

West Bali



West Bali is the sinuous bit of the island that runs in the shadow of the central string of volcanoes. It is the least densely populated part of the island; much of the land is given over to agriculture.

Many visitors hurtle through the region on their way to or from Java or to the incredible dive locations in the Taman Nasional Bali Barat (West Bali National Park). This too is a shame as West Bali has deep cultural significance. Near the wild beaches north of Seminyak, Pura Tanah Lot is hugely popular for its clichéd role as a postcard-perfect temple at the sea. Yet journey further west and you find the wonderful temple Pura Rambut Siwi, a vision in limestone that honours the place where Nirartha landed in the 16th century. (He was rather important; he shaped the Balinese faith.)

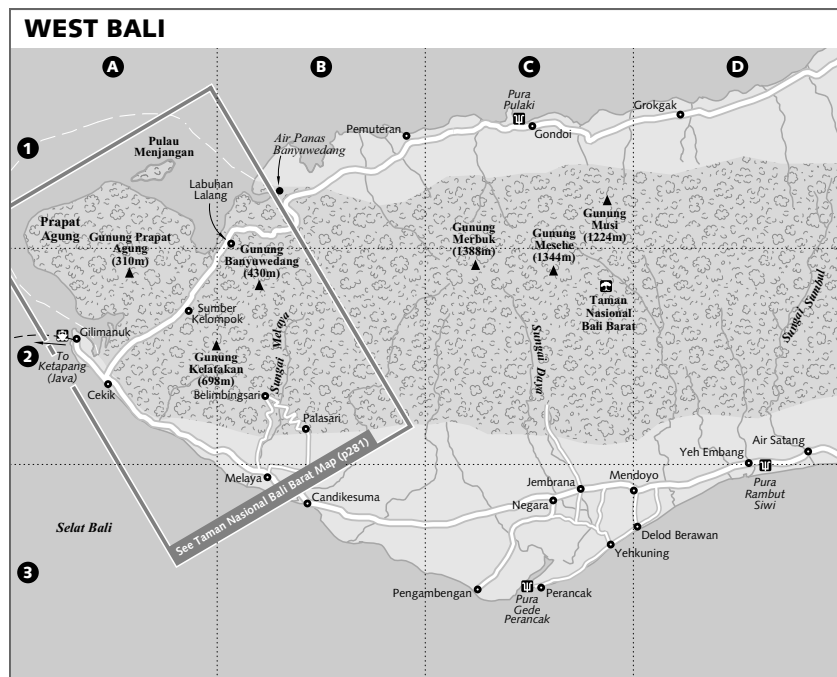
Make your own discoveries all along the coast. Untouched beaches uncurl like a ribbon from horizon to horizon. Here and there surfers have staked their claims, but follow almost any road to the sea and you'll find your own private sandy refuge. You'll know from the waves that you can't swim but you can soak up the wild ambience while you gaze out into the distance.

In fact, take just about any road at random in West Bali and see what you find. From incredible rice terraces to tropical forest dropping fruit over the road, you'll luxuriate in green.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Discovering the serene sea temple of **Pura Rambut Siwi** (p278)
- Viewing the rice terraces at **Pupuan** (p277)
- Exploring Bali's national park, **Taman Nasional Bali Barat** (p280), by foot or boat
- Diving at the spectacular **Pulau Menjangan** (p282)
- Driving through a huge acacia tree near **Manggissari** (p277)





PURA TANAH LOT

☎ 0361

The subject of a zillion pixels, **Pura Tanah Lot** (adult/child 3300/1800Rp, car park 1500Rp) is the most popular and most photographed temple in Bali. It's an obligatory stop on many tours from South Bali, very commercialised, and especially crowded at sunset. It has all the authenticity of a stage set – even the tower of rock that the temple sits upon is an artful reconstruction (the entire structure was crumbling). Over one-third of the rock you see is artificial.

For the Balinese, Pura Tanah Lot is one of the most important and venerated sea temples. Like Pura Luhur Ulu Watu, at the tip of the southern Bukit Peninsula, and Pura Rambut Siwi to the west, it is closely associated with the Majapahit priest, Nirartha. It's said that each of the 'sea temples' was intended to be within sight of the next, so they formed a chain along Bali's southwestern coast – from Pura Tanah Lot you can usually see the cliff-top site of Pura Ulu Watu far to the south, and the long sweep of sea shore west to Perancak, near Negara.

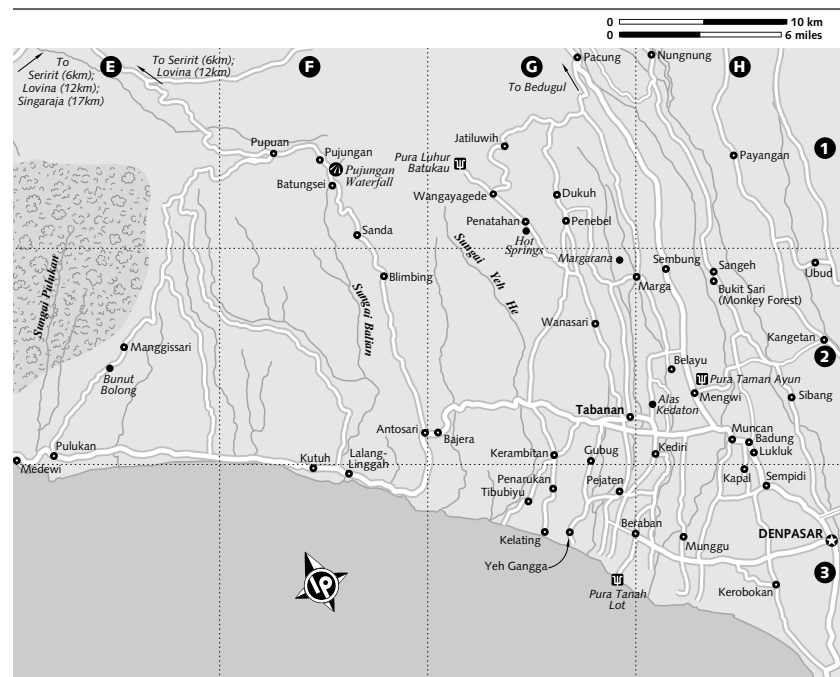
But at Tanah Lot itself you may just see from one vendor to the next. To reach the temple, a walkway runs through a sort of carnival alley with dozens of souvenir shops down to the sea. To ease the task of making purchases, there is an ATM.

