

# SPECTATOR

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## Island-hopping

Clemency Burton-Hill gets away from it all in Indonesia

**T**o take a three-week holiday is such an extravagance that the destination has to be good. Indonesia, the world's largest archipelago, is great. Even if you only manage to visit a couple of its 17,000 islands, as we did, there's something for everyone.

But where to start? My boyfriend and I flew into Java, ostensibly to get a sense of the country's political heartbeat. After a few hours in Jakarta, however, it became clear that the most culturally enriching way to spend our time would be to prop up the bar with locals in Café Batavia, an art-deco dinner and jazz joint in the old Dutch port that is so fabulous it almost justifies the trip to the otherwise noisy, smelly capital by itself.

The next day we crossed the island by train, eventually arriving at Yogyakarta, an artisan town known as Java's 'soul'. Surviving an earthquake on our first night, we visited handicrafts markets; watched the sun rise over Borobudur, the world's largest Buddhist temple; bought silver set with topaz the colour of dawn; and had our first taste of Storm beer. Staying at the delightful Yoga Village Inn, we swam in hibiscus-fringed turquoise pools, slept on linen scented with frangipani blossoms, and enjoyed miraculously cheap massages in the afternoon. The holiday had truly begun.

Over the sea, our next stop was Ubud, Bali's creative capital. Art galleries and craft shops abound along Monkey Forest Road, but it is also a wonderful place to explore the island's luminous rice paddies. Tourism in Bali has barely picked up since the double blow of terrorist bombings in 2002 and 2005, but foreigners do exist in Ubud, as witnessed by the plethora of hotels, restaurants and spas. We enjoyed the cocktails at such chic outlets as Ary's Warung and Greenhouse, but loved staying in a local guesthouse, where raucous gamelan



A performance of the Legong Kraton dance in Ubud

music and chanting from the Puri Saraswati temple serenaded us well into the night.

Aching for the sea, we soon jumped on a boat to Nusa Lembongan, a sleepy little island whose economy is predominantly seaweed-driven. I learnt to scuba dive on Jungutbatu beach, at the brilliant World Diving centre, but anybody searching for peace, quiet and simplicity should head here. Although much of the accommodation is basic, it's clean and full of character. A short stroll around the bay — which has amazing views of Bali's great, active volcano Mount Agung — things get much swisher. We treated ourselves to a night at Batu Karang, a superb resort consisting of exquisite private villas, infinity swimming-pools, a spa, and the best spot for sundowners on the island. Given the quality of the service, food, and attention to detail — not to mention the stunning location — it was money well spent.

Back in Bali, we were temporarily thrown off our intended course by a chance meeting with someone on a bus who told us he lived in 'the best place on the island'. Set in a dramatic, verdant valley with views up to the mountain and down to the ocean, the tiny, unspoilt village of Sidemen is indeed gorgeous. The area is famous

for ikat and songket cloth; using primitive wooden looms set among squawking chickens and children, women weave the most beautiful creations. Our two-day stay coincided with an annual festival at the Hindu temple, so, donning our new ikat sarongs, we joined in the vibrant music, mask and dance celebrations and had a ball.

Next we headed up the north-eastern coast, a staggeringly beautiful stretch of banana plantations, palm trees, rocky beaches and sparkling ocean dominated by the looming grandeur of Mount Agung. In Amed we read books, took walks — you can hike up the volcano in half a day — drank Storm beer and ate mouthwateringly fresh barbecued

mahi-mahi, while in Tulamben we did some thrilling diving on the wreck of the Japanese-sunk USS *Liberty*. Locals up here like to say that their wild, coastal enclave is the 'real Bali' — and we enjoyed it so much we stayed there too long to go across to Lombok.

Arriving at picture-postcard beautiful Legian on our penultimate day, the contrast was certainly stark. For the first time in weeks, here were tourists! Once we'd got over the shock, we had our final dinner at La Lucciola and reconciled ourselves to it. Lit by banana-leaf lanterns, over a soundtrack of the crashing, moonlit ocean and the distant beats of the nightclubs down the road, we ate a fantastic dinner and washed it down with fresh lychee martinis. It was the perfect end to a perfect three weeks.

*Clemency Burton-Hill is a contributing editor of The Spectator.*

### WORLD DIVING, NUSA LEMBONGAN

[www.world-diving.com](http://www.world-diving.com)

### BATU KARANG

[www.batukaranglembongan.com](http://www.batukaranglembongan.com)

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