



BALI BY BIKE

There's more than one way to discover the beauty of Bali, but doing it by mountain bike is a serene and environmentally friendly option. The routes cater for everybody and give a unique view of island life, reports **Laetitia Chanéac-Knight**.

Above: The Ubud Monkey Forest is a small nature preserve on the southern outskirts of Ubud. The forest is home to three temples, dating from around the 14th century, as well as three troops of macaque monkeys.

Thinking of Bali, mountain biking doesn't necessarily spring to mind. But it is one of the best ways to discover the island and its spectacular beauty. The small country roads and dirt tracks get you in touch with nature, the villages with their friendly inhabitants, and authentic Balinese life. Bali's vibrant culture is at its best far from the tourist trails, and that's exactly where the mountain bike tours go.

Thanks to the growing popularity of mountain biking the infrastructure is now in place to make this sport accessible to all. Some do it for fun, others enjoy the physical challenge, but all come back enthralled by the scenery. In Bali you are never too far from the start of a cycling track and, with a little preparation, mountain biking is truly for everyone.

One option is to rent a mountain bike on site and concoct a do-it-yourself tour. Locals are happy to provide useful information on the terrain, tracks and the weather. Don't forget about the rain, especially at altitude, as tracks can become impassable.

Fortunately, in Bali you're never too far from people if the going gets tough. A GPS is a useful tool to find your way around and locate tracks, while Google maps offer accurate contour lines, which help you understand the difficulty of a route.

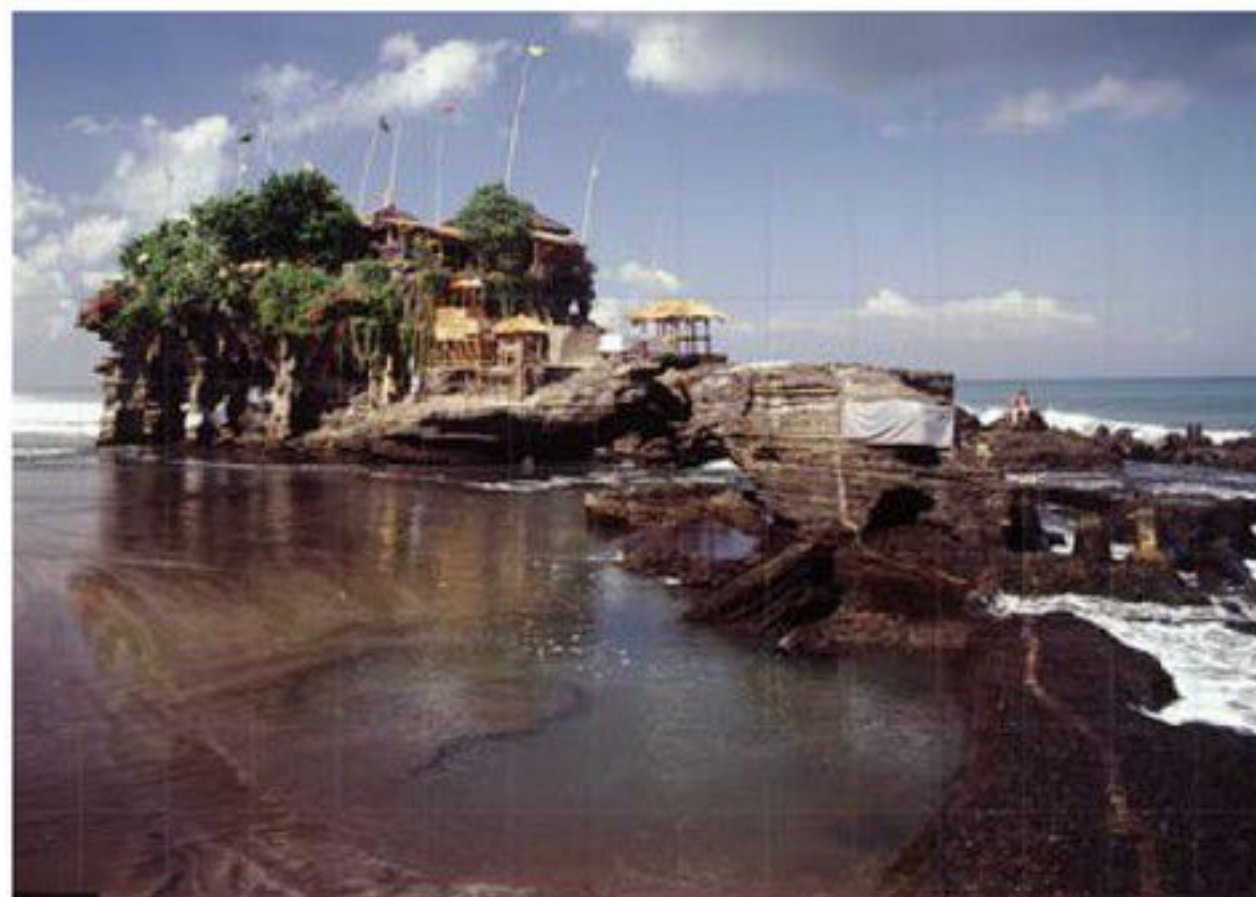
Most visitors, however, prefer to join a tour with one of the reputable organisations. These companies provide transport from hotels, a well-serviced mountain bike, food and drinks, equipment, insurance and an experienced guide. Itineraries

are usually graded from 1 to 5 on the difficulty scale and, regardless whether you are a complete amateur or a family with small ones, there's a tour for you.