To visit the temple you should pick the correct time – everybody shows up for sunset and the mobs obliterate any spiritual feeling the place has. If you visit before noon, crowds are few and the vendors are all but asleep.

You can walk over to the temple itself at low tide, but non-Balinese people are not allowed to enter. One other thing: local legend has it that if you bring a partner to Tanah Lot before marriage, you will end up as split as the temple. Let that be a warning – or an inducement.

Sleeping & Eating

If you want to join the sunset spectacle and also avoid traffic afterwards, you can stay near Tanah Lot. Cheap warung (food stalls) line the car park, and more expensive restaurants are inside the grounds and on the cliff-tops facing the temple.



Dewi Sinta Restaurant & Villa (☎ 812933; www.indo.com/hotels/dewisinta; r US\$18-40; 🍽️ 🚗 📶) Off a souvenir-shop gang, not far from the ticket office lies this midrange hotel. The 27 rooms are comfortable and modern. Some have views across the pool and beyond to rice fields. Others see a different green: the nearby golf course. The restaurant offers buffet lunches, with meals ranging from 18,000Rp to 60,000Rp.

Le Meridien Nirwana Golf Spa & Resort (☎ 815900; www.starwoodhotels.com; r from US\$120; 🍽️ 🚗 📶) Occupying a swathe of black-sand beach, this large resort has 278 luxurious rooms and an 18-hole golf course. Traditional stone designs are used throughout and the resort is attractive. There's a view of Tanah Lot, albeit from a disrespectful viewpoint (it's set higher than the temple).

Getting There & Away

Coming from South Bali with your own transport, take the coastal road west from Kerobokan, north of Seminyak, and follow the signs or the traffic. From other parts of Bali, turn off the Denpasar–Gilimanuk road near Kediri and

follow the signs. During the pre- and postsunset rush, traffic is predictably bad.

By bemo (small minibus), go from Denpasar's Ubung terminal to Tanah Lot (6000Rp) via Kediri, noting that bemo stop running by nightfall. Alternatively, take an organised tour which includes many other sights as well.

KAPAL

About 10km north of Denpasar, Kapal is the garden feature and temple doo-dad centre of Bali. If you need a polychromatic tiger or other decorative critter rendered in colours not found in nature, then this your place! (Although shipping might be a bitch.) This is on the main road to the west, so it might be worth getting out of traffic just to walk with the animals.

The most important temple in the area is **Pura Sadat**. It was possibly built in the 12th century, then damaged in an earthquake early in the 20th century and subsequently restored after WWII.

Throughout this part of Bali you will see peanuts and corn growing in rotation with rice. Bananas and other fruits grow wild alongside the roads.

PURA TAMAN AYUN

The huge state temple of **Pura Taman Ayun** (adult/child 4100/2100Rp; ☎ 8am-6pm), surrounded by a wide, elegant moat, was the main temple of the Mengwi kingdom, which survived until 1891, when it was conquered by the neighbouring kingdoms of Tabanan and Badung. The large, spacious temple was built in 1634 and extensively renovated in 1937. It's a lovely place to wander around and its size means you can get away from rapidly sightseeing group-tour hordes ('Back on the bus!'). The first courtyard is a large, open, grassy expanse and the inner courtyard has a multitude of *meru* (multiroofed shrines).

Getting There & Away

Any bemo running between Denpasar (Ubung terminal) and Bedugul or Singaraja can drop you off at the roundabout in Mengwi, where signs indicate the road (250m) to the temple. Pura Taman Ayun is a stop-off on many organised tourist tours.

BELAYU

Traditional *songket* (silver- or gold-threaded cloth) sarongs are intricately woven with gold threads. These are for ceremonial use only and not for everyday wear. You'll find them in the small village of Belayu (or Blayu), 3km north of Mengwi.

To get there, take any bemo or bus between Denpasar (Ubung terminal) and Bedugul or Singaraja, get off at the turn-off to Belayu and walk about 1km west; alternatively bemo go directly from Ubung terminal to Belayu (4000Rp).

MARGA

Between the walls of traditional family compounds in Marga, there are some beautifully shaded roads – but this town wasn't always so peaceful. On 20 November 1946, a much larger and better-armed Dutch force, fighting to regain Bali as a colony after the departure of the Japanese, surrounded a force of 96 independence fighters. The outcome was similar to the *puputan* (warrior's fight to the death) of 40 years earlier – Ngurah Rai (later of airport-name fame), who lead the resistance against the Dutch, and every one of his men was killed. There was, however, one important difference – this time the Dutch suffered heavy casualties as well, and this may have helped weaken their resolve to hang onto the rebellious colony.

The independence struggle is commemorated at the **Margarana** (admission 3000Rp; ☎ 9am-5pm), northwest of Marga village. Tourists seldom visit, but every Balinese schoolchild comes here at least once, and a ceremony is held annually on 20 November. In a large compound stands a 17m-high pillar, and nearby there's a **museum**, with a few photos, homemade weapons and other artefacts from the conflict. Behind is a smaller compound with 1372 small stone memorials to those who gave their lives for the cause of independence – they're headstone markers in a military cemetery, though bodies are not actually buried here. Each memorial has a symbol indicating the hero's religion, mostly the Hindu swastika, but also Islamic crescent moons and even a few Christian crosses. Look for the memorials to 11 Japanese who stayed on after WWII and fought with the Balinese against the Dutch.

Getting There & Away

Even with your own transport it's easy to get lost finding Marga and the memorial, so, as always, ask directions. You can easily combine this with a tour of the amazing Jatiluwih rice terraces (p254).

