierge and secretarial services
Wellness Facilities

Restaurants:

Kudus House serves breakfast and dinner, showcasing the diverse influences, flavours and spices of Indonesia's regions served in a 150-year-old former Javanese residence.

Dining Options:

glow has healthful menus for lunch and dinner, including energising COMO Shambhala Cuisine.

In-room dining is available 24 hours and includes COMO Shambhala Cuisine in the menu selection.



Wellness facilities:

Ojas ('Essence of Life'), the main treatment area:

- Nine treatment rooms (including three for couples)
- Mineralised vitality pool and outdoor hydrotherapy area equipped with a 'scotch' spiral jet
- Separate male / female steam rooms and saunas
- 25m lap pool
- Yoga pavilion and yoga bale

Kedara ('The Water Gardens') features the following:

- Four treatment pavilions
- Fully equipped Pilates studio

Shikara ('Peak of the Mountain'), the Estate's base for consultants and the COMO Shambhala Activities Centre, features the following:

- Four wellness consultation rooms
- COMO The Shop

A well-equipped gym is located adjacent to Kudus House. There is also a jungle gym located seven-minute walk from Bayugita Residence.

All health facilities draw water from a spring locally revered for its healing properties.

Treatments:

More than 20 Asian-inspired and Western holistic treatments developed by COMO Shambhala. These include:

- Ayurveda
- Hydrotherapy
- Nutritional advice
- Reflexology

Yoga, Pilates, Functional fitness



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Outdoor Activities:

- Aqua circuit training (vitality pool)
- 'Canang sari' classes
- Juice-making demonstrations
- Custom-designed cultural tours
- Guided hiking
- Jungle gym circuit training
- Martial arts
- Mountain biking
- Museum, temple and gallery visits
- Outdoor cross-training
- Outdoor rock climbing
- Swimming
- White water rafting
- Yoga and Pilates retreats led by world-renowned teachers
- Water Garden picnic lunch

Direct Reservations:

T. +62 361 978 888

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GDS Access Codes:

Private label chain code **CV**

Sabre **64562**

Apollo/Galileo **8734**

Amadeus **DPSBEG**

Worldspan **4693**



Integrated Wellness Programme

Our Integrated Wellness Programme is for those who are looking for a wellness programme designed according to their individual needs, which can range from stress management to rejuvenation and more. Guests can build their own experience following a consultation with our wellness expert, who will suggest an eating plan, therapy schedule and wellness activities. Programmes can include yoga, Pilates, meditation, rice field walks, massage and body care treatments, and meals of healthful COMO Shambhala Cuisine. You will leave COMO Shambhala Estate relaxed and inspired, with actionable advice to continue your wellness journey at home.

Integrated Wellness Programme Inclusions:

- Private consultations with a COMO Shambhala wellness expert (one every seven nights)
- Individual treatment plan including a suggested eating plan and wellness activities schedule for the duration of stay
- One wellness treatment per day
- Access to our daily schedule of activities
- Accommodation in tranquil rooms, suites, villas and residences
- Daily breakfast, lunch and dinner
- The services of a personal assistant



Resort Synopsis: COMO Shambhala Estate, Bali

In December 2005, the COMO Group opened its first residential health retreat, COMO Shambhala Estate in Bali, Indonesia. The Estate is the flagship for COMO Shambhala, the award-winning holistic health company owned by Christina Ong, which operates world-class COMO Shambhala Retreats at its resorts, including COMO Parrot Cay in the Turks and Caicos, COMO Uma Paro and COMO Uma Punakha in Bhutan, COMO Uma Ubud in Bali, COMO Point Yamu in Phuket and COMO Cocoa Island and COMO Maalifushi in the Maldives. COMO Shambhala Urban Escapes can be found at COMO Metropolitan London, COMO Metropolitan Bangkok, COMO The Treasury in Perth, and as a stand-alone Urban Escape in Singapore.