During my stay I used the services of Régis Requis, a pioneer of mountain biking on the island, who founded Archipelago Adventure. Biking is his passion and he knows Bali, as well as Java, like the back of his hand. The company offers several tours that cater for all fitness levels and as a safety precaution a vehicle accompanies every trip.

Families enjoy the easy discovery rides that explore the island. As soon as kids can cycle and use a three-gear bike they're ready to tackle trips that stick to flatter grounds along small paths, rice fields or the beach. "I like all the things around me like trees, palm trees, little houses and monkeys. Rocky roads are hard and fun, but my favourite is cycling in the rice fields," was seven-year-old Marius' opinion.

Tanah Lot, with its famous temple, is an easy destination (Level 1) suitable for families or anyone with no previous



Clockwise from top: Renting a mountain bike and going on an organised tour is the best way of experiencing traditional Balinese life; The Level 2 tour from Bedugul to Jatiluwih is one of the most scenic and includes the famous terraced rice fields of Jatiluwih; The Pura Ulu Danau Temple is another sight close to Bedugul.

Top and above:

Level 1 tours stick to easy and level terrain and are suitable for everyone. One of the most popular destinations is Tanah Lot, a rock formation off the coast, that is home to the Pura Tanah Lot temple.

Top right: The Munduk to Pupuan tour is for cyclists with previous experience. The reward for extra effort is the Munduk waterfall and coffee and cocoa plantations that are seldom visited.

experience. In a day cyclists cover rice fields, stop at a dazzling beach to take a swim, visit a tile making workshop and a rice cooperative. Bali coffee and refreshments are provided along the way at local warungs (food selling spots) plus a tasty lunch at a traditional restaurant. What better way to go and see this sacred Balinese landmark?

Another Level 1 tour is Mount Batur to Ubud. The caldera offers splendid views of the volcano and lake and the smooth descent takes you through some of Bali's famous fruit orchards. You are guaranteed to see farmers tending their fields, school children in uniforms walking back home and families preparing their midday meal. With all five senses fully alert, cyclists can soak up the unique atmosphere of Bali, its nature and day to day life. Once in Ubud, a well-deserved lunch is served in a little Balinese restaurant with an unimpeded view of the rice fields.

The Level 2 tour from Bedugul to Jatiluwih in central Bali is probably the most popular thanks to its amazing scenery. Cyclists start their 2.5 hours

TRAVEL INFORMATION

Bali is a small island east of Java, Indonesia. Its tropical climate has distinct dry and rainy seasons. Temperatures range from 24 to 35°C with high humidity. The dry season runs from May to October and the rainy season from November to April. It is still pleasant to visit Bali during the rainy season but the high season is in July, August and around Christmas. Currency is the Indonesia Rupiah (\$1 = IDR8.96 approximately).

GETTING THERE

EMIRATES flies daily between Dubai and Jakarta.

RESOURCES

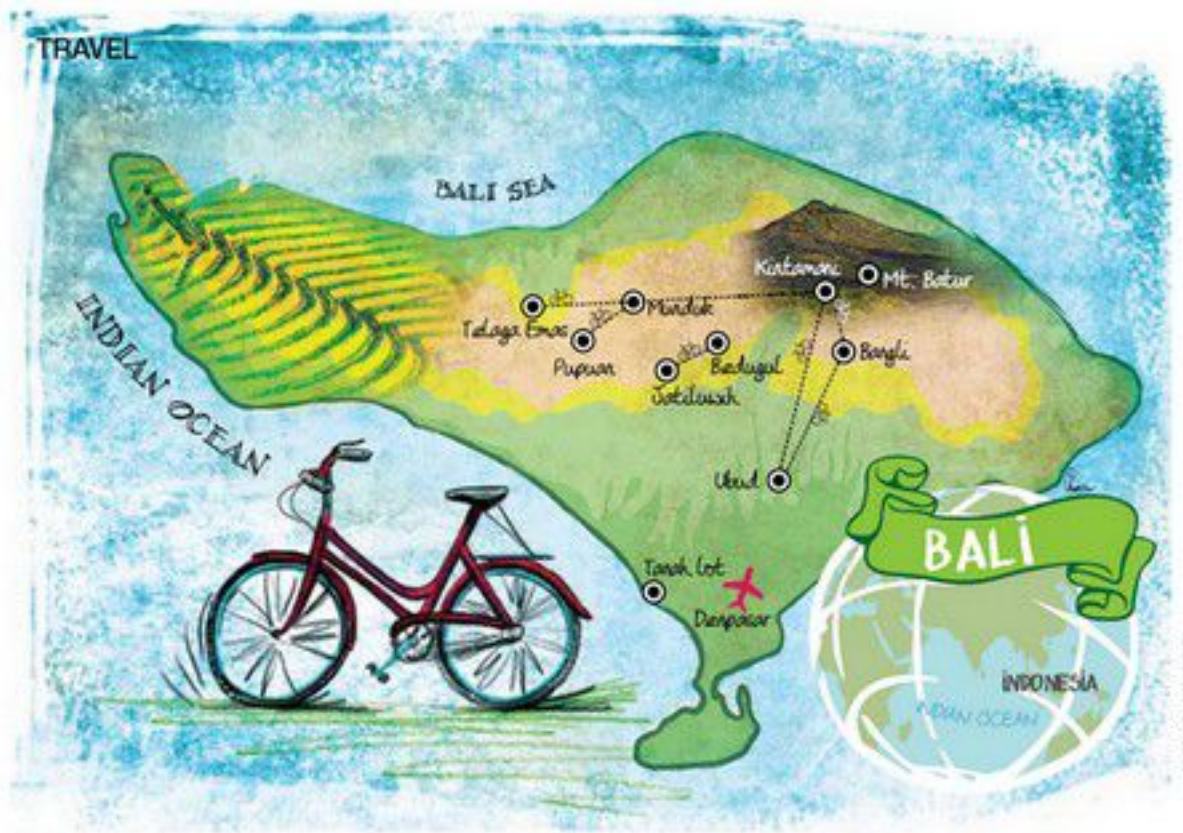
The Bali Tourism Board is a good start for planning your holiday at balitourismboard.org. For up-to-date information on what to see and do bali.com is an excellent resource.