SANGEH

If you love monkeys, you'll love the 14-hectare monkey forest of **Bukit Sari**. But if you are put off by the thieving, copulating little buggers, than perhaps you should give it a miss. Actually we're among the former and the monkeys here are all rather workmanlike: they eat three squares a day (breakfast is bananas, lunch is cassava and dinner is rice, a very Balinese diet in fact) and when tourists leave they relax after a day of high-jinks ('Hey did you see the hat I stole off that bald guy?').

Also noteworthy, but not as exciting, are a rare grove of nutmeg trees in the monkey forest and a **temple**, Pura Bukit Sari, with an interesting old Garuda (mythical man-bird creature) statue. This place is definitely touristy, but the forest is cool, green and shady. The souvenir sellers are restricted to certain areas and are easy to avoid.

Getting There & Away

You can reach Sangeh and Bukit Sari by any bemo heading to Plaga from Wangaya terminal in Denpasar (6000Rp). Most people visit on an organised tour or drive themselves; it's about 20km north of Denpasar.

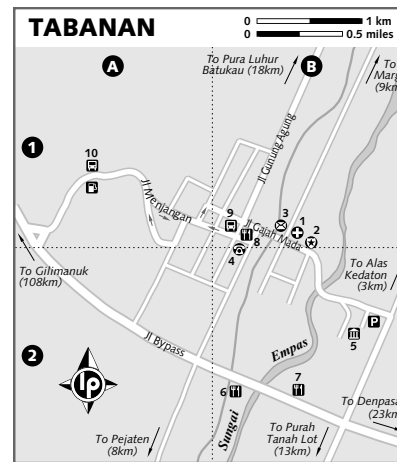
TABANAN

☎ 0361

A renowned centre for dancing and gamelan (traditional Balinese orchestra) playing, Tabanan, like most regional capitals in Bali, is a large, well-organised place. Mario, the renowned dancer of the prewar period, hailed from Tabanan. His greatest achievement was to perfect the Kebyar dance. He is featured in Miguel Covarrubias' classic book, *Island of Bali*. Nowadays it's hard for visitors to find performances here on a regular basis but you can enjoy the vibrant rice fields and related museum.

Orientation & Information

The main road thankfully bypasses the centre, where you'll find ATMs, wartel (public telephone office) with internet access, a hospital, a **police station** (☎ 91210) and a post office in



INFORMATION

Hospital.....	1	B1
Police Station.....	2	B1
Post Office.....	3	B1
Wartel & Internet.....	4	B2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Mandala Mathika Subak.....	5	B2
----------------------------	---	----

EATING

Babi Guling Stall.....	6	B2
Hardy's.....	7	B2
Market.....	8	B1

TRANSPORT

Bemo Terminal.....	9	B1
Bus Terminal.....	10	A1

Tabanan. The road to Pura Luhur Batukau and the rice terraces of Jatiluwih (see p254) heads north from the centre.

Sights

Playing a critical role in rural Bali life, the *subak* is a village association that deals with water, water rights and irrigation. The **Mandala Mathika Subak** (☎ 810315; Jl Raya Kediri; admission 5000Rp; ☎ 7am-4.30pm) is quite a large complex devoted to Tabanan's *subak* organisations. Within this is the somewhat forlorn **Subak Museum** with displays about the irrigation and cultivation of rice, and the intricate social systems that govern it.

With water passing through many, many scores of rice fields before it drains away for good, there is always the chance that growers near the source would be water-rich while those at the bottom would be selling carved wooden citters at Tanah Lot. Regulating a system that apportions a fair share to everyone is a model of mutual cooperation and an insight into the Balinese character. (One of the strategies used is to put the last guy on the water channel in control.)

Exhibits are housed in a large building with water coursing by right out front. The genial staffers will turn on lights so you can see the displays, many of which are decently labelled.

Eating

There are plenty of basic warung in the town centre as well as the bustling regional market; a night market sets up on the south side. **Babi Guling Stall** (dishes 5000-10,000Rp; ☎ 7am-7pm) Out on the main road, this stall has new batches of fresh-roasted seasoned young pork throughout the day. It's a treat Balinese love.

Hardy's (☎ 819850) Also on the main road, mundane, yet practical, you can stock up on supplies at this supermarket if you're heading to one of the surf sites in the west.

Getting There & Away

All bemo and buses between Denpasar (Ubung terminal) and Gilimanuk stop at the terminal at the western end of Tabanan (6000Rp). The bemo terminal in the town centre only has transport to nearby villages. If you're driving, note that most main streets are one way, with traffic moving in a clockwise direction around the central blocks.

SOUTH OF TABANAN

Driving in the southern part of Tabanan district takes you through many charming villages and past a lot of vigorously growing rice.

Just south of Tabanan, **Kediri** has Pasar Hewan, one of Bali's busiest cattle markets. About 10km south of Tabanan is **Pejaten**, a centre for the production of traditional pottery, including elaborate ornamental roof tiles. Porcelain clay objects, which are made purely for decorative use, can be seen in a few workshops in the village. Check out the small showroom of **CV Keramik Pejaten** (☎ 831997), which is a prominent local producer. The trademark pale-green pieces are lovely and when you see the prices, you'll at least buy a frog.

A little west of Tabanan, a road goes 8km south via Gubug to the secluded coast at **Yeh Gangga**, where there's some good accommodation choices and **Island Horse** (☎ 0361-730218; www.balislandhorse.com; rides from US\$50), which offers horse rides along the long flat beach.

The next road west from Tabanan turns down to the coast via **Kerambitan**, a village noted for its beautiful old buildings (including two 17th-century palaces); a tradition of *wayang*-style painting; and its own styles of music and dance, especially *tektekan*, a ceremonial procession.

South of Kerambitan, you will pass through **Penarukan**, known for its stone- and wood-carvers, and also its dancers. Continue to the coast, where you'll find the beach at **Kelating** wide, black and usually deserted.

About 4km from southern Kerambitan is **Tibubiyu**. For a gorgeous drive through huge bamboo, fruit trees, rice paddies and more, take the scenic road northwest from Kerambitan to the main road.

Sleeping

Bali Wisata Bungalows (☎ 0361-7443561; www.baliwisatabungalows.com; Yeh Gangga; bungalows 180,000-350,000Rp; 📍) West of Tabanan and on the coast at Yeh Gangga, this attractive accommodation has excellent views in a superb setting on 15km of black-sand beach. The ocean-view rooms are definitely worth it.

