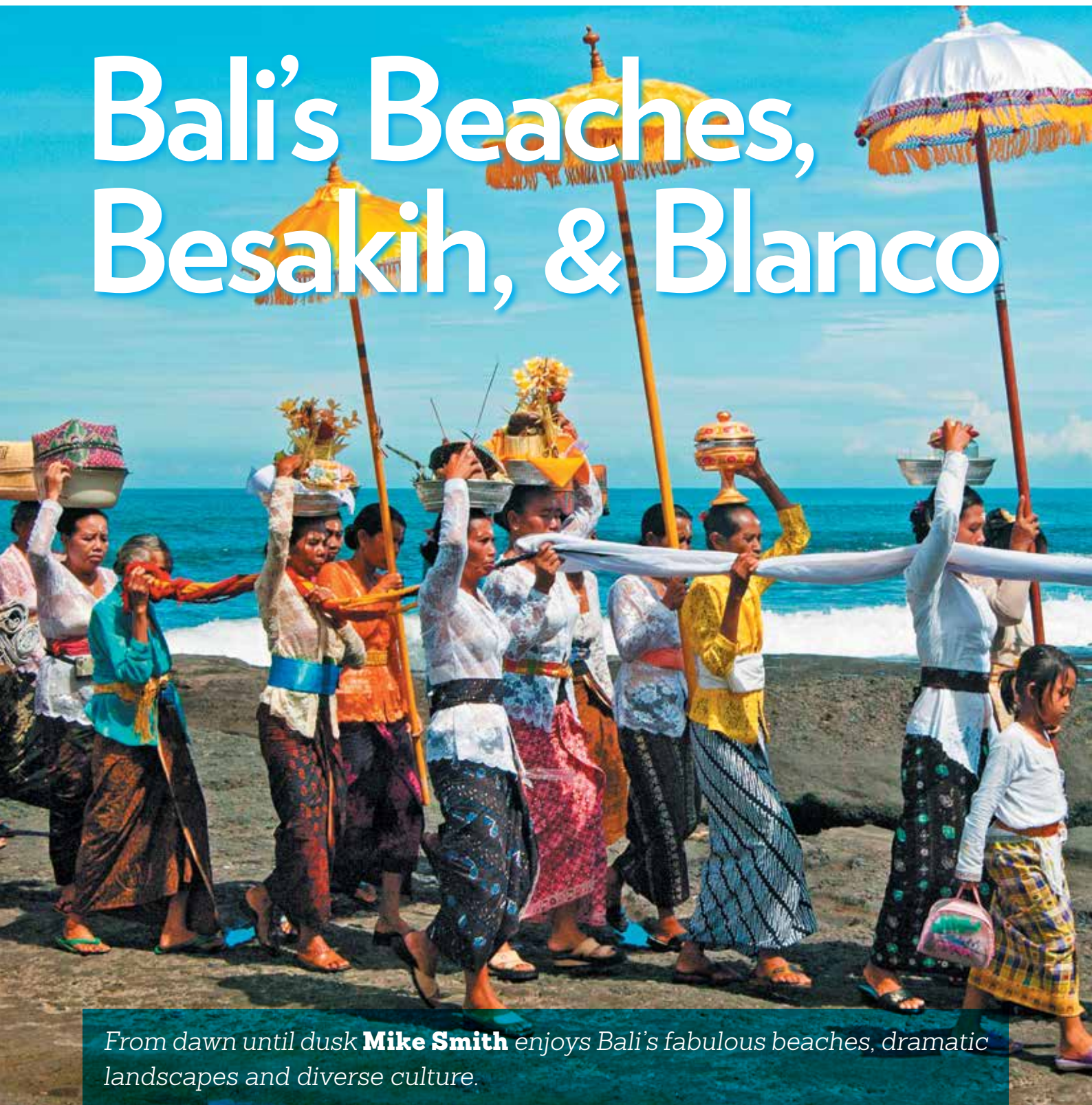


# Bali's Beaches, Besakih, & Blanco



*From dawn until dusk **Mike Smith** enjoys Bali's fabulous beaches, dramatic landscapes and diverse culture.*

## **Kuta Beach**

I never get tired of visiting Bali and Kuta Beach is always one of the first places on my itinerary. Donning my shorts I headed for the beach. Early in the morning it is empty except for a few keen joggers, dog walkers and surfers, late in the afternoon it can be packed with sunbathers, hawkers and people playing sports. I had my camera ready as

lifeguards charged out to sea, rehearsing their skills, and surfers setting out to catch the morning waves setting the scene for possible photos.

I can't just sit on the beach and read a book or get a tan, but I have been known to stop for a beer and snacks. I like to wander and people watch or study the seascape. Seeing



others expending energy seems to blow away my calories. Perhaps it's because walking on sand is a lot tougher than pounding the pavement.

### Banter over Beer

The eye candy was fine, the umbrellas were colourful and provided just enough shade to enjoy a nice cool Bintang beer.

Surfers performed their tricks and the hawkers bantered in a jovial manner as they tried to make a decent living.

Keep your eyes open because there are often dramatic ceremonies on Kuta Beach. One of my best memories is of an amazing parade of hundreds of beautifully dressed Balinese, including young girls in fabulous white and gold



outfits with floral headdresses, marching from the temple in the middle of the roundabout by Kuta Square to the beach to pray.