History

The Estate is an extraordinary 23-acre (9.3 hectare) location on a jungle-covered riverbank a 20-minute drive from the inland town of Ubud. The COMO Group assumed management and ownership, and have since changed the property to launch it anew – with a completely altered purpose – supported by substantial health facilities and extended accommodation, allowing the Estate to become the world’s first full-service residential health retreat and holiday resort in one.

Location

Ubud, a small but lively town regarded as the island’s cultural hub, derives its name from ‘Ubad,’ meaning medicine in Balinese. This is because of the profusion of unique medicinal plants that grow wild in the dense green forests. In addition, the Estate utilises water from a natural spring locally revered for its healing properties.

Facilities

The Estate’s architecture has been overseen by Cheong Yew Kuan. Materials are in keeping with the established aesthetic of the five four- and five-suite Residences, which made up the original Begawan Giri Estate, combining local stone, wood and traditional alang-alang roofing. Interiors of the COMO Shambhala health facilities and accommodations – including four one-bedroom pool villas, three two-bedroom pool villas and two three-bedroom pool villas – are by Koichiro Ikebuchi. Ikebuchi’s uncomplicated, succinct approach to design allows guests to engage with COMO Shambhala’s greater purpose, which is to clear the mind of all but thoughts of better physical, mental and spiritual health. Facilities, which include Ojas (the principal treatment area), Shikara (where consultants and the COMO Shambhala Activity Centre are located), and Kedara (the water gardens positioned near the Ayung River, with four additional treatment pavilions with rest areas, baths and showers) draw water from The Source, the Estate’s natural spring. In total, there are 13 treatment areas (including seven for couples), an outdoor hydrotherapy pool, swimming pool, yoga room, Pilates studio, a separate male/female steam room and sauna, a fully-equipped indoor gym with dramatic views, an outdoor jungle gym with a climbing wall and four consultation rooms.



Accommodation at the Estate is among the most spacious of its kind, built into jungle clearings and above the Ayung River.

There are five uniquely themed residences, each with four or five suites, airy living areas, and a large swimming pool, designed by Cheong Yew Kuan, an architect with conspicuous respect for the environment and indigenous styles of building. The aesthetic combines Asian and European influences, high-spec fixtures, handmade furniture, Indonesian artefacts and architectural details that exude the spirit of the region. Each residence is uniquely private, and no two are alike.

Bayugita (Sanskrit for 'Windsong') is an architectural exercise in simplicity, combining the simple lines of Balinese tradition with details from colonial Java (Victorian antique baths, Venetian and Dutch colonial beds). Cooling breezes move through the interior, comprising a 96sq m COMO Shambhala Suite with private Jacuzzi, two Terrace Suites, one Garden Room and a study, which can be converted into an additional bedroom or used for wellness treatments. If the residence is booked in its entirety, guests share the living/dining area adjoining the COMO Shambhala Suite. There is a dramatic infinity pool stretching towards rice fields.

Tirta-Ening (Sanskrit for 'Clear Water') is dominated by a 91sq m COMO Shambhala Suite with an exquisite Japanese water garden featuring a private waterfall. The entire residence has a zen feel. The sound of water can be heard throughout. The dining and living rooms cover some 113sq m, and can be shared with guests booked into Tirta-Ening's Suite or two Terrace Suites. The pool is stunning, with a central floating pavilion constructed from batu kuning (yellow rock) and teak with an ironwood shingled roof, reminiscent of old Javanese homes. Other highlights of Tirta-Ening include hand-carved doors, stone carvings and Chinese antiques.

Tejasuara (Sanskrit for 'Sound of Fire') is a bold residence inspired by Sumba, constructed using 1,200 tonnes of stone imported from this island. Detailing includes tribal cloth furnishings, black bamboo beds and a thatched roof. A fire pit burns beside the infinity pool, which overlooks fields of lemongrass, a spice also endemic to Sumba. This residence incorporates three substantial Terrace Suites, each measuring 83sq m, as well as the COMO Shambhala Suite, a 70sq m suite with a private Jacuzzi, outdoor shower, meditation garden, courtyard and pavilion. There is also a large communal living and dining room, as well as a study/ extra bedroom.