Puri Anyar Kerambitan (☎ 0361-812668; wiryana2000@yahoo.com; r from 250,000Rp) One of Kerambitan's two palaces accepts guest bookings in spacious, traditional accommodation in the lively and welcoming palace compound. The prince lives in the palace and you can watch him at work on paintings. The simple rooms

are decorated with carved teak and unrestored antiques. Balinese feasts and dancing can be arranged. Even if you're not shacking up with the prince, the compound makes for a good stop.

Waka Gangga (☎ 0361-416257; www.wakagangga.com; Yeh Gangga; r from US\$100; 📍 📍) Ten circular bungalows with views in three directions are scattered about rice fields at this remote boutique resort. The beach is out front, the design is rustic yet elegant and the trappings luxurious.

NORTH OF TABANAN

The area north of Tabanan is good to travel around with your own transport. There are some strictly B-level attractions; the real appeal here is just driving the fecund back roads.

Yet another monkey forest, **Alas Kedaton** (adult/child 5000/2500Rp; 🕒 7.30am-6.30pm) is a stop-off on many organised tours. Your ticket includes a guide, who may do little more than fend off avaricious monkeys and lead you to a cousin's carved-stick shop nearby.

About 9km north of Tabanan the road reaches a fork. The left road goes to Pura Luhur Batukau, via the **hot springs** at Penatahan. Here you'll find the simple **Yeh Panas Resort** (☎ 0361-262356; espayehpanes@telkom.net; r from 250,000Rp; 📍), 4km from the fork, by the Sungai Yeh Ho (Yeh Ho River). The resort has a small, cool pool, which nonguests can soak in for 30,000Rp. Another pool has water from the hot springs and costs 150,000Rp. Rooms are set on the hillside and overlook the river.

LALANG-LINGGAH

☎ 0361

At Antosari, the main road takes a sharp turn south to the welcoming breezes of the ocean. The first town you encounter continuing west another 10km is Lalang-Linggah. Here a road leads to the surf breaks near the mouth of Sungai Balian (Balian River). The entire area has deep spiritual significance and caves along the river are the scene of ceremonies.

Sleeping & Eating

You'll find warung scattered about the area with both funky and swank accommodation.

Sacred River Retreat (☎ 814993; www.sacred-river.com; r US\$40-60) Just east of town, Sacred River Retreat is a new-agey place with suitably hippy-esque décor and activities that include yoga and spiritual retreats. The 11 airy two-level bungalows are suitably restive (No 1 has the

best view). Meditate upon the hotel's motto: 'A conscious resort' and wonder about the alternative.

Gajah Mina (☎ 081-23811630; www.gajahminaresort.com; ste from US\$85; 📍 📍) Designed by the French architect-owner, the ocean is close to this eight-suite boutique hotel. The stylishly furnished bungalows all have outdoor and indoor bathrooms, and addictive loungers on the balcony. The turn-off from the main road is near the village market and there is a gate where 1000Rp is collected before you make the scenic 1km-drive.

JEMBRANA COAST

About 34km west of Tabanan you cross into Bali's most sparsely populated district, Jembrana. The main road follows the south coast most of the way to Negara. There's some beautiful scenery, but little tourist development along the way, with the exception of the surf break action at Medewi.

Medewi

☎ 0365

The surf scene at Medewi is centred on one short lane from the road down to the waves. There are a couple of places aimed at surfers (and their parents) and not much else.

Along the main road, a large sign points down the paved road (200m) to the surfing mecca of Pantai Medewi. The 'beach' is a stretch of huge, smooth grey rocks interspersed among round black pebbles. Think of it as a reflexology course. It's a placid place where cattle graze by the beach. Medewi is noted not for its beach but for its *long* left-hand wave – and there is little else here.

SLEEPING & EATING

Some places for the Medewi surf break are right on the one main lane. Others are along the coast to the east and west. For a casual meal, some of the finest fare is freshly stir-fried and served up at a cart right by the beach.

Homestay CSB (Pulukan; r 70,000Rp) Some 2km east of the Medewi surf break at Pulukan, Homestay, signposted from the highway on the ocean side, has nice bungalows with rice-paddy views and sea views in the near distance.

Gede Bungalow (☎ 081-23976668; Pulukan; r 70,000Rp) Only 100m from the beach, Gede Bungalow has rice-barn style cottages set amid rice paddies. To reach it, go past Homestay CSB above and take the first right. It's the first building on the left.

Mai Malu Restaurant & Guesthouse (☎ 43897; s/d 60,000/80,000Rp) Near the highway on the

SCENIC ROUTES TO THE NORTH COAST

You can cross between Bali's south and north coasts via **Pupuan**, well west of the two main cross-island routes (via Kintamani and Bedugul in the central mountains). From the Denpasar-Gilimanuk road, one road goes north from **Antosari** and another road goes north from **Pulukan**; the two roads meet at Pupuan then drop down to Seririt, west of Lovina.

The road from Antosari starts through rice paddies, climbs into the fragrant spice-growing country via **Sanda** and then descends through the coffee plantations to Pupuan. From Pupuan, if you continue 12km or so towards the north coast you reach Mayong, where you can turn east to Munduk and on to Danau Bratan.

The Pulukan-Pupuan road climbs steeply up from the coast providing fine views back down to the sea. The route also runs through spice-growing country – you'll see (and smell) spices laid out on mats by the road to dry. After about 10km and just before Manggissari, the narrow and winding road actually runs right through **Bunut Bolong** – an enormous tree that forms a complete tunnel (the *bunut* is a type of ficus; *bolong* means 'hole').

Further on, the road spirals down to Pupuan through some of Bali's most beautiful rice terraces.

It is worth stopping off for a walk to the magnificent **waterfalls** near Pujungan, a few kilometres south of Pupuan. Follow signs down a narrow, rough road and then walk 1.5km to the first waterfall, it's nice but before you say 'is that all there is?' follow your ears to a second that's 50m high.

