

## Baruna's Blessings on Bali

By Jeanne Liebetrau and Peter Pinnock



Many villagers living on the northern coast of Bali give daily offerings of fruit and flowers to Baruna, Hindu God of the Sea. Baruna in turn must protect the sea, its inhabitants and ensure that there is sufficient fish to feed his worshippers. Not a simple task with a large population to feed and Mother Nature's temperament to placate in Bali, an Indonesian island located within the Pacific Ring of Fire.

Menjangan, on the north-west coast, is approximately a 4-hour taxi ride from Denpasar Airport. The route passes through fascinating villages steeped with

culture and Balinese Hinduism. Each family home has an ornately constructed Hindu temple where craft woven baskets filled with fruit, flowers and incense pay respect to good spirits. Those discreetly left on the ground are to pacify the bad spirits. The properties are walled with impressively carved wooden door entrances guarded by stone statues that prevent evil spirits from entering. Even shops, police stations, petrol garages and road intersections have a Hindu statue of worship.



The centre of Bali is mountainous with narrow windy roads that are bustling with scooters, the Balinese preferred mode of transport. Scooters carry everything from families to market crops or building materials. Some are transformed into mobile food stalls selling Indonesian delicacies such as nasi goreng or gado gado. The scenic route is inspiring - tailored terraced paddy fields, colourful flower farms and neat fruit and vegetable plantations.

Every inch of space is wisely put to use. High in the mountains is one of Bali's most holy temples, Pura Ulun Danu Bratan. Visitors pay a nominal donation to enter and walk through the immaculate gardens to the picturesque



shrines built on the edge of a lake. The lake is the crater of an extinct volcano 1400m above sea level. It's a peaceful environment despite the crowds of visitors. Not too far away is Belugal market where a wide variety of Balinese crafts such as wooden masks, bamboo mats, bowls and trays, elaborate kites and hand made paper are sold along with vividly coloured sarongs and the obligatory souvenir T-shirts. The market is famous for plants, flowers, fruits and exotic spices - including saffron and vanilla pods. Bargaining is a must.

The journey finally ends in Banyuwedang Bay. Mimpri Menjangan Resort is a green oasis on this dry side of Mount Agung. All the Balinese style rooms have thermal water from a natural hot spring piped into an outdoor hot spring tub. There is a also a large communal hot spring on the premises. The 45 degree water is said to promote cleansing, be both relaxing and rejuvenating, assist healing and have a soothing effect on psychosomatic and chronic disorders.



Menjangan Island, part of Bali Barat National Park, is a short boat ride from the resort. Here a park ranger assists Baruna in protecting the sea. Together they have done well to protect the reefs which are rich with hard corals in the shallows and filled with

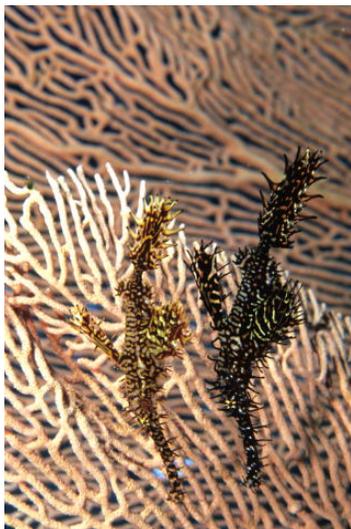
exquisitely coloured tropical fish.

The short wall leading to the dive site known as Garden Eel Point is covered with small seafans, soft corals and colourful squirts. Some large barrel sponges are home to funky looking hairy squat lobsters. On the edge of the reef a coral overhang provides protection for a school of glassfish. Hungry jackfish torpedo





into the swarming fish who instantly take asylum within the reef's configuration. Laying below, a few gluttonous coral rockcods cunningly wait for this opportunity of food being driven into their general direction.