Wanakasa (Sanskrit for 'Forest in the Mist') comprises a COMO Shambhala Suite with a private Jacuzzi, two Terrace Suites, two Garden Rooms and a study/ extra bedroom. It is set among the trees, the pool's semi-circular edge echoing the bend of the Ayung River that lies 100m below. The main living pavilion is supported by large columns fashioned from the wide trunks of Bingkirai trees. Together with teak floors and the ironwood shingle roofs, the space embodies that of a luxury treehouse. Interiors have a contemporary edge, fashioned from light-speckled tiger bamboo and 150-year-old teak.



Umabona (Sanskrit for ‘House of the Earth Son’) boasts The Estate’s grandest accommodation – the COMO Suite, comprising two master suites, a Jacuzzi, private infinity pool, living room and dining room (308sq m). Additionally, there are two Terrace Suites, a Garden Room and study, all sharing a pool, living and dining room with a wood-fired pizza oven. The aesthetic is inspired by the Majapahit palaces and their formal pleasure gardens. Interiors include hand-carved reliefs, fine antiques and courtly furniture. Views are exceptional, looking towards the Ubud jungle.

One-bedroom Pool Villas, our one-bedroom pool villas are a mix of cool and contemporary style together with traditional Balinese design elements and peerless forest views. There is also a private pool, Jacuzzi and outdoor deck for lounging and leisure.

Two-bedroom Pool Villas boast a private swimming pool, Jacuzzi, and large living and dining areas. Each floor is an exclusive space unto its own, with views of the verdant valley below. Both bedrooms feature their own personal entrances for an extra touch of discretion.

Three-bedroom Pool Villas feel like private homes with residential style, expansive living areas and a fully equipped kitchen. The villas each have two master bedrooms and one guest bedroom, as well as a private garden, an infinity pool and Jacuzzi.



Holistic Purpose

The Estate represents the apogee of the COMO Shambhala philosophy in its approach to health – to help individuals find a sense of peace through the continuous process of learning and rebalancing, aided by special environments, specific knowledge and healing therapies. Unlike the conventional destination spa that usually focuses on pampering, COMO Shambhala provides a total, 360-degree experience closely tailored to each individual's needs, offering comprehensive lifestyle as well as healing programmes to mend mind, body and spirit.

This proactive approach, and commitment to the process of life-long learning, allows guests to make changes to their lives, supported and inspired by specialist staff. A nurturing environment is therefore key, for it is only when someone feels safe that they will take the necessary steps to face personal issues and future challenges. Guests are made to feel comfortable coming to the Estate alone, engaging at their own pace and on their own terms, or experiencing the powerful camaraderie created by shared goals. This sense of community is encouraged, with attractive single rates, activities that bring guests together, and a dining experience that allows strangers to become friends.

Knowledge and empowerment are provided by the Estate's highly experienced team of specialist staff. Their role is to guide each guest out of familiar comfort zones towards higher goals, unrealised depths, new strengths and a greater sense of equilibrium. In addition to changing mindsets, teaching skills and setting new perspectives, COMO Shambhala's experts also provide healing treatments and bodywork.

This philosophy emanates from the top – from the Estate's advisory panel, or Board of Directors, which is made up of a number of world-class experts in holistic health, invited by the owner to help direct the philosophy of COMO Shambhala. The Board of Directors ensures the integrity of COMO Shambhala's offerings and its continual evolution.

COMO Shambhala also works closely with a selection of residential consultants and visiting masters, who are invited by the property to lead retreat weeks throughout the year. These teachers, of whom there are many, may include yoga and Pilates instructors, life coaches and energy healers. Others host specialist learning seminars, with subjects ranging from Tibetan Buddhism to meditation.

Usually a retreat involves five hours of practice daily (split between morning and evening), in addition to discussions that provide a greater depth of knowledge on the retreat's specific subject.



The Estate has a number of Resident Teachers – a fitness instructor, yoga instructor and Pilates instructor, as well as teachers of varying modalities. The property also provides specialist activity guides for mountain biking, hiking, climbing, white water rafting and outdoor circuit training. Using the surrounding landscape, mountains, volcanoes, rivers and valleys for outdoor training is an essential facet of the Estate. Swimming pools are available on site. Activity guides are available for cultural excursions and workshops, which might include one-off sessions in Balinese dance, photography or writing.