Wind up the exhilarating day with a stay at **Sanda Bukit Villas & Restaurant** (☎ 0828 369 137; www.sandavillas.com; bungalows from US\$100; 📍 📍) In the foothills of Gunung Batukau, 8km south of Pupuan at Sanda, this showplace of a boutique hotel has a large infinity pool that seems to disappear into the rice terraces. The engaging owners will recommend many walks in this beautiful area.

Medewi side road, Mai Malu is a popular hang-out, serving crowd-pleasing pizza, burgers and Indonesian meals in its modern, breezy upstairs eating area. Dishes range from 10,000Rp to 35,000Rp. The three rooms have cold water and fans. Other cheapies huddle nearby.

Medewi Beach Cottages (☎ 40029; r US\$10-60; 🏠 🚿 🚿) There's a lively two-storey building on the western side of the road with seven second-rate cold-water rooms aimed at surfers and a posher wing on the other side that might be the choice of their parents (no matter how old the surfer). The spiffy side features satellite TV and lush grounds, but security measures have obstructed what should be a good view.

Puri Dajuma Cottages (☎ 43955; www.dajuma.com; r US\$70-90; 🏠 🚿 🚿) Coming from the east, you won't be able to miss this seaside resort, thanks to its prolific signage. Happily, the 18 large rooms actually live up to the billing. Bathrooms are both inside and out, and its location on a pounding bodysurfing break is dramatic. Pantai Medewi is a 2km walk west. Ask for a deal on the listed rates.

Pura Rambut Siwi

Picturesquely situated on a cliff-top overlooking a long, wide stretch of black-sand beach, this superb temple shaded by flowering frangipani trees is one of the important sea temples of West Bali. Like Pura Tanah Lot and Pura Ulu Watu, it was established in the 16th century by the priest **Nirartha**, who had a good eye for ocean scenery. Legend has it that when Nirartha first came here, he donated some of his hair to the local villagers. The hair is now kept in a box buried in this temple, the name of which means 'Worship of the Hair'. Unlike Tanah Lot, it remains a peaceful and little-visited place (which means you should put a change to that).

The caretaker rents sarongs for 2000Rp (see the boxed text, p42) and is happy to show you around the temple and down to the beach. He then opens the guest book and requests a donation – about 10,000Rp is a suitable amount (regardless of the much higher amounts attributed to previous visitors).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The temple is between Air Satang and Yeh Embang, at the end of a 300m side road. You'll find it's well signposted, but look for the turn-

off near a cluster of warung on the main road. Any of the regular bemo and buses between Denpasar (Ubung terminal) and Gilimanuk will stop at the turn-off.

NEGARA

☎ 0365

Set amid the broad and fertile flatlands between the mountains and ocean, Negara is a prosperous little town, and useful for a pit stop. Although it's a district capital, there's not much to see. The town springs to life when the famous bull races (below) are held nearby. There's a hospital, police station, post office and a wartel. Most banks change money and have international ATMs.

Sleeping & Eating

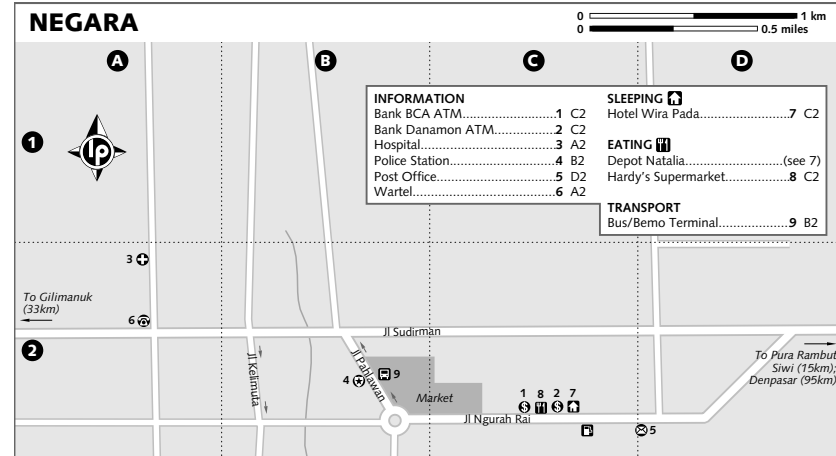
The main road bypasses the town to the north – you'll need to turn in to the main drag, Jl Ngurah Rai. There are assorted warung in the market area.

Hotel Wira Pada (☎ 41161; Jl Ngurah Rai 107; r with fan/air-con 85,000/125,000Rp; 🚿) There are 10 basic rooms around a nice little plant-filled courtyard. The best rooms have little terraces.

BULL RACES

This part of Bali is famous for the bull races, known as *mekeprung*, which culminate in the Bupati Cup in Negara in early August. The racing animals are actually the normally docile water buffalo, which charge down a 2km-long stretch of road or beach pulling tiny chariots. Gaily-clad riders stand or kneel on top of the chariots forcing the bullocks on, sometimes by twisting their tails to make them follow the curve of the makeshift racetrack. The winner, however, is not necessarily first past the post. Style also plays a part and points are awarded for the most elegant runner. Gambling is not legal in Bali, but...

Important races are held during the dry season, from July to October. Occasional races are set up for tourist groups at a park in Perancak on the coast, and minor races and practices are held at several Perancak and other sites on Sunday mornings, including Delod Berawan and Yeh Embang. Check with your hotel or the **Jembrana Government Tourist Office** (☎ 41210, ext 224) for details.



Depot Natalia (☎ 42669; Jl Ngurah Rai 107; dishes 5000-20,000Rp) In front of Hotel Wira Pada, the Depot is bright and clean, and has a large, tasty Indonesian menu.

Hardy's Supermarket (☎ 40709; Jl Ngurah Rai; 🚿) Hardy's has a popular indoor food court with several stands wok-ing up all manner of fresh, cheap chow. Dishes are generally under 4000Rp. This large supermarket has the best selection of goods in western Bali.

Getting There & Away

Most bemo and minibuses from Denpasar (Ubung terminal) to Gilimanuk drop you in Negara (20,000Rp).