FURTHER READING

MY LIFE IN BALI by Sandrine Soimaud is a great book for children and adults that explains all aspects of Balinese culture. Each page is beautifully illustrated with a watercolour.

LONELY PLANET BALI & LOMBOK offers practical information to explore the island.

BALI A TRAVELLER'S COMPANION is both a guide and a coffee table book. It covers fascinating background information and has accurate maps and many quality photographs.



descent 1,200 metres above sea level on a small track that winds its way through charming mountain villages before plunging into a thick birch forest that provides some welcome shade. Heading south, the route crosses incredible countryside areas including Jatiluwih and its famous ancestral terraced rice fields.

“The highlight of my holiday was definitely the full day mountain bike tour around Bedugul and Jatiluwih,” said David Shackleton, who was on his third visit to Bali. “The beauty of cycling is the total tranquility, far from the hustle and bustle of the main tourist areas. You can enjoy the smells, sounds and sights of real Balinese life and you can stop any time to watch people going about their regular life without it being a show for visitors. What I learnt and saw on this tour was better than any guidebook I have read before.”

At Level 3 on the difficulty scale the Munduk to Pupuan tour is for cyclists with previous experience of off-road cycling who enjoy the challenge of changing terrain. This track goes through coffee and cocoa plantations in a mountainous area that not many people know. It's up and downhill all day and definitely off the beaten track.

Aficionados usually opt for the Level 4 Kintamani to Telaga trip. This route was originally opened by mountain bikers and the variety of little forest tracks

Opposite page left: The macaques in the Ubud Monkey Forest might look cute, but they've been known to snatch sunglasses from unwary visitors.

Opposite page right: Kintamani, with its bustling market, is the start of a Level 3 tour that ends in Telaga.

combined with the breathtaking views of mountain peaks are the strong points of this tour. It is physical but cyclists with enough experience are rewarded by spectacular views of Mount Batur's crater, the Indian Ocean and a never-ending descent all the way to the coast.

If you have the experience and want something more daring then the Level 5 course from Mount Batur, at 1,600 metres above sea level, to Bangli and Ubud is the one for you.

TRAVEL INFORMATION

WHERE TO EAT

MOZAIC is a world-class restaurant and culinary school. Chef Chris Salans guarantees a unique experience for your taste buds in a stylish setting. Jl. Raya Sanggingan in Ubud (+62 361 975768). mozaic-bali.com

NAUGHTY NURI'S is run by an American-Indonesian couple and is highly popular for its delicious ribs and other BBQ. Jl. Raya Sanggingan in Ubud (+62 361 977 547).

IBU OKA'S WARUNG is the place to taste Babi Guling (suckling pig) in the best Balinese tradition. Cheap and always crowded. Jalan Tegal Sari No. 2 (+ 62 361 976345).

WHERE TO STAY

PRIVATE VILLAS are a popular choice in Bali. Prices range from affordable to expensive. Check out the comprehensive website. natanhospitality.com

KOMANEKA in Monkey Forest is an upscale hotel and a fabulous retreat in the centre of Ubud near to the shops and restaurants but yet close to nature. komaneka.com

TEGAL SARI HOTEL is a haven of peace a 15 minutes walk from the centre of Ubud. Set in rice fields, it ensures total relaxation with all the comforts. tegalsari-ubud.com

It consists mainly of challenging small tracks and includes going down some steps and fording small rivers for a real feel of adventure. The descent lasts two and a half hours with magnificent views all the way.

So whether you are in search of the authentic Bali, physical exercise or fun with family and friends, mountain biking is key to discovering the hidden side of Bali. It opens the doors to some of the most beautiful sights in Asia. ❖