Our therapists at COMO Shambhala Estate deliver different types of hands-on treatments, recommended according to each client's end goal, whether it be assisting with a lymphatic issue, something muscular, or relieving deep-set stress. Traditional Eastern techniques include Thai, Indonesian, and Ayurvedic therapy (Abhyanga, Pizhychil and Shirodhara all feature). Other areas of expertise include hot stone and deep tissue massage. Balinese-inspired therapies include a warm muscle wrap. Using traditional, local medicine in a warming hand-crushed rice and spice mix, this treatment is considered effective in helping to break down cellulite.

Body-care specialists are available for various hydrotherapies and facial therapists for skin and non-invasive anti-ageing treatments, including facials from established organic skincare brands.

All staff work together to devise the optimum personal programme for each guest. After an initial consultation, dynamic packages are created according to personal requirements, whether it is to get fit, detoxification, stress management, or weight loss after pregnancy. Specific treatments are recommended, which are experienced in conjunction with the fixed daily activities schedule. This usually includes morning yoga, meditation and the Estate walk.

Other physical activities available include bespoke hikes among the villages, temples, rice paddies and jungle gorges surrounding the Estate. For mountain biking, guests can choose from gentle cruises along easy backroads to an exhilarating adventure down muddy tracks and rough village byways. Various trails have been mapped by the Estate. Trips include an ascent to Kintamani, high on the crater rim of Mount Batur (1,717m), then a well-earned downhill run through a chain of traditional villages.

To complete the holistic approach, COMO Shambhala places a core emphasis on cuisine, with COMO Shambhala's health coach liaising between the guest and kitchens to ensure all personal specifics are taken care of. COMO Shambhala does not stipulate calorie-counting diets, but fosters a more balanced approach, encouraging guests to enjoy their food and its creation while maintaining a life-long interest in the benefit of good nutrition. This is in line with the values of COMO Shambhala Cuisine, meticulously developed by COMO Hotels and Resorts Group Executive Chef, which are reflected in personal eating plans drawn up by the Estate's dietician.



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The cuisine is organic, sourced locally, and delivered from field to table with minimum delay. Meat, fish and vegetables are featured, allowing all guests to eat healthily whatever their preferences. Flavour is given maximum consideration, with influences ranging from south Indian to Italian. Balinese cooking also appears on the menus. COMO Shambhala Cuisine accommodates food intolerances, with soy milk instead of cow's milk, and yeast- free breads. Menus feature little salt, and raw, unprocessed honey replaces sugar. Raw fruit and vegetables are also critically important to the Estate's menus – they are richer in living enzymes – and there is an extensive juice and vegetable extract menu, which is favoured by those on detoxification programmes.

Guests can dine at either Kudus House or glow. Kudus House serves breakfast and dinner in a 150-year-old former Javanese residence, showcasing the diverse influences, flavours and spices of Indonesia's different regions. glow is a contemporary all-day dining restaurant designed by Ikebuchi, that can seat up to 40 people. Guests also have the option of enjoying a picnic lunch at Kedara with the option of an Indonesian or a healthy glow set menu.



About The COMO Group and COMO Hotels and Resorts

COMO Hotels and Resorts, part of the Como Group, is a multi-award-winning, family-owned business with 15 hotels and resorts worldwide — each one different to the other but sharing the same core values: a deep commitment to holistic wellness, exceptional nutrition-rich cuisine, and inspiring destinations that honour the spirit of place.

Our city hotels include COMO Metropolitan London and COMO The Halkin in London, COMO The Treasury in Perth, Australia, and COMO Metropolitan Bangkok in Thailand. Our country resorts include COMO Uma Paro and COMO Uma Punakha in Bhutan, COMO Uma Ubud and COMO Shambhala Estate in Bali, and COMO Castello Del Nero in Tuscany. COMO's beach and island portfolio encompasses COMO Parrot Cay in the Turks and Caicos, COMO Cocoa Island and COMO Maalifushi in the Maldives, COMO Point Yamu in Phuket, and COMO Uma Canggu on the Bali shore. COMO Laucala Island is the Group's newest addition: a private island resort in Fiji.