AROUND NEGARA

At the southern fringe of Negara, Loloan Timur is the largely Bugis community (originally from Sulawesi) that retains 300-year-old traditions. Look for the distinctive houses on stilts, some decorated with wooden fretwork.

To reach **Delod Berawan**, turn off the main Gilimanuk–Denpasar road at Mendoyo and go south to the coast, which has a black-sand beach and irregular surf. You can see bull-race practices Sunday mornings at the nearby football field.

Perancak is the site of Nirartha's arrival on Bali in 1546, commemorated by a dignified limestone temple, **Pura Gede Perancak**. Bull races are run at **Taman Wisata Perancak** (☎ 0365-42173), and Balinese buffets are sometimes staged for organised tours from South Bali. If you're

travelling independently, give the park a ring before you go there. In Perancak, ignore the sad little zoo and go for a walk along the picturesque fishing harbour.

Once capital of the region, **Jembrana** is the centre of the *gamelan jegog*, a gamelan using huge bamboo instruments that produce a very low-pitched, resonant sound. Performances often feature a number of gamelan groups engaging in musical contest. To see and hear them in action, time your arrival with a local festival, or ask in Negara where you might find a group practising.

BELIMBINGSARI & PALASARI

Two fascinating religious towns north of the main road are reason enough for a detour.

Christian evangelism on Bali was discouraged by the Dutch, but sporadic missionary activity resulted in a number of converts, many of whom were rejected by their own communities. In 1939 they were encouraged to resettle in Christian communities in the wilds of West Bali.

Palasari is home to a Catholic community which boasts a huge church largely made from white stone. From the right angle it blots out the sun and is set on a large town square. It is really rather peaceful and with the gently waving palms, it feels like old missionary Hawaii rather than Hindu Bali. The church does show Balinese touches in the spires, which resemble the *meru* in a Hindu temple, and features a façade with the same shape as a temple gate.

Belimbing Sari was established as a Protestant community, and now has the largest Protestant church in Bali, although it doesn't reach for the heavens the way the church does in Palasari. Still, it's an amazing structure, with features rendered in a distinctly Balinese style – in place of a church bell there's a *kulkul* (hollow tree-trunk warning drum) like those in a Hindu temple. The entrance is through an *aling-aling*-style (guard wall) gate, and the attractive carved angels look very Balinese. Go on Sunday to see inside.

For a near religious experience you might consider staying at **Taman Wana Villas & Spa** (☎ 0365-40970; www.bali-tamanwana-villas.com; Palasari; r from US\$150; ♿ ♿), a striking 2km-drive past the Palasari church. This architecturally stunning boutique resort has 27 rooms in unusual round structures. Everything is very luxurious and you really are away from it all. Views are panoramic, get one of the rice fields.

These villages are north of the main road, and the best way to see them is on a loop with your own transport. About 17km from Negara, look for signs for the Taman Wana Villas. Follow these for 6.1km to Palasari. From the west, look for a turn for Belimbing Sari, some 20km southeast of Cekik. A good road leads to the village. Between the two towns, tackle the thicket of little but passable lanes. You'll get lost but soon get set straight by anyone you see.

CEKIK

At this junction one road continues west to Gilimanuk and another heads northeast towards Lovina. All buses and bemo to and from Gilimanuk pass through Cekik.

Archaeological excavations here during the 1960s yielded the oldest evidence of human life in Bali. Finds include burial mounds with funerary offerings, bronze jewellery, axes, adzes and earthenware vessels from around 1000 BC, give or take a few centuries. Look for some of this in the **Museum Situs Purbakala Gilimanuk** (p283).

On the southern side of the junction, the pagoda-like structure with a spiral stairway around the outside is a **war memorial**. The memorial commemorates the landing of independence forces in Bali to oppose the Dutch, who were trying to reassert control of Indonesia after WWII.

Cekik is home to the park headquarters of the Taman Nasional Bali Baratright.

TAMAN NASIONAL BALI BARAT

☎ 0365

Call it nature's symphony. Most visitors to Taman Nasional Bali Barat (West Bali National Park) are struck by the mellifluous sounds from myriad birds with a nice riff from the rustling various trees.

Bali's only national park covers 19,000 hectares of the western tip of Bali. An additional 55,000 hectares are protected in the national park extension, as well as almost 7000 hectares of coral reef and coastal waters. Together this represents a significant commitment to conservation on an island as densely populated as Bali.

It's a place where you can hike through forests, coastal the island's best diving and explore coastal mangroves.

Although you may imagine dense jungle, most of the natural vegetation in the park is not tropical rainforest, which requires rain year-round, but coastal savannah, with deciduous trees that become bare in the dry season. The southern slopes receive more regular rainfall, and so have more tropical vegetation, while the coastal lowlands have extensive mangroves.

There are more than 200 species of plant growing in the park. Local fauna includes black monkeys, leaf monkeys and macaques (seen in the afternoon along the main road near Sumber Kelompok); rusa, barking, sambar, Java and mouse deer (*muncak*); and some wild pigs, squirrels, buffaloes, iguanas, pythons and green snakes. There were once tigers, but the last confirmed sighting was in 1937 – and that one was shot. The bird life is prolific, with many of Bali's 300 species found here, including the very rare Bali starling.

Just getting off the road a bit on one of the many trails (see opposite, transports you into the heart of nature. One discordant note: hikes in fuel prices mean that there are lots of people selling firewood snatched from the forest along the road.

Information

The **park headquarters** (☎ 61060; ⏰ 7am-5pm) at Cekik displays a topographic model of the park area, and has a little information about plants and wildlife.

The small **Labuhan Lalang visitors centre** (☎ 8am-3pm) is located on the northern coast, where boats leave for Pulau Menjangan.

You can arrange trekking guides and permits at either place, however there are always a few characters hanging around and determining who is an actual park official can be like finding a Bali starling: difficult.

The main roads to Gilimanuk go through the national park, but you don't have to pay an entrance fee just to drive through. If you want to stop and visit any of the sites within the park, you must buy a ticket (2500Rp).

Sights & Activities

By land, by boat or by water, the park awaits exploration.

TREKKING

All trekkers must be accompanied by an authorised guide. It's best to arrive the day before you want to trek, and make inquiries at the park offices in Cekik or Labuhan Lalang.

