

KNOW THY NEIGHBOUR: BALI



Where is Bali?

Bali is one of Indonesia's most well-known islands in an archipelago nation that has so many islands even Indonesian officials can't be sure of the exact number. It has about 18,100 islands according to the Indonesian Consulate General, with Bali being one of the more sizeable islands, sandwiched between Lombok and Java.

What languages do they speak?

Most Balinese speak at least two languages, Balinese and Indonesian, with many speaking English as well.

What's there for visitors?

The question should really be what there isn't to do. Bali has cornered the market of Asia-bound fun-loving holidaymakers. There's an endless array of holiday attractions branching out from the tourist strip north and south of Ngurah Rai International Airport. While Kuta and its northern cousins of Legian, Seminyak and Canggu, along with Sanur and Nusa Dua on the east coast, lure visitors to a plethora of beachfront restaurants, beach clubs, swimming and surfing opportunities, seeing the 'real Bali' requires venturing further afield.

Take a mountain bike tour with Spice Roads Cycle Tours to explore the backroads by bicycle or board a traditional *pinisi* sailboat with Seatrek Sailing Adventures to see Bali

from a seafarer's perspective. Ubud is where you'll find Bali's more spiritual and creative side, with artisans selling exquisite artworks such as timber carvings, woven baskets, silver jewellery and batik fabrics.

What makes the economy tick?

Tourism is a major income source, generating approximately 60 per cent of gross regional domestic product.

What is the currency?

The Indonesian rupiah (IDR).

What are the highlights?

Bali's tourism has drastically evolved in the past decade or so, yet the quintessential Bali experience and the renowned friendliness of the island's people ensure travellers keep returning. The beaches – and adjacent plush hotels and villas – have long been a drawcard for surfers, beach walkers and flop-and-drop holidaymakers who are content to move between beachfront sunlounges where food and drink offerings are plentiful. Bali's notorious traffic is not getting any better and some luxury hotels (like Viceroy Bali in Ubud) are installing helipads, offering helicopter transfers between the airport and hotel for cashed-up travellers.

Anything unusual?

Bali literally sits at the crossroads of species evolution – the Wallace Line – as defined by Alfred Russel Wallace in 1859. The Wallace Line is an imaginary line that separates Bali from its near-neighbour Lombok along the Lombok Strait, and it marks the difference between species found east of the line in Australia and Papua New Guinea and west of the line in Asia. ■

'Know Thy Neighbour' is a column that puts the focus on countries near PNG or in the Pacific region.