The Singapore-based COMO Group of lifestyle companies is home to businesses that seek to make a meaningful difference to customers' lives with products and services focused on quality and authenticity. Founded by Mrs Christina Ong, the COMO Group encompasses the international luxury fashion retailer Club 21, the award-winning wellness brand COMO Shambhala, our food concepts, COMO Cuisine and COMO Dempsey, the philanthropic COMO Foundation, and COMO Club. This new initiative for 2022 is a one-stop digital platform that connects customers to the different experiences in the COMO Group, as well as partner brands who share our values.

For more information on COMO Hotels and Resorts, visit our website comohotels.com, follow our adventures on [Instagram @comohotels](#), or chat to us on our [Facebook](#) page.



About COMO Shambhala

Founded in 1997 by Mrs Christina Ong, COMO Shambhala has evolved organically from an intimate yoga studio in Singapore into an award-winning wellness concept found in 14 COMO Hotels and Resorts properties across nine countries and four continents.

Meaning 'peace' in Sanskrit, Shambhala alludes to the pursuit of balance that defines our philosophy. COMO Shambhala advocates proactive holistic wellness, combining modern science with ancient practices.

From city centres to island retreats and highland resorts, COMO Shambhala offers a team of diverse wellness practitioners across various modalities. Our curated suite of wellness services includes treatments, experiences, products and activities. Complementing these services is our signature COMO Shambhala Cuisine, a full range of healthful nutrition-optimised dishes using pure ingredients in nourishing combinations.



Key Biographies: COMO Shambhala Estate, Bali

Gede Suteja, General Manager:

More than a decade of experience later, Gede is returning as General Manager to COMO Shambhala Estate – where his COMO career first began. Born and raised in Bali, Gede Suteja joined COMO Hotels and Resorts in 2004, where he was involved in the opening of COMO Shambhala Estate. Since then, he has been Executive Assistant Manager at COMO Cocoa Island in the Maldives, as well as Resort Manager and subsequently General Manager of COMO Uma Ubud.

Dewa Wijaya, Executive Chef:

Dewa, born in Indonesia, previously worked at our COMO Uma Bhutan property, as well as COMO Parrot Cay in the Turks and Caicos Islands. Always respectful of local nuances even when creating innovative dishes, Dewa has worked hard to revive traditional Indonesian offerings while providing creative contemporary interpretations of the cuisines of nearby countries, especially India.

Prasanth Vayanakathu Sasidharan Unnithan, Wellness Manager and Ayurvedic Doctor:

Dr. Prasanth has been conducting consultations in Ayurveda, nutrition and stress management for close to two decades. His wellness programmes focus on individual needs and are based on Integrative Medicine, Ayurveda, naturopathy, yogic and conventional science. Dr. Prasanth also teaches classical and therapeutic yoga, designing classes based on the guests' wellbeing needs, and offers Marma therapy: a specialized branch of Ayurveda that manipulates subtle energy within the body to support natural healing.

Monica Troiani, Yoga and Pilates Expert:

Monica has over 500 hours of yoga teacher training, accrued over nineteen years, having studied under Giovanni Formisano in Milan, David Swenson in London and with Daniel Rama and Kalpana in Bali. Monica's classes draw upon her expertise in various disciplines, including Hatha, Ashtanga and Vinyasa yoga. Having first turned to Pilates and yoga after sustaining an injury, Monica is aware of the physical benefits of yoga, which she hopes to share in her classes. For Monica, yoga is a means of understanding both your body and your mind better, as much as it is a tool for improving balance and strength. She offers personalised instruction to each participant to bring about the best results.

Pak Dewa Nyoman Sulendra, Chakra Healing:

Traditional healers hold an important place in Balinese life, treating illness through their universal connection, and delivering insights into situations to provide the opportunity for self-healing. Pak Dewa is a Balinese healer who specialises in kundalini energy and chakra healing. During each session, he energetically scans the body to locate problem areas, and acting as the medium, focuses universal energy to heal and balance chakras.