The set rates for guides in the park depend on the size of the group and the length of the trek – with one or two people it's 150,000Rp for one or two hours, 200,000Rp for three or four hours, and 400,000Rp for five to seven hours; with three to five people it's 250,000Rp,

300,000Rp or 500,000Rp. Transport and food are extra and all the prices are negotiable. Early morning, say 6am, is the best time to start – it's cooler and you're more likely to see some wildlife.

Although you can try to customise your hike, the guides are most familiar with the four listed here. If once you're out you have a good rapport with your guide, you might consider getting creative.

Gunung Kelatakan (Mt Kelatakan) From Sumber Kelompok, go up the mountain (698m), then down to the main road near Kelatakan village (six to seven hours). You may be able to get permission from park headquarters to stay overnight in the forest – if you don't have a tent, your guide can make a shelter from branches and leaves which will be an adventure in itself. Clear streams abound in the dense woods.

Kelatakan Starting at the village, climb to the microwave tower, go down to Ambyasari and get transport back to Cekik (four hours). This takes you through the forested southern sector of the park. From the tower you get a feel for what much of Bali looked like centuries ago.

Prapat Agung From Sumber Kelompok, you can trek around here, via the Bali Starling Pre-Release Centre and Batu Lucin – but only from about June to September, when the sensitive Bali starlings move further inland (allow at least five hours). It's easier and quicker to access the peninsula by chartered boat from Gilimanuk where you will see the mangroves and drier savannah landscape.

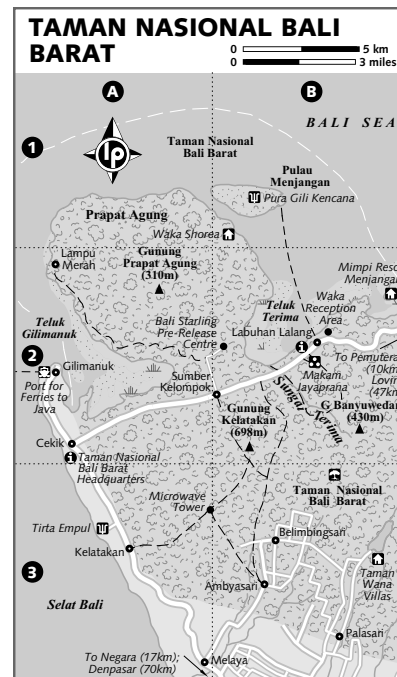
Teluk Terima (Terima Bay) From a trail west of Labuhan Lalang, hike around the mangroves here. Then partially follow the Sungai Terima into the hills and walk back down to the road along the steps at Makam Jayaprana. You might see grey macaques, deer and black monkeys (allow two to three hours).

BOAT TRIPS

The best way to explore the mangroves of Teluk Gilimanuk or the west side of Prapat Agung is by chartering a boat (maximum of two people) for about 150,000Rp per boat per hour. You can arrange this at either of the park offices. A guide will cost another 150,000Rp. This is the ideal way to see bird life, including kingfishers, Javanese herons and, very, very rarely, Bali starlings.

DIVING

Pulau Menjangan is Bali's best-known dive area, with a dozen distinct dive sites. The diving is excellent – there's lots of tropical fish (including clown fish, parrot fish, sharks and barracuda), soft corals, great visibility (usually), caves and a spectacular drop-off.



ON A WING & A PRAYER

Also known as the Bali myna, Rothschild's mynah, or locally as *jalak putih*, the Bali starling is perhaps Bali's only endemic bird (opinions differ – as other places are so close, who can tell?). It is striking white in colour, with black tips to the wings and tail, and a distinctive bright blue mask. These natural good looks have proven to be a major problem as the bird has been poached into virtual extinction. On the black market, Bali starlings command US\$7000 or more.

The wild population has been estimated to be a dozen or none – well below the number needed for sustainable reproduction if that's even possible. In captivity, however, there are hundreds if not thousands. Unfortunately the bird is so docile that a mass escape seems unlikely.

The internationally supported Bali Starling Project attempted to rebuild the population by re-introducing captive birds to the wild. At the Bali Starling Pre-Release Centre, formerly caged birds were introduced to the food sources of the natural environment and encouraged to nest in native trees, before being released around Taman Nasional Bali Barat (West Bali National Park). This proved impossible. Despite heroic efforts by some staff members, birds were often killed by predatory falcons, while countless others were stolen from the centre by armed thieves.

Today international support for the project has faded. There is talk among scientists of starting another at a double-secret location on Nusa Penida but plans haven't jelled.

It's possible to visit the **Pre-Release Centre** (🕒 8am–3pm). Some 6km off the main road through the park, the compound is supposedly closed to visitors, but with great sincerity – and possibly 100,000Rp – you might talk your way in to see the remaining birds. Whatever you do, don't fall for suggestions that you need to go through the guides at the park information offices. Should this happen you'll feel like a Bali starling (or an egg): poached.

Near Ubud, the Bali Bird Park (p205) has large aviaries where you can see Bali starlings. The park was one of the major supporters of efforts to reintroduce the birds into the wild.

Unfortunately, the coral has suffered somewhat from coral bleaching (caused by warm water during the 1998 El Niño event) but it is recovering.

Divers who like wall diving will love it here. Most of the dive sites are suitable for all experience levels except for Anker Wreck, a mysterious sunken ship that challenges even experts. The closest and most convenient dive operators are found at Pemuteran (p269) and Lovina (p263).

PULAU MENJANGAN

This uninhabited island boasts what is thought to be Bali's oldest temple, **Pura Gili Kencana**, dating from the Majapahit period in Java. You can walk around the island in about an hour, but the attractions are mainly underwater. Snorkellers can find some decent spots not far from the jetty – ask the boatman where to go. Dive sites are dotted all around the island, so it's worth discussing the possibilities with the dive master when you arrange the trip.

