

# An Indonesian cultural escapade

By JASLEEN KANDHARI

En route to the magnificent Buddhist stone temple of Borobudur, all it takes to dispel the hawkers who inevitably congregate around you is to utter "Saya tinggal di Yogyakarta," the magic Bahasa Indonesian words meaning, "I am a resident of Yogya."

Conceived of as a Buddhist vision of the cosmos in stone, this architectural monument is Indonesia's most popular heritage site. Comprising 505 Dhyani Buddha sculptures seated in meditation within the stepped stupa, this is a brilliant example of Indian cultural influence on Indonesia.

"Follow me to heaven," our on-site guide exclaimed as we ascended up to the tenth level in a clockwise manner in accordance with the Buddhist pilgrims path, in search of and to rub the figure of the lucky Buddha so as to be granted our heartfelt wishes.

Borobudur is a two-hour drive from Yogyakarta in Java, the cultural capital of Indonesia. Here I experienced a myriad of entertaining cultural highlights using the local form of transport, the becak or rickshaw. I visited the Kraton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat or the Sultan Palace, batik dyeing and painting factories, as well as wayang kulit or shadow puppet workshops.

On the way from Yogyakarta to the city of Solo lies the Hindu temple complex at Prambanan village, serving as the finest existing architectural example of the Hindu influence on Java. I discovered that the temples dedicated to the Hindu gods—Brahma, Vishnu, and the largest to Lord Shiva at a soaring 47 metres—were richly carved in relief with narratives and figurative friezes, including scenes depicting the Hindu Ramayana and Mahabharata epics.

A highlight of the trip was the trek to the rim of the crater of the active volcano, Mt Bromo in east Java. Spewing sulphurous gases from its heart along with Mt Batok and Mt Semeru, this was one of the smaller volcanoes to emerge from the eruption of the pre-existing volcano. It left behind an external rim within which villages and farmlands have since arisen, making the most of the ancient fertile lava flows.

I enjoyed the horseride across the black volcanic seas of sand up to the edge of Mt Bromo's crater. As my first ride ever, I mused that this was a most unique start to future equestrian escapades.

"If there is a God, we are one step closer to him," said Ian, our humorous tour guide as we chugged through east Java's lush green mountainous landscape. It was as if a carpet of dense foliage had been spread over the mountains interspersed with the haze of clouds at high altitude. Watching the sun rise over Mt Bromo, followed by an early morning meditation hike was a tranquil experience. Within the volcano's external rim, meditation is something that happens naturally.

Such treks require hearty break-



Pura Danu Batur temple. BALI JASLEEN KANDHARI



The author with tour guide Puto riding across volcanic sands to the crater of Mt Bromo in Java. PUTU DEWI

fasts to follow, the standard Indonesian breakfast dish being the fried rice-based nasi goreng. Exotic fruits are intriguing forms of cuisine found in tropical regions like Indonesia, such as the snake fruit salak, so named for the snakeskin-like outer skin, the succulent dragon fruit which does not resemble a

dragon I hasten to add, nangka, the inversely fragrant durian, and jack fruit.

Meals savoured at roadside taverns, called warungs, proved to be spicy and tasty indeed. Chicken satay mixed with coconut, Beef Rendang and Ayam, and chicken Butunu being some of the richly flavoured Balinese specialties I indulged in at these local eateries.

As a special treat I savoured the Foie Gras of snake fruit compote at the Oberoi resort in Bali, with Balinese wines, the Wine of Gods Chardonnay and the Hatten rose, complementing the food sublimely.

In contrast to the island of Java which is Muslim, Bali is a small, beautiful, lush hotspot which is predominantly Balinese Hindu. It lives up to its reputation as being a paradise island with its lush foliage, beautiful sandy beaches and ancient temples. Volcanoes serve as the essence of Bali. I gazed over the breathtaking views of Mt Gunung Batur and the holy Mt Agung from Kintamani village, located on the rim of the caldera.

For culture-vultures like myself, Ubud is the place to be in Bali with its plethora of galleries of contemporary crafts, batik, paintings, and traditional performing arts held every evening.

"Jump over the coconut husks," I heard a voice pipe up amidst a fire-dance performance. The dancer enters a trance-like state to kick fiery coconut husks into the audience, all in the name of sheer drama.

One cannot leave Ubud without paying a visit to Mandala Wisata Wanara Wana, the sacred monkey forest sanctuary, with its Hindu temples and long-hanging jungle vines peppered with mischievous Meca monkeys.

The Oberoi resorts in Bali, which I travelled to independently after

the tour, proved to be relaxation personified. I stayed in a thatched roof lanai cottage overlooking my own private coral walled garden with running water features which were soothing to the mind. Such structures serve to recreate the atmosphere of a Balinese village right on the golden sands of Seminyak beach.

Continuing with the theme of relaxation Indonesian-style, I enjoyed a Mande Lular luxurious bathing ritual in which Indonesian brides traditionally partook before their wedding day. Having indulged in a firm Balinese massage with the Oberoi Melody oil followed by a lular body scrub of turmeric, sandalwood, and rice powder to soften the skin and a refreshing yoghurt rubdown, I almost drifted off to sleep in the rose petals bath fragranced with frangipani essential oils—a most fitting way to end my Indonesian escapade.

Jasleen Kandhari is an Asian art historian with a passion for travel and exploring cultural horizons. She has published numerous exhibition reviews, culinary and travel articles on Asia, Europe and North America. Jasleen Kandhari flew within Southeast Asia with Air Asia ([www.airasia.com](http://www.airasia.com)), travelled on East Java & Bali tour with Imaginative Traveller ([www.imaginative-traveller.com](http://www.imaginative-traveller.com)), and stayed at the Oberoi Resorts Bali ([www.oberoihotels.com](http://www.oberoihotels.com)).

## SUDOKU

Fill in the boxes using numbers between 1 and 9 so that each column, each row, and each 3x3 square contain all nine numbers only once.

			8	1				
		2			3	5		
	1	6		3	8	4	7	
	7							
		8	3		2	1		
8	5	9						
6	2	3	4		5	7		
	8	4	1		5		3	2
		7	2	6		8		

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4	8	1	9	2	7	6	5	3
2	3	9	5	6	1	4	8	7
6	2	5	8	4	3	7	1	9
5	9	2	4	1	6	5	7	8
5	1	2	7	3	8	9	4	6
8	6	4	2	9	5	7	1	3
2	4	8	3	5	9	1	6	7
1	5	6	7	2	8	9	4	3
9	2	6	1	8	4	3	5	7

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This week's solution

## The Epoch Times Geography Guru™

"Growing your geography knowledge"

Quiz #230



**DIVIDING RANGE:** The Caucasus Mountains are traditionally considered one of the dividing lines between Europe and Asia. If you went hiking in the Caucasus, which of the countries below might you hike in, and which others of those mentioned are definitely not in the Caucasus?

Albania  
Afghanistan  
Austria

Azerbaijan  
Georgia  
Germany

Romania  
Russia  
Rwanda

.....  
Read The Epoch Times next week for the answer!

Answer for Quiz #229:

**NON-CONTIGUOUS:**

A. What two nations are closer to Alaska than any other state? CANADA, RUSSIA  
B. Which state is closest to Alaska? WASHINGTON



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From The Skimmer, Time magazine



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