

Longing for Lombok



Bali and lesser-known Lombok are ripe for Indonesian adventures, discovers **Nick Goodyer**

I'm snorkelling in bath-warm tropical waters, looking down at the seabed some 10 metres below me, when my eye is drawn to a creature stirring among the rocks. It's a turtle, gently rising from the depths for a few breaths of air.

As it descends, I follow it down. It's not alone; there are eight of them – green turtles, some nearly a metre in length. I've dived all over the world and seen plenty of turtles, but never this many in one spot. Not far from here is a remarkable set of underwater statues: a ring of standing and recumbent life-sized figures, the work of British sculptor Jason deCaires Taylor.

This underwater tableau and the abundant marine life around it are just two aspects of Indonesia's Gili Islands that make them and nearby Lombok and Bali such compelling destinations. And while they might be off-limits to UK travellers for the moment, they offer exactly the type of socially distanced escape clients are likely to be seeking in 2022 and beyond.

LOMBOK

Lombok, to which the Gilis lie close, is not as well known as Bali, but offers a quieter, more reflective take on Indonesia. It's also very different in terms of the way it looks.

The two islands are divided by the Wallace Line, the boundary of the biogeographic zones of Asia and Wallacea (the region between Asia and Australasia). While Bali is mainly lush, green and tropical, Lombok is visibly drier, with sparser vegetation. Like all 18,000 islands in Indonesia, Lombok is the result of volcanic activity – especially evident in the form of the still-active Mount Rinjani, which towers over the island and offers trekking and camping adventures.

For those who prefer lying on a beach to lying in a volcanic crater, there are plenty of lovely spots with accommodation options for most budgets.

At the top of the spectrum is Puri Mas Boutique Resort and Spa. Split between two locations close to Senggigi Beach, the island's main tourist town, it's about an hour's drive from Lombok's airport.

In addition to its beautifully appointed pool villas, infinity pool and sumptuous pampering at the separate spa, one thing that marks Puri Mas out as different from the competition is its connection to ballroom dancing. Founded and owned by Marcel de Rijk, a former world champion of the discipline, the Ballroom Restaurant hosts displays of dancing in the evenings and has attracted participants and judges from *Strictly Come Dancing*. ➤

Mount Rinjani, Lombok

PICTURE: Shutterstock/rob_travel

DESTINATIONS

ASIA | INDONESIA

6
OF THE
BEST

THINGS TO DO IN INDONESIA

LOMBOK

Chill on the Gilis:

Gili Trawangan is the party island, while Gili Air and Gili Meno are more tranquil affairs.

Climb:

Mount Rinjani is 3,700m high and boasts a spectacular crater some five miles across. Trekking options include camping in the crater – and enjoying a dip in the hot springs – and three-day hikes to the summit.

Explore:

Mataram is the capital of Lombok and has many beautiful mosques. The Islamic Center Mosque offers tours with beautiful views from the minaret.

BALI

Unleash your inner hippy:

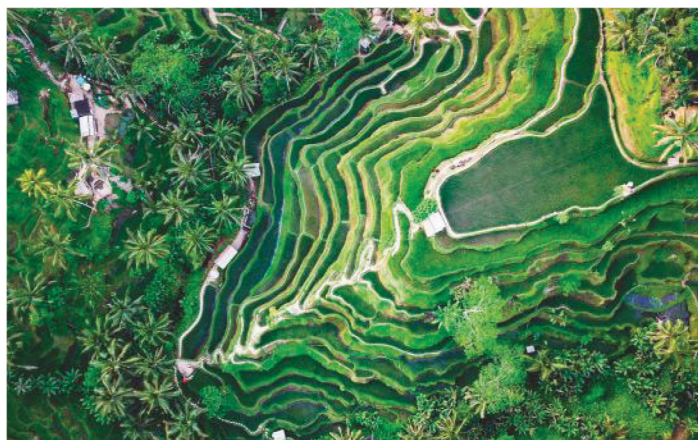
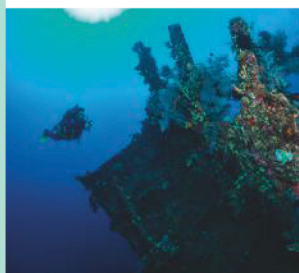
Head to Ubud to join an art class, take part in a yoga session or meditate while overlooking the rice terraces.

Get away from it all:

Much of Bali is overlooked but there is some beautiful scenery away from the south, as well as wonderful resorts such as Alila Manggis on the east coast.

Dive:

Bali has numerous dive sites. The best known is the Second World War ship *USAT Liberty*, torpedoed off Tulamben in eastern Bali. The wreck is in shallow water and is also suitable for snorkellers.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Sunset in Senggigi, Lombok; Ubud market, Bali; rice terraces, Bali; Kecak dance, Uluwatu, Bali

PICTURES: Shutterstock/Christophe Faugere, khlomwangchao, gorgeoussab, Andrei Kobylko, timsimages.uk



BALI

Bali is a lengthy boat ride or about half an hour's flight west of Lombok, where the plane touches down in bustling Denpasar. The difference is immediately apparent. I first went to Bali more than 20 years ago, and while even then it couldn't be described as quiet, now the streets of Denpasar and the strip of Kuta through to Seminyak are abuzz with cars, scooters and chaos.

Kuta, the main area for restaurants and bars, has been described as Ibiza on steroids – and that's not far off the mark. It's especially popular with Australian gap-year travellers, and the nightlife is not for the faint-hearted.

That said, it would be a real mistake to think the whole island of Bali is like this, and even Kuta itself has some tranquil havens such as the beachfront Anvaya Beach Resort.

To the north of the main conurbation is Ubud.

Running along a main thoroughfare, the town is home to countless art galleries, boutiques, restaurants and coffee shops, as well as an extensive covered market that's perfect for souvenirs such as traditional batik cloth.

On the fringes of Ubud are rice terraces cut into the steep ravines of the many streams and rivers that drain the volcanoes to the north. Many of Bali's ubiquitous giant swings can be found here, set on the edge of ravines that give thrill-seekers a brief taste of vertigo.

Closer to Kuta and the main strip is Uluwatu. On a peninsula at the southern tip of the island, it is home to a spectacular cliff-top Hindu temple of the same name,

providing sea views over the waves that make Bali world-famous for surfing. Uluwatu is renowned too for the frenetic Kecak dance performed each day at sunset. Concentric circles of men sit chanting and waving their arms around performers who enact a play based on the Hindu *Ramayana* epic – all amid flaming torches and with audience members plucked out of the crowd. By the time the dance ends, it's dark, and walking back to the temple entrance, flanked by eerie statues and the roaring sea, makes for a memorable end to the day. **TW**

GETTING THERE

Indonesia remains on the UK's red list so advise clients to check the latest rules from the UK government and Foreign Office before travelling.

Singapore Airlines flies to Singapore 18 times a week from Heathrow and three times a week from Manchester, and expects to resume onward connections to Denpasar once restrictions are lifted. Return flights to Denpasar in 2022 start at £625 from Heathrow and £595 from Manchester. singaporeair.com

Premier Holidays offers five nights in a Superior Promo Room at Puri Santrian Bali and four nights in a Superior Room at Puri Mas Boutique Resort and Spa from £1,299, including transfers and flights with Singapore Airlines in May 2022. premierholidays.co.uk