

Munduk: off the beaten track in Bali

By BRUCE SACH

Even wizened Balinese tour guides—who have likely heard every possible question in the book—showed genuine interest and surprise when we explained we had just returned from Munduk, a village located in northern Bali.

Munduk, a tiny jewel set high up in the mountains of northern Bali and located not far from Lakes Tamblingan and Buyan, is definitely off the beaten track. And when it comes to Bali, this is getting harder and harder to say. The “island of the gods,” with a native population of 3 million souls, reports millions of visitors yearly.

Firstly, getting to Munduk is not as easy as most Balinese destinations. Our previous hotel driver, never having been near Munduk in his life, enjoyed the explorations required to locate the place. He was equally pleased when we turned the tables on him and, playing hosts, invited him for a cup of freshly roasted Balinese coffee!

In a landscape that is uniquely Balinese, we looked out into the far distance at the sun-drenched Bali Sea, as the lush coffee and clove plantations surrounding us were suddenly engulfed in a cold mist. After witnessing a demonstration on how coffee is roasted and ground by hand, we had a cup of outstanding coffee and were on our way.

The owner, quite beside himself with joy (because our stop there brought him in another 20-odd visitors), laughed in spite of himself—he had forgotten to try and sell us some of the coffee, the *raison d'être* for the restaurant and roasting centre.

A WELCOMING MUNDUK

The next two days in Munduk were truly enchanting and offered, we venture to say, some of the magic that so seduced visitors to Bali in the good old days of the 1930s.

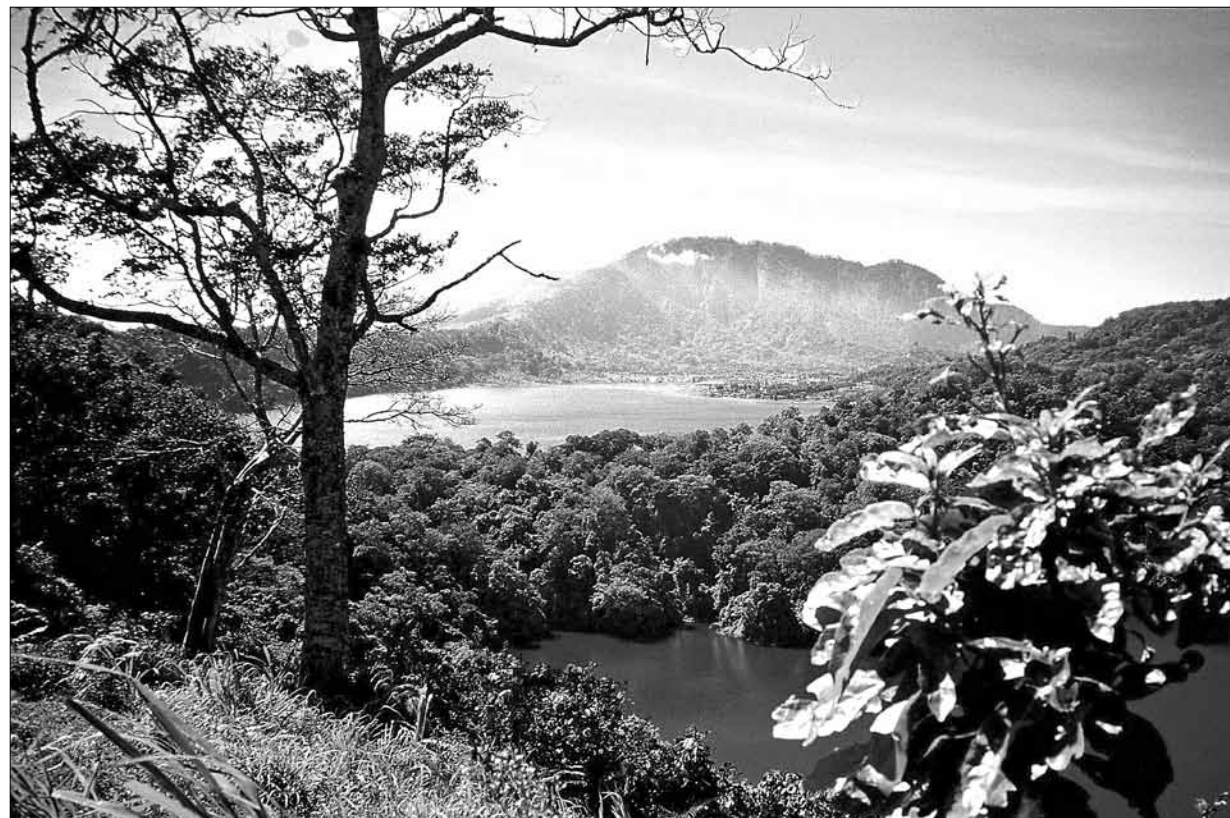
Dance is Bali's signature art form, and there is a dance for every occasion—from choosing a mate to pacifying evil spirits. Three of the most popular dances are the *barong*, in which an ornate dragon is paraded on stage; the *kecak*, the spirited, hypnotic swaying of men singing at sunset; and the *legong*.

The *legong* relates the story of the kidnapping of a princess by the ruthless King Lasem. Our version of the hilarious and sensuous *legong* was performed by tiny dancers no more than 5 or 6 years old. They were accompanied by the sometimes somber, sometimes excitable *genjek gamelan* orchestra. This orchestra is made up of the patriarchs of the nearby coastal village of Umeanyar.