### Laid Back Tuban

I often walk significant distances on the beach. For example, I have strolled from Legian through Kuta and Tuban almost to Bali Airport.

Tuban is more laid back than Kuta, but very photogenic. Capturing colourful scenes is my prime objective. There is a small fishing community with friendly guys mending nets in the mornings and there are fewer hawkers. My legs were aching so I stopped for an hour long massage for the grand sum of \$5.00 Singapore dollars. Money well spent!

### Salt of the Earth

One of the most famous caves in Bali is Pura Goa Lawa, more commonly known as the Bat Cave because of the thousands of bats that hang out there. The Kuta Beach of the bat world, I suppose.

What isn't so well known is that there are a few traditional, labour intensive, salt making cottage industries less than a kilometre away. The owners welcome guests and are happy to chat about their many challenges including the seasonality of the work and the difficult task of succession as their children, not surprisingly, prefer to live the "city life".

In the dry season sea water is carried ashore in teku-teku, palm stem buckets, and splashed onto the raked, black volcanic sand. Once dried the salty sand

is collected, pressed and washed with more sea water and brine to form a concentrated brine solution.

This solution is then allowed to evaporate in drying troughs made from coconut tree trunks leaving bright, white crystals of salt. Like most tourists, I left with memories, photographs and a couple of large packets of freshly made salt.

### Dinner on the Beach

The fish market at the airport end of Jimaran Beach is interesting and there are a lot of small fishing boats close to shore, but the main reason to visit is the host of relatively pricey, but excellent, seafood restaurants that line the water's edge.

My dinner was at Ganesha Seafood Restaurant. The sea breeze, roving



minstrels and traditional dancers, not to mention lovely grilled fish, prawns, cold white wine and a nice sunset made it a great way to end the day.

### Ubud and Environs

Moving inland, The Grand Sunti Hotel Resort in Ubud was to be my home for the next two days and very pleasant it was too. The morning began with a trip to the Monkey Forest, which I feared would be terrible, but actually it was fascinating to see the interaction between the hundreds of monkeys and other monkeys and between monkeys and humans. Keep hold of your spectacles if you try to get a very close encounter as the monkeys do get playful if you intrude into their space!

Transport is a bit of a hassle in Ubud as taxis don't have meters, but it's only

a short ride to the Elephant Cave, so named because the demon like figure on the entrance supposedly looks like an elephant. Built in the 9th Century it's worth the short detour as indeed are the rarely visited simple stone carvings at Yeh Pulu.

Ubud is the home to art and handi-crafts in Bali and numerous artists have opened their houses and collections to the public. The works of flamboyant Don Antonio Blanco, a Spanish national, born in the Philippines who lived with his Balinese wife in what is now the Blanco Renaissance Museum, are beautifully presented. Mario, his proud son, continues the family tradition of painting, but prefers still life as a subject matter rather than voluptuous women that so fascinated his father.

### Ogoh-Ogoh

Sometimes I get lucky, not often, but when I do I try to take full advantage of the situation. This happened in Ubud when I came across a Hindu Nyenuk Ceremony, a massive procession carrying Ogoh-ogoh statue representations of the nine manifestations of the gods. Hundreds of ladies in yellow, white or multi coloured garments and men in red, white and other assorted colours, accompanied by drums and gamelan paraded through the streets to Pura Dalem Temple bringing all traffic to a standstill.

A great spectacle to watch, but hot work for the participants in the late afternoon! The rice terraces at Tegallang are very popular. There is a lovely small bar overlooking the terraces and if you go in the afternoon a local farmer



will happily pose for small change. The same guy has been doing this for twenty years, I have photos and his confirmation to prove it!

### Mother Temple

Besakih Temple and I have a love hate relationship. It is a massive complex on the slopes of Mount Agung and frequently has festivals, as during my recent trip, which makes it a joy to visit. However, it takes ages to get there and the hawkers, sarong sellers and 'guides' are extremely pushy, which sometimes dampens my mood. On balance it is a must see.

As is Mount Kintamani, where the hawkers are also aggressive, but ignore them and enjoy lunch at one of the restaurants at one of Bali's most famous viewpoints overlooking the

mountain and Batur Lake. The buffet food is average, but the beer is cold and the rugged scenery is outstanding.

### Goodnight from Tanah Lot

Tanah Lot has to be the most photographed temple in Bali. The traffic can be a pain, but I recommend getting there at least 90 minutes before sunset. Explore the market stalls and general views over the temple and surroundings before climbing the steps and selecting a restaurant of your choice, order a cold drink and simply enjoy the atmosphere as the sun sets. Paying a few dollars premium to sit in a deserted bar overlooking the temple, surfers and crowds is priceless.

Yes I know Bali has changed, but then again, so have most places and I wasn't going to turn down an opportunity to

visit. I'm glad I went because plenty of the old charm still remains despite a big increase in traffic jams! **A**

### POCKET GUIDE

Trip partly sponsored by Ministry of Tourism Republic of Indonesia

Tour Package  
**Great Day Holiday**  
[www.gdhibali.com](http://www.gdhibali.com)

Hotels  
**Holiday Inn Express Kuta Square**  
[www.hiexpress.com](http://www.hiexpress.com)

**Adhi Jaya Hotel**  
[www.adhijayahotel.com](http://www.adhijayahotel.com)

**The Grand Sunti Ubud**  
[www.thegrandsunti.com](http://www.thegrandsunti.com)