

Bali Travel Guide and Review - Part 2

Balinese Castes

The Balinese Hindu religion necessitates a traditional caste system though it has never been as factious as its Indian root. This is for the most part due to the fact that over 90% of Balinese consist of to the lowest 'Sudra' caste, and in India would have been regarded as 'untouchable'. Given their dominance such mental attitudes in Bali would not be realistic. Notwithstanding these facts, inter-marriage continues to be rare and discouraged.

The three upper castes are collectively acknowledged as the 'Triwangsa' ('three peoples') consisting of Brahmana, Kesayatria and Wesia. Caste is specified by birth but is rarely reflected in a person's line of work, although only a Brahmana can become a Pedanda high priest, and only Brahmana may take the task of repairing masks from the 'Barong' dance as they harbour the ability to protect themselves from the evil spirits.

Balinese Names

Upon learning a Balinese friends name, you can establish some elements of his or her background. First Of All, the name will often indicate the cast to which they originate from. For instance, if you meet someone named Ida Bagus, you recognize they belong to the highest Brahmana caste or, if they are named Gusti, they will almost surely belong to the Wesia caste. The Balinese also name their children in order of birth. Together with a personal name, unique in the family, a Balinese child will be awarded a more common name. The firstborn is often Wayan or Putu while the second born generally carries the name of Made or Kadek. The third child may be Nyoman or Komang and the fourth is always Ketut; with the birth of a fifth child, the naming cycle begins again.

Children

The Balinese dote on their children, a devotion that no doubt leads to the calm and relaxed demeanour of the island's population. At birth the baby's umbilical cord is buried with offerings to protect them throughout their lives. Until the child reaches three months of age, they are permanently carried as it is considered unclean and disrespectful if they should touch the ground before that age. Balinese children are discouraged from crawling, believed to be only the actions of an animal, and learn to walk at a very young age. Upon reaching 105 days, the baby will be adorned with bracelets and anklets. A further 105 days later, a ceremony is held to signify their entry into adulthood. The passage through puberty is celebrated with a tooth filing ceremony, aimed to flatten any pointed teeth that may represent evil and designed to curb sinful emotions and actions such as greed, anger, jealousy, stupidity, and adultery.

Religion

Bali is a predominantly Hindu Island, surviving in an Islamic nation. Minority populations of Muslims, Christians and Buddhists are also found on the island.

Little is known of the founding of Hinduism in Bali though it doubtlessly involved the Indian traders who came to these parts for the spice trade over two thousand years ago. Given its physical isolation from the ancestral religion, Balinese Hinduism has since evolved into a unique version of the ancient faith. Although the fundamentals remain the same, many of the gods worshiped on Bali are unknown in India and vice versa. Vast Hindu kingdoms were also found in neighbouring islands but they disappeared soon after the Arabs became interested in the archipelago, bringing with them Islam to Indonesia's shores. Bali maintained little interest for the Arab traders so it was largely left alone. Throughout Indonesia, traditional beliefs in mysticism and the spiritual world continue to be strong, despite the common practice of imported faiths that forbid such strong beliefs.

While the impact this has had on the Islamic faith is often controversial, for the Balinese, the two have simply blend to create the distinctive religion they follow today.

Entry to a temple is not necessarily restricted to those of the Hindu faith although strict dress codes are required: generally a sarong with a 'salendang', worn around the waist. Menstruating women may not enter the temple due to a general sanction against human blood flowing on holy soil.

to be continued.....

About the Author

Bali Travel Guide is a comprehensive guide to the island of Bali, a collaboration by Jenifer Bird and Dave Waldheim. A complete Bali introduction with

travel tips and reviews of all major [bali resorts](#) and bali hotels such as the [Sofitel Seminyak Resort](#) .

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