Cheong Yew Kuan, Architect:

Yew Kuan divides his time between Bali and Singapore. His past projects for COMO Hotels and Resorts include COMO Parrot Cay in the Turks and Caicos, COMO Uma Ubud in Bali, and COMO Cocoa Island in the Maldives. He has also worked on a number of high profile private houses. Formerly with Kerry Hill Architects in Singapore, his style is defined by a keen awareness of indigenous traditions, creating satisfying, sensitive volumes for modern living. His work has been universally acknowledged as the best of its kind – tropical architecture that is both luxurious and sensitive to the environment that it occupies.

Koichiro Ikebuchi, Interior Architect:

Japanese interior architect Koichiro Ikebuchi is defined by his sensitive approach to nature and respect for cultural authenticity. All that he creates is entirely appropriate to its physical context. This is achieved by an uncomplicated, succinct approach to design, which gives a strong flavour in the fewest strokes possible. It is for these reasons that his extensive restaurant work, including Aoki in Singapore, has set new benchmarks in interior design. COMO Uma Ubud was his first resort project. At the Estate, he has been responsible for the Garden and Retreat Villas, in addition to the lobby and wellness facilities.

Trevor Hillier, Landscape Architect:

Currently working from Bali, Hillier is a South East Asian tropical landscape specialist, with a strong conservationist leaning. His work shows a keen sensitivity to architecture and context, his designs incorporating agriculture into the landscape wherever possible. In the resort sector, he has been responsible for extensions of both Four Seasons Hotels in Bali, as well as the landscaping of COMO Parrot Cay in the Turks and Caicos. For COMO Hotels and Resorts, he has worked on COMO Uma Ubud in Bali and COMO Uma Paro in Bhutan



Destination Overview: COMO Shambhala Estate, Bali

Bali is the jewel of Indonesia – a paradise filled with smiling faces, white-sand beaches and unspoilt, rolling countryside carpeted in velvet green rice paddies. It is all of this, but more as well, its manifold layers created by a long-standing, sophisticated culture informed by a deep sense of religion and respect for tradition.

Bali is also a place with a long history of healing. This includes sacred waters, revered for their curative properties, and a culture of wellbeing, still practised in massage and beauty rituals in private homes.

A volcanic mountain range splices the island in two. Ubud, revered as the island's cultural hub, lies at its heart. To the east lies Sidemen – a rural enclave in the shadow of Mount Agung – and to the south, the busier beach resorts of Kuta and Nusa Dua. The less visited north and west of Bali includes a quiet coastline that is great for diving.

Significantly, Bali is the only predominantly Hindu island in the world's largest Muslim nation – Indonesia.

Hinduism was introduced from Java in the eighth century and then strengthened in the fifteenth century as the Brahman priests fled the Islamic encroachment on Java. From these early roots, Bali has developed its own unique system of beliefs, officially called 'Agama Tirtha' ('Religion of Holy Water'). Balinese people believe in the seen and the unseen worlds. Life is a battle between the demons and dark forces that dwell in the sea and the gods who reside in the mountains or volcanoes – both dominant aspects of the island's topography.

Village life is a core element of Balinese culture – a cohesive religious community (banjar) organised around a group of temples. Each banjar member is duty-bound to take part in rituals and assist in ceremonies, involving art, music, theatre and elaborate offerings. These ceremonies constitute the island's heartbeat.

The very soul of Bali is rooted in religion and is expressed in art forms that have been well preserved over the centuries. Hindu tenets have also morphed with local influences. Dance dramas, for example, are based on the old Hindu epics of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, but contain elements of folklore peculiar to the island.

Although the ancient regencies of the 'Rajas' and princes of Bali were dismantled by colonial governments in the early twentieth century, many of the royal descendants, who still own traditional palaces, are very much respected as patrons of the arts. Even today, it seems that almost every person is a painter, carpenter or weaver, sharing an unusual respect for nature and Bali's rich and singular heritage.



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