

Bali

Off the beaten soul

There is a version of Bali that rarely makes it to Instagram. One that is not wrapped up in infinity pools or curated sunsets. Read on, and you may begin to see a different Bali, one that lives beyond the first thousand Google clicks.

In this spread,
One way to experience Ulun Danu Beratan Temple is by taking a *Jukung* (boat) out onto the lake; Capture the perfect moment at the famous Gates of Heaven; Nature surrounds the Sidemen landscape.



Sidemen, Bali's quiet soul

In the valleys of East Bali, Sidemen feels like how Ubud once was, before the wellness craze, chic boutiques, trendy restaurants, and gridlocked traffic redefined the island's pace. Life in Sidemen still moves to the rhythm of the land. Farmers thresh paddy by hand in terraced fields. Shrines rise solemnly between footpaths. It is a glimpse of Bali untouched by the rush.

At the heart of the village, silversmiths welcome guests into their workshops, guiding them through the slow, meditative process of crafting silver, an experience that mirrors the unhurried rhythm of Sidemen. Not far off, Gembleng Waterfall spills down the hillside, forming a natural pool that is perfect for cooling off under the midday sun.

Here, life slows, the noise fades, and Bali feels personal again.

Throughout the valley, eco-stays and boutique retreats blend effortlessly into the landscape. Some come with open-air spaces and private pools, others offer the simple pleasure of birdsong and misty morning views. Places like Wapa di Ume take it further, designed with harmony to the land, where wide terraces open to rice fields, tented suites echo the contours of the hills. From here, nature trails wind through Bali's timeless landscapes, past shrines and across rivers, tracing the quiet steps of daily life as it unfolds. It is a place in tune with the spirit of Sidemen.

Fiery rituals of East Bali

Every year, on the eve of Bali's Day of Silence, the island erupts in colour, chaos, and ritual.

All over Bali, communities build towering *Ogoh-Ogoh*, demonic effigies crafted from

bamboo and paper. Some are grotesque, with bulging eyes and snarling teeth. Others are satirical, poking fun at modern-day vices. All are destined to be paraded, then banished, to cleanse the island before the new year.

By sunset, the streets come alive. Torches blaze. Drums thunder. Barefoot men hoist the effigies on their shoulders, spinning them wildly to confuse and drive out evil spirits. Offerings pile high at roadside temples, and in Bali, nearly every junction has one.

For a raw and unfiltered experience, head to Singaraja or Amlapura. The rituals here are not performances, but sacred traditions and fuelled by generations of belief.

No tickets or guide required. Just follow the sound and let the rhythm lead you through one of Bali's most unforgettable nights.





Nyepi in Tulamben and beyond

The Balinese New Year does not begin with fireworks, but with silence. The airport shuts. Streets empty. Lights dim. This is *Nyepi*, a day of reflection, and spiritual reset.

After the fire and frenzy of *Ogoh-Ogoh* the night before, the sudden silence feels almost surreal.

Whether you are in the buzz of Canggu or deep in Ubud, *Nyepi* halts everything. Shops close. Everyone stays indoors. This is not just silence, it is a pause the whole island honours.

In places like Tulamben or Air Saneh, the sky comes alive with stars, free from artificial light. In Sidemen or villages near Bangli, the silence is deeper, broken only by leaves and birdsong.

The next morning, life returns slowly, and Bali finds its pace again.



In this spread, Decorative penjors line village streets during Galungan, a festival celebrating ancestral spirits; Worshippers gather for prayers at Besakih Temple, Bali’s holiest site; Green rice paddies stretch across the countryside, while Ogoh-Ogoh figures come alive during Nyepi Eve; Women in colourful kebaya walk in temple processions with grace and devotion.



Fly with Batik Air to Bali,
Indonesia 7x weekly
(Via Melbourne)

A sacred journey from Amed to Besakih

You will feel it the moment you arrive. Long bamboo poles called *penjor* draped with coconut leaves and offerings line every street, curving above like ceremonial arches. They sway gently in the breeze, signalling the arrival of ancestral spirits.

Galungan, held every 210 days, celebrates the return of ancestral spirits and the victory over evil. Ten days later, Kuningan is celebrated when the spirits are believed to return to heaven. Processions fill the streets. Women in lace *kebaya* (blouse) and *batik sarongs* (skirt) carry baskets of offerings, children trailing behind in ceremonial dress. Sweet *dodol* (sticky desert) and other festive treats are shared in honour of the day.

In smaller villages like Kubutambahan and Amed, the ceremonies feel deeply personal. Nothing geared for the tourists. Just a celebration elevated in spirit. Wander with quiet respect, pause by a family’s gate to watch, or sit gently at the edge of a prayer. Sometimes, you might be invited to observe a ritual at a family temple or even join in the celebration.

For a grander scene, visit Besakih Temple on the slopes of Mount Agung, where vibrant processions with waves of colour and devotion rise with the mountain paths.

Wherever you choose to witness it, Galungan and Kuningan offer something rare, a glimpse of Bali not designed for show, but lived with grace.



Wearing tradition

In Bali, dressing for a ceremony is more than formality. It is a sign of respect. Women wear a *kebaya*, *sarong*, and sash; men, a collared shirt, *sarong*, and *udeng* (traditional headgear). You will find these at local markets, where friendly vendors often help with proper styling. It is a simple gesture, but one that honours the culture and never goes unnoticed.

Final Thought

If you have only known Bali for its sunset and pool villas, perhaps it is time to come for something else. Plan around Galungan, Kuningan, or *Ogoh-Ogoh* and *Nyepi*. Be here when the processions fill the streets, or silence takes over. This is Bali beyond the brochures.

It is not the views that leave the impression. It is the hum of a prayer you do not understand, but feel anyway. It is the way Bali moves with rituals, rhythm, and with soul.

Bali’s Festival Calendar 2026

- 18 March: Ogoh-ogoh Parade
- 19 March: Nyepi
- 17 June: Galungan
- 27 June: Kuningan



CONTRIBUTOR

Shannim Mohd Sa’ad

Shannim Mohd Sa’ad is an adventurous traveller with a deep appreciation for diverse cultures and off-the-beaten-path destinations. Along her journeys, she enjoys riding motocross, Muay Thai training, and snowboarding. Writing is her passion, compelling to share her unique experiences. Follow her on Instagram @epicadventuress and her blog epicadventuress.com