The sandy slope above the drop off is pitted with holes occupied by garden eels. Stretching out of, yet never leaving their holes, the eels feed on drifting plankton. On approach the eels nervously sink beneath the sand. Shrimp gobies and their blind shrimp companions are unperturbed by the activity as they continually work at excavating the sands drifting into their subway homes. Nearby a coral bommie supports a community of harlequin ghost-pipefish. At least 5 can be seen on one bommie - each with different colouration and host. A black and white couple clash against a pink seafan, a cameo dressed female is

fashionably coordinated within the fronds of a leather coral and a rusty brown male is camouflaged by a matching crinoid.

The Anker Wreck is not far from the guardhouse on the island. This wreck lies in 45m with the anchor firmly wedged in the shallow water. It is believed she sank over a century ago after her chain broke. Her cargo of metal sheets now plastered with coral growth. The adjacent slope is frequented by green turtles, schools of butterflyfish, wrasses and surgeonfish. The shallow water is pristine with hard corals proving that the park is a worthwhile place to visit.



On the other side of the park is the not so secret, Secret Bay. Living below colourful traditional fishing craft moored to the black sand shore are weird and wonderful creatures. Secret Bay was so named by Takamasa Tonuzuka who first photographed its unusual and rare inhabitants, but kept their location a secret. The water can be 5 degrees colder than other areas of Bali due to nutrient rich upwellings from the deep trench

beyond the bay. In the shallow waters long spined black urchins play host to the beautiful Banggai cardinal fish. These rare fish are only found in Indonesian waters.



Their unusual fin markings resembling aboriginal art make them wanted specimens for aquarists. Other critters have found homes in broken chairs, old tyres, scrap metal and other arbitrary trash. More recently artificial reef structures have been erected. Numerous species of anglerfish balance perfectly on the cross bars of these metal frames. A huge school of striped catfish fills one cage structure. Densely packed together, the tight ball of catfish shimmy in a confusion of stripes, whiskers and poisonous fins. Though most critters take

advantage of the protective homes, the Caledonian stinger scorpionfish, flounders and numerous lionfish are sufficiently brave to roam the open sands. Filefish, pipefish and sedentary seahorses hide amongst the seagrasses. Expect the unexpected.



On North east side of Bali another Mimpi resort is literally a stones throw from the sea. Gunung Api erupted in 1963 throwing fist size black rocks on Tulamben beaches. Many lives were lost. Baruna must have been angry with Mother Nature. The Liberty Ship that had been laying on the beach since 1942 was pushed 50m into the sea. During WWII the ship was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine and suffered huge

damage. Attempts to tow her to port for repairs were abandoned when she took on too much water. She was deliberately run aground in order to salvage her cargo of rubber and railway parts. These days she is the most popular dive site in Bali and considering it is a shore entry dive, she is arguably the most accessible wreck in the world. Even though she was salvaged and broken in 2 by the volcanic eruption she is beautifully draped with soft corals, fans and sponges.

The Dropoff is accessed by swimming across the black sands in front of the outrigger fishing craft launch site. White sandperches stand out visibly against the volcanic sand. On the reef itself, a sunshine yellow warty frogfish waves his modified dorsal fin lure frantically trying to lure fish for his dinner. Hundreds of damsels





flit up and down the wall. The funnel of barrel sponges forms a good resting place for groupers while longnose hawkfish prefer the bushy hard corals or small sea fans. Goggle-eyed gobies peek out of reef holes. It is a busy reef with oodles of interesting critters waiting to be found.

But perhaps the Liberty Wreck is Baruna's temple. It certainly could resemble a place of worship for marine inhabitants. A sizeable giant barracuda with menacing teeth guards the boiler room; a group of oriental sweetlips gather in a corner, their plump lips moving as if rehearsing hymns and a congregation of big-eye jacks forge towards the foredeck as if in a religious procession. A ritual is performed as the jacks circle above the deck. Some of the followers rub their bodies on the rusting surface. Is this an act of respect for Baruna - will he continue to bless Bali's reefs?



Travel Advise: Commuting around Bali can take time. Stay close to the dive sites.

Travel Contact: <http://ww.mimpi.com>

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