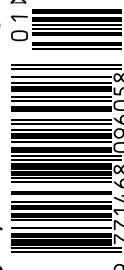


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TRIPPIN'...

WITH FIVE FAR FLUNG FEATURES

MARSHALL ISLANDS | BRAZIL
PERU | BALI | THE HONEYMOON



AARON HADLOW
MINDS THE GAP

GLOBAL TRAVEL TIPS
FROM THE PROS

TRIGGER FINGER
WITH MITU & REO STEVENS

ISLAND LIFE

WORDS: GABI STEINDL
PHOTOS: GABI STEINDL & MARK THORPE

I LIKE TO THINK THAT THERE'S A POINT BREAK QUOTE APPROPRIATE TO EVERY SITUATION. One of the best has to be: "Surfing's the source man; it'll change your life. Swear to God." Uttered just before Johnny Utah gets stuck in to another bank robbery. In **Gabi Steindl's** case, you'd need to add a 'kite' to the start of the quote – but aside from that it's pretty accurate. 10 years ago she first got going on a kite. She subsequently quit her high-flying job and has been kiting pretty much solidly ever since. She recently returned to Bali, the place where it all began, and found that – thankfully – not a whole lot had changed...

The Balinese call their slice of paradise the Island of the Gods, and who wants to contradict them? Coconut trees shade fine sandy beaches (snow-white in the south, volcano-black in the north), there's a varied landscape of hills and mountains, rugged coastlines, lush rice terraces and barren volcanic hillsides.

I am very attached to this pearl in the Indian Ocean. 10 years ago I did my first kite-course on Bali, and this island has a very special place in my heart. Back in those days I was still 'surfing the career-rail' in Hong Kong, jetting all throughout Asia on assignments in a management position. Bali was the place where I first held a kite bar in my hands and put my feet in straps: it's where I was shaken awake from the brainwash of the Western World and got back in touch with my heart. I also bought my very first kite equipment here (a huge foil kite and a mega-directional board!) and, shortly after my return to Hong Kong, I handed in my notice, left Asia, and decided to

live my dream with the plan of training as hard as I could for the next few months in order to compete in the Kitesurfing World Cup the following year.

CROWD PLEASER

I recently decided to return to Bali and, although the country of rice fields certainly doesn't count amongst the windiest places on the planet, the waves of Indonesia are world class and attract surfers from all corners of the world, all year round. Bali is incredibly diverse. It's not only the heart-rate of kitesurfers and surfers which goes up at the mention of the island – party-animals also froth on the hectic district of "Kuta" and the chic "Seminyak" in the south of the island; culture and art enthusiasts enjoy the mountains and chilled out hippie-vibes inland; yogis and spa-lovers can find plenty of possibilities for indulging body and soul in heavenly oasis; miles of coral reefs with colourful fauna and various ship wrecks from the second world war fascinate and draw divers from all over the world.

TRAVEL
Special

Gabi immersing herself
in the local culture...







(MAIN)
Always one eye on framing the shot, we'll call this "The Pirate Ship shot"

(FAR LEFT)
The wind picks up, the surfers come in, the kites go up. Hack. Job done.

(LEFT)
Launching off for the fated crossing.

(MAIN RIGHT)
Prototype of the North Crab...



And the island lives up to what you've seen in the guidebook: everywhere there are rice paddies, lonesome beaches, volcanoes, mountain lakes, waterfalls, women in brightly patterned garments with flower-decorated offerings on the head stroll along the streets; men in wrap-around skirts hurry to work and the smell of incense is everywhere in the air... In Bali the flowers seem to blossom constantly, and every day its people celebrate the charitableness of the gods through putting coloured offerings in front of hotels and restaurants, the beach, bars and souvenir stores.

