

BALI, INDONESIA

The Van Gogh anchors offshore near Padang Bay, Bali at 8am. Our tender boat arrives at the quayside at about 10.30, and we are met by smiling schoolchildren and Balinese dancers and musicians.



This welcoming scene is suddenly replaced however, as we step off the covered walkway, by a threatening mob of hawkers, who separate and surround us, pawing at our arms, and

placing unwanted items of jewellery around our necks. This is very intimidating for us, and other passengers, who flee into waiting taxis, to be whisked away from this mayhem.

We manage, in the melee, to team up with some fellow passengers, and we agree a price for a taxi to the centre of the island. The taxi guide then brings another 2 passengers into the taxi, so that he then has to travel in the back seat with us. We agree with him that the original price should stay the same.

Our trip inland is pleasant enough. The island is lush and green, and we pass banana plants, coconut palms, mango trees, and rice paddies complete with peasant farmers in straw hats. Buildings are mostly rough affairs, with thatched or corrugated tin roofs.

We pass a quarry where black sand is being loaded onto lorries. As we near the town of Ubud, we see smarter houses and ornate Buddhist temples of black volcanic rock.

Our taxi stops at a roadside temple, where we are given sarongs to cover our legs, (yes Owain too!) We are then able to walk freely around the temple, which consists of intricately carved, black rock structures, surrounded by grass and paving, and without a roof.





In the entrances of all the houses, we see parcels of food that have been left for the spirits. Sometimes these offerings are simply left on the ground, and yet others are placed in special baskets, on poles, outside the houses. Apparently these offerings are replaced daily.

Our guide insists on taking us to a silversmith, an art museum/shop and a wood carving shop, before we ask to be taken straight to the town.

Ubud is a pleasant place with a market, handicraft shops, monkey sanctuary and a number of restaurants.



As it is lunchtime, we choose one of these restaurants for our midday meal. The restaurant building is in the open air, with pillars supporting the roof. We have to walk up steps to the restaurant, and presume that it is designed this way so that it does not get flooded in the monsoon season.

We choose to try some of the local beer called Bitang, and a 2 course meal of local specialities. Owain has chicken satay on skewers, followed by pancake stuffed with fresh fruit and cream. Alvina tries the Gocek, (BBQ chicken in coconut milk), and Dadar (green pancakes stuffed with coconut and honey). The meal is delicious, and the bill for several drinks and food for 4 people, costs around £14.

After our meal we take a trip into the market, where we buy some T shirts, and Owain a "genuine" Breitling watch! The stall holders are not pushy at all, not a bit like the unruly gaggle at the port, and the people are friendly and smiling.

When we arrive back at the quayside, we can see the street sellers making towards our taxi, and suddenly our guide wants more than the agreed \$70 for our trip. We have in fact already given him an extra \$10 as a tip, but he wants more money for the extra 2 people he brought into the taxi earlier on.

We refuse, all 8 of us link arms, and we wade onward, through the mob, towards the waiting tender boat. Our taxi guide follows us to the boat, still demanding money, so Owain informs a uniformed port officer of the situation, and points out the vehicle that we had travelled in. Our guide has disappeared by this time, and the port officer says that she will look into the complaint. It is with some relief that we board the tender and return to the Van Gogh.

The authorities must know that they have a major problem in the port area, and this will discourage tourists from returning to this otherwise beautiful island, and its friendly people.

In fact, we are not sure whether we would come back to Bali, as it is not the upmarket, tropical paradise that we thought it would be.

Our next port of call is Darwin, Australia - back to civilisation.