The girls mirrored each other's movements, jerking their necks from side to side, darting their eyes, and waving their



LOCAL STAPLE: A rice paddy in the countryside of Munduk. CAROLE JOBIN



SCENIC VIEW: Mountains and natural majesty make the beauty of the Munduk area stunning. CAROLE JOBIN

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fans. The Balinese like a blend of seriousness and slapstick, as this dance expertly showed. Older performers came and danced, but the young girls had definitely stolen the show!

We retired to our mosquito-netted rooms, the rooms with the magnificent Bali Sea view. By morning, we had adapted to the local sounds—roosters crowing, water running from one irrigated rice paddy to another, men cutting giant ferns and clearing grasses with machetes, birds shrieking, and motorbikes zipping by.

OF HEALTH AND HEALING

We had noticed a local *dukun* (shaman) earlier at the reception area and thought he might be a local tradesman. The shaman, Ketut Suwitra, was a thin, muscular 57-year-old.

Today, as the most completely self-taught naturopath you are likely to ever meet, he gives a soothing, fabulous acupressure massage while subtly diagnos-

ing your health complaints. We received a clean bill of health, at least that is what I understood through the animated gesticulations and curious mixture of pidgin-English and Bahasa he used. I think he said he had treated Bob Dylan, too.

The body massage was so soothing that I immediately made a mental note to find some of the nutmeg balm he used on us. Seeing how much I liked the stuff, he gave me his own bottle.

Typical of the other Balinese traditional healers, he does not charge for his treatments and will accept anything as payment. The live peacock that a Javanese patient gave Suwitra still lives at his home in the mountains near Munduk.

To make things easier for the visitor, the hotel charges US\$9.00 per visit.

WHAT TO COOK?

Our private Balinese cooking lesson turned out to be a great choice. The chef had assembled all the lady chefs in the kitchen—they were her daughters. We settled into an outside kitchen where a clove and coffee tree fire burned.

Partially watching the demonstration and partially pitching in, we helped prepare a local specialty, *Timbungan Ayam*, which is a kind of chicken soup. The ingredients included shrimp paste, cassava (tapioca leaves), palm sugar, nutmeg, and hot chilies. All were mashed together using a volcanic rock mortar and pestle.

The cooks prepared food slowly and deliberately in the same manner and rhythm we noted throughout Bali. Shops, restaurants—no matter where tourists visit, they are forced to adopt the measured pace of the aforementioned Bali *Jamu* (Bal-

inese time).

We also created *bergedel kentang* (potato fritters) as well as the fresh peanut sauce made for *gado gado* (vegetable salad). Time really did stand still and the meal preparation, which began around 4:00 p.m. real time, extended endlessly in Balinese time.

As the sun set, we experienced the deliciously different feel of our outdoor kitchen as it became darker and darker, lit only by the open fire of the wood cooking stove. It was like a living meditation. The very typical *sate ayam* (chicken satay) and *tahu petis* (tofu with miso) rounded out the meal.

PARTAKE OF CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

The hotel offered many other cultural experiences, and the one we most regretted not signing up for was the morning language class. Although Bahasa Indonesia is not the native language of the Balinese, it is the lingua franca for all Indonesia and is understood by all Balinese.

Our last few hours in Munduk turned into an enriching surprise. Our new driver, secretly dreading the unfamiliar drive to Ubud, Bali's cultural capital, suggested we visit the site of Munduk village proper. We happened to park in front of his uncle's studio, which was closed due to prayer.

As if to compensate us, he then proposed we swing by his parents' home as they attended to their prayers. He took a narrow, winding road down the mountainside, yet we never did make it to the house as their neighbourhood was engaged in a full prayer ceremony. Where they were perched on the mountainside, in a sun-drenched court, we happened upon this



SIMPLE BUT DELIGHTFUL FARE: A local lady prepares a Balinese meal. CAROLE JOBIN

very intimate yet authentic ceremony celebrating the second six-month new year in the Balinese calendar.

Even in this intimate setting, we were not discouraged from recording the event on film. It felt right, since the family had welcomed us so warmly.

As another guide would explain to us later, the Balinese are not performing for tourists. Every gesture, from carefully

prepared offerings to dance to art to prayer, is for a very different audience—the gods.

ACCOMMODATIONS:

- PuriLumbung Bungalows www.balitouring.com/hotel/
- Wakka Gangga: www.wakkagangga.com

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The Epoch Times Geography Guru™

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Quiz #240



MOUNTAINOUS: Match the mountain ranges on the left with the appropriate nation on the right.

- | | |
|---------------|-----------|
| Atlas | Australia |
| Carpathian | China |
| Ghats | India |
| Grampian | Mexico |
| Kunlun | Morocco |
| Macdonell | Scotland |
| Sierra Madres | Slovakia |

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Read The Epoch Times next week for the answer!

Answer for Quiz #239:

CITIES OF THE GREAT LAKES: Cities located on the shores of one of the Great Lakes: Buffalo, New York; Chicago, Illinois; Cleveland, Ohio; Thunder Bay, Ontario; Toronto, Ontario. NOT on the Great Lakes: Cincinnati, Ohio; Indianapolis, Indiana; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Montreal, Quebec

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.

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

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