MAKAM JAYAPRANA

A 20-minute walk up some stone stairs from the southern side of the road, a little west of

Labuhan Lalang, will bring you to Jayaprana's grave. There are fine views to the north at the top. Jayaprana, the foster son of a 17th-century king, planned to marry Leyonsari, a beautiful girl of humble origins. The king, however, also fell in love with Leyonsari and had Jayaprana killed. Leyonsari learned the truth of Jayaprana's death in a dream, and killed herself rather than marry the king. This Romeo and Juliet story is a common theme in Balinese folklore, and the grave is regarded as sacred, even though the ill-fated couple were not deities.

Sleeping

Park visitors will want to spend the night as close to the park as possible in order to get an early start. Gilimanuk (p284) is closest and has basic choices. Much nicer are the luxury hotels in Labuhan Lalang (opposite). The best all-around choice is in Pemuteran (p270), 12km further east.

There is a free camping at the park headquarters in Cekik (p280). The grounds are not pristine, but the bathroom is clean enough and the toilets decent. A gratuity to the staff is greatly appreciated. You'll need some sort of gear, however.

Getting There & Away

The national park is too far away for a comfortable day trip from Ubud or South Bali, though many dive operators do it. You'll want to stay at one of the places suggested under Sleeping, opposite).

If you don't have transport, any Gilimanuk-bound bus or bemo from North or West Bali can drop you at park headquarters at Cekik (those from North Bali can also drop you at the Labuhan Lalang visitors centre).

LABUHAN LALANG

To catch a boat to Pulau Menjangan, head to the jetty at this small harbour in the national park (opposite). There's also a small park visitors centre (p280), warung and a pleasant beach 200m to the east. Some of the warung rent snorkelling gear (50,000Rp for four hours) and can point out the best sites.

Local boat owners have a strict cartel and fixed prices: it costs 250,000Rp for a four-hour trip to Menjangan, and 20,000Rp for each subsequent hour, in a boat holding 10 people (or five scuba divers with equipment). A guide costs an additional 60,000Rp.

Sleeping

The choices are quite luxurious. All have dive operations.

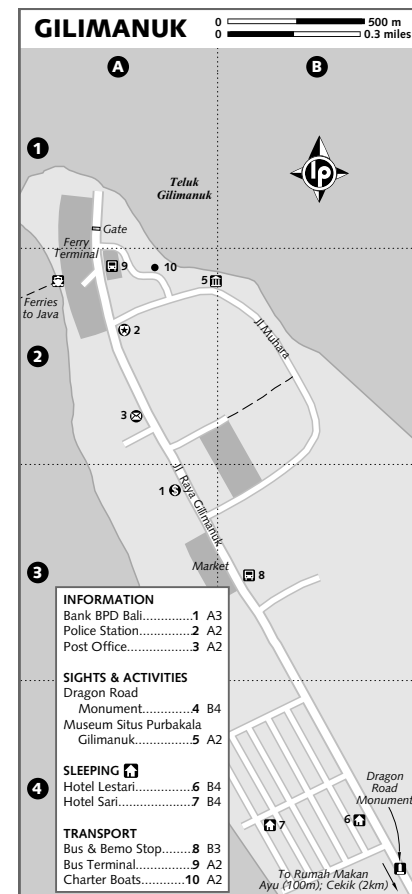
Mimpi Resort Menjangan (☎ 0362-94497, 0361-701070; www.mimpi.com; r US\$95, villas US\$195-355; 🚰 🚿 🚻) At isolated Banyuwedang, this 24-unit resort has a large site extending down to a small, mangrove-fringed, white-sand beach. The rooms have a stark, simple design with open-air bathrooms. Villas have a hot-spring tub and their own private courtyard; some have a pool.

Waka Shorea (☎ 0362-94666; www.wakaexperience.com; units from US\$165; 🚰 🚿 🚻) Located in splendid isolation in the park, Waka Shorea is a 10-minute boat ride from the hotel's reception area 100m east of Labuhan Lalang. It's a boutique resort, with units built on stilts among forest. The emphasis here is on nature, whether through diving, trekking or bird-watching.

GILIMANUK

☎ 0365

Gilimanuk is the terminus for ferries that shuttle back and forth across the narrow strait to Java. Most travellers to or from Java can get an onward ferry or bus straight away,



and won't need to stop in Gilimanuk. The museum is the only attraction – the town is really a place one passes through quickly. It has the closest accommodation to the national park if you want to start a trek early.

Information

There is a Bank BDP Bali (without ATM) on Jl Raya, a post office, a police station and wartel, but not many shops or other services.

Sights

This part of Bali has been occupied for thousands of years. The **Museum Situs Purbakala Gilimanuk** (☎ 61328; donation 5000Rp; 🕒 8am–4pm Mon–Fri) is centred on a family of skeletons thought to be 4000 years old, which were found locally

in 2004. The museum is 500m south of the ferry port.

Stop anywhere along the north shore of town to see the huge clash of waves and currents in the straight. It's dramatic and good reason *not* to have that dodgy duck dish if you're about to board a ferry.

Sleeping & Eating

Good sleeping choices here are thin on the ground. There's nothing good close to the ferry terminal, but things improve as you go west. The best food is at the bus station warung.

Hotel Lestari (☎ 61504; r 65,000-325,000Rp; 🏠) From fan-cooled singles to air-con suites you have your choice of basic accommodation at this 25-room place that feels oddly suburban.

Hotel Sari (☎ 61264; r 100,000Rp, with air-con 175,000Rp; 🏠) Among the best of the dubious lot of hotels. On the ocean side of Jl Raya, it

has basic rooms, although the karaoke bar next door can be invasive.

Warung Men Tempeh (🕒 10am-4pm) Known for its succulent and spicy *ayam betutu* (chicken in spices).

Getting There & Away

Frequent buses hurtle along the main road between Gilimanuk's huge bus depot and Denpasar's Ubung terminal (25,000Rp), or along the north-coast road to Singaraja (20,000Rp).

To get to and from Ketapang on Java (30 minutes), **car ferries** (adult/child 4300/2900Rp, car & driver 81,500Rp; 🕒 24hr) are the main reason method of transport.

Getting Around

At the ferry, bemo and bus terminals, you can get an *ojek* (motorcycle that takes passengers), charter car or even a *dokar* (pony cart) for a negotiable 8000Rp.