

# FROM SEA TO SUMMIT

Take a break from busy Bali with an island adventure and a sunrise climb up a sacred mountain

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**F**resh from landing in Bali, I arrive at Sanur Beach having just missed the fast boat to the island of Nusa Lembongan, 12km off the east coast of Bali. Soon, the locals, tourists and I are aboard the slow boat arriving 90 minutes later at Jungut Batu beach.

Accommodation on the island ranges from AU\$5 a night for basic rooms to AU\$200+ for villas on the hill. I haven't booked anything, but after a short stroll I stumble across Secret Garden Bungalows. Set amid a beautiful tropical garden and only 50m from the beach, they offer very comfortable rooms for just AU\$15 a night.

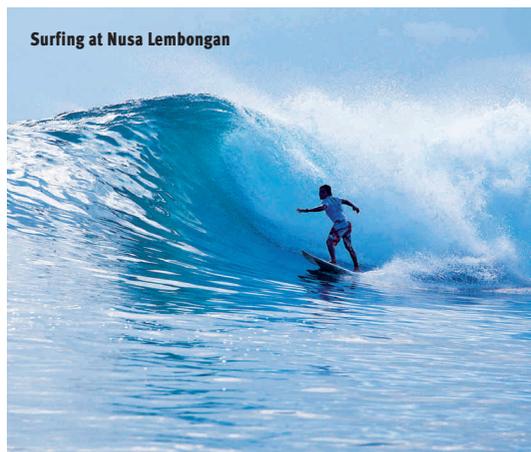
My first priority is a surf. Directly in front of Jungut Batu Beach are three breaks that cater for all levels of surfing: "Shipwrecks" and "Lacerations" at the northern end are best suited for intermediate to experienced surfers, while "Playgrounds", at the southern end, is perfect for beginners and kids.

At just 4.5km long and 2.5km wide, the island is best explored by bicycle or moped, which can be rented at most hotels and guesthouses. I hire a bicycle for AU\$3 a day and, with no cars or traffic to worry about, it's a relaxing and safe way to get around.

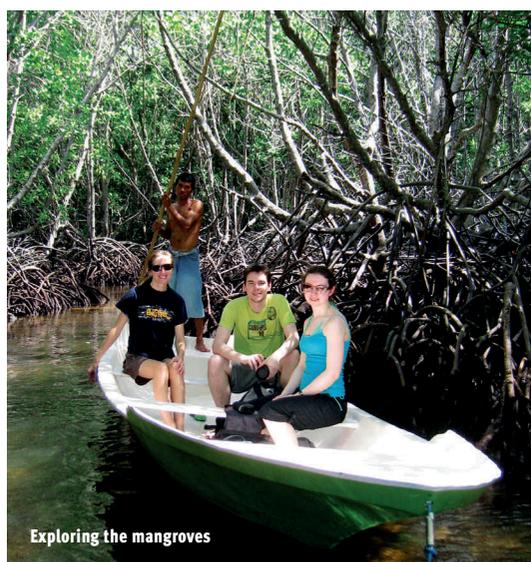
Many of Lembongan's best attractions lie offshore and numerous dive operators ferry tourists to the best spots. Tim Birkett, the owner of Secret Garden Bungalows, is an avid diver who also runs Big Fish Diving, a PADI & SSI dive resort.

I join a dive group going to Manta Cove, a new dive site Tim has recently discovered off Nusa Penida. Manta Cove is a shallow bay with a spectacular backdrop of towering vertical cliffs. While underwater I eyeball a hawksbill turtle and a small reef shark. It isn't long before the stars arrive — a group





Surfing at Nusa Lembongan



Exploring the mangroves



Collecting seaweed is a means of income for many locals

## TAKE ME THERE

### NUSA LEMBONGAN

Nusa Lembongan is accessible from Bali via four different boats. All boats leave from Jalan Hang Tuah at the northern end of Sanur Beach. Ticket offices can also be found on this road.

### SECRET GARDEN BUNGALOWS JUNGUT BATU GUNUNG AGUNG

Gunung Agung is a sacred mountain, so access is restricted during religious ceremonies, particularly in March and April. The climb should only be attempted during the dry season, May to October. The two most popular routes depart from Pura Pasar Besakih and Pura Pasar Agung. You'll need a guide, warm clothes, water, food, a good torch and hiking shoes. Aim to reach the summit by 7am to witness sunrise. **BALI EMERALD TOURING**  
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smattering of simple *warungs* (cafés) in the village behind Jungut Batu. Fresh seafood is at the top of many menus each day and it doesn't get any fresher or tastier than at Nyoman's Warung. Nyoman's husband, Made, goes spearfishing each day and the cheerful Nyoman grills the fresh fish over hot coals and serves it with her delicious spicy sambal and sautéed green vegies.

During my Bali visit, I've also decided to climb the imposing peak of Gunung Agung before I leave. Two of the island's most important temples, Pura Besakih and Pura Pasar Agung, sit perched high on its southern slopes. Rising to 3,014m, Agung's peak can be viewed from just about anywhere on the island on a clear day.

I arrive in Ubud on the day of the full moon with a forecast of clear skies. My good friend, Dewa, at Bali Emerald Touring, has arranged a driver and guide for the climb that night. I've only managed a couple of hours' sleep when Dewa arrives at 12.30am to drive us to Pura Pasar Agung Temple perched 1,500m high up on the southern slopes of Gunung Agung.

## You don't need to dive to experience the island's marine treasures

of black manta rays glide around us like giant underwater bats. It's a wonderful and surreal experience.

But you don't need to dive to experience the island's marine treasures. There's snorkelling off the beach, and many locals offer boat rides through the mangroves which boasts 13 different tree species, 30 birds species, lizards and crabs.

Most of the guesthouses and resorts have their own restaurants and there's a

## The Balinese consider Mount Agung to be the centre of the world

On the way, Dewa explains that Gunung Agung is Bali's highest and holiest mountain. "It's home of the Hindu gods and dwelling place of the ancestral spirits, it dominates the spiritual and physical life of the island. The Balinese consider Mount Agung to be the centre of the world and all temples in Bali point towards this holy mountain."

We arrive at the temple car park at about 2.30am, when the cool air quickly wakes us from our slumber. Our guide, Made, is waiting for us in the car park and soon has us all gasping for breath after the initial climb up the steep flight of steps to the temple's entrance. He gives us a much-needed breather when he lights offerings of incense sticks and prays to the gods for a safe journey.

It seems the gods are placated as the clouds lift and the full moon shines brightly, making the temple's intricate stone carvings visible. However, we



**FROM TOP:** Diving in Nusa Penida; on the summit of Mount Agung; the descent is just as hard on legs as the ascent

soon have our headlamps on as the start of the climb runs through dense forest on a rough and sometimes slippery track.

After an hour, we reach the open and bare solidified lava where the track basically disappears and our need for a local guide becomes apparent. The last 100m to the summit feels more like 1km. Fortunately I've brought a jacket as it's very cold on the summit and we still have to wait 30 minutes for the sunrise.

With the firewood he has carried, Made quickly has a small fire going and makes us hot coffee. As we all huddle around the small fire cupping our coffee, we watch the sun's first rays of light casting a shadow of the mountain on the clouds below and the imposing peak of Gunung Rinjani, on the neighbouring island of Lombok, jutting out above the clouds. We sit in awe and savour the magic. ★

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