THE BEACHES

The two main kitespots are Sanur Beach, and Canggu Sanur Beach (in the south-east of the island), which is often also referred to as Kite Beach. It was here that I first held onto a kite bar for the very first time and it was really good to see my two kite-teachers from back then again: Mar-

ion and Jankie. These two Italians were previously running Bali's only kite school together. Today, they do their own thing. Mario is still the manager of the kite school in the Blue Oasis Beach Club, and Jankie owns Bali's only kiteshop in Sanur. Jankie is the local contact point for all kites who are new to the island. He's always super happy to help and is also still well connected to the "Bali Kite School", his former business. Today the school is run by a competent bunch of local rippers. Situated directly on the best spot along the beach they have a great little set-up and I would recommend swinging past theirs when you come to Bali. Sanur Beach is perfect for freestyle and those starting out: an immensely wide, white sandy beach that borders onto a perfect, heavenly flatwater-playground. In the dry season the eastern trade winds blow here consistently side-onshore. A little bit further outside there's a reef which often produces really fun waves and, each year

in July, the annual "Sanur Kite Festival" takes place, which has nothing to do with the kites that we're using, but rather 'normal' kites. During this week teams from all the different villages on the island fly gigantic traditional Balinese dragons (up to 10m in length) on land. The sky over Sanur is literally plastered with these fantastic creations. The origin of this tradition comes from sending a message to the Hindu Gods in a festival to ask for a rich harvest and a successful sowing year. It was a really cool experience to kite around Sanur beach with all the amazing, super colourful pieces of art and dragons up in the sky which came in incredibly varied forms – fish, crabs, bears, tigers.

For days when the conditions were on, I would drive with Jankie to Canggu, the main kitewave-spot in the southwest of the island. It's a break that's well known amongst surfers and is a semi-reef break that breaks on a mix of stone, sand, and lava. The beach here is narrow, black and therefore extremely hot (keep your sandals on whilst setting up!). There are also some pretty harsh rocks in the water, and the wind is often very gusty and fickle. The channel to kite out into the line-up is fairly clear but, due to a pretty gnarly current and often big holes in the wind, getting out can be tricky.

ISLAND HOPPING...

One of the highlights of my trip was a fairly daredevil crossing from the sleeping neighbouring island of Nusa Lembongan back to Bali. The Lombok strait that connects the Indian Ocean with the Java Sea is infamous for its depth and strong current. Several years ago a French windsurfer who attempted the same crossing disappeared and was never found again....

A catamaran took me and a group of local kites over to Lembongan, where we launched our kites from the boat. I had borrowed an old 16m North Rebel from the kiteschool for the crossing as the wind forecast was light, and off we went. Everything went fine at first, but the wind left the party rather early in the game and all of the kites of my colleagues dropped out of the sky at once. I was a bit ahead of them, the catamaran was some distance behind, and I had to decide: "Do I continue alone or is it time to surrender?" Kitegabi never gives up though, so I continued on my own! It was a long, lonesome kite and hard work, and I was really stoked when I could recognise Bali appearing on the horizon. But then, just before actually reaching the coast (and way further downwind than we had planned on landing at), the wind completely died on me. Ouch. The kite fell out of the sky and I was floating all alone, in the middle of nowhere...

ISLAND LIFE

Not a pleasant feeling. I drifted closer and closer to the offshore reef, which didn't look inviting at all. I have never been to that side of the island and didn't know where I was, nor did I know whether the reef was as gnarly as on the other side of the island. If it was I would get seriously hurt trying to swim in. And there was no sign of the catamaran. Eerie!

All of a sudden I spotted a potential rescue: an outrigger boat with a fisherman and two small kids on board which just had passed the reef on their way out. I shouted and waved and they came over. It wasn't easy to explain that I needed help as I was in a rather dangerous situation, but I somehow managed to get the message across. I packed up the kite and was pulled into the tiny boat with all my gear, where I squeezed myself in between the fisherman and his kids.



Knowledge Box

When: July – September

Getting there: Flights from all major UK airports (Singapore airlines via Kuala Lumpur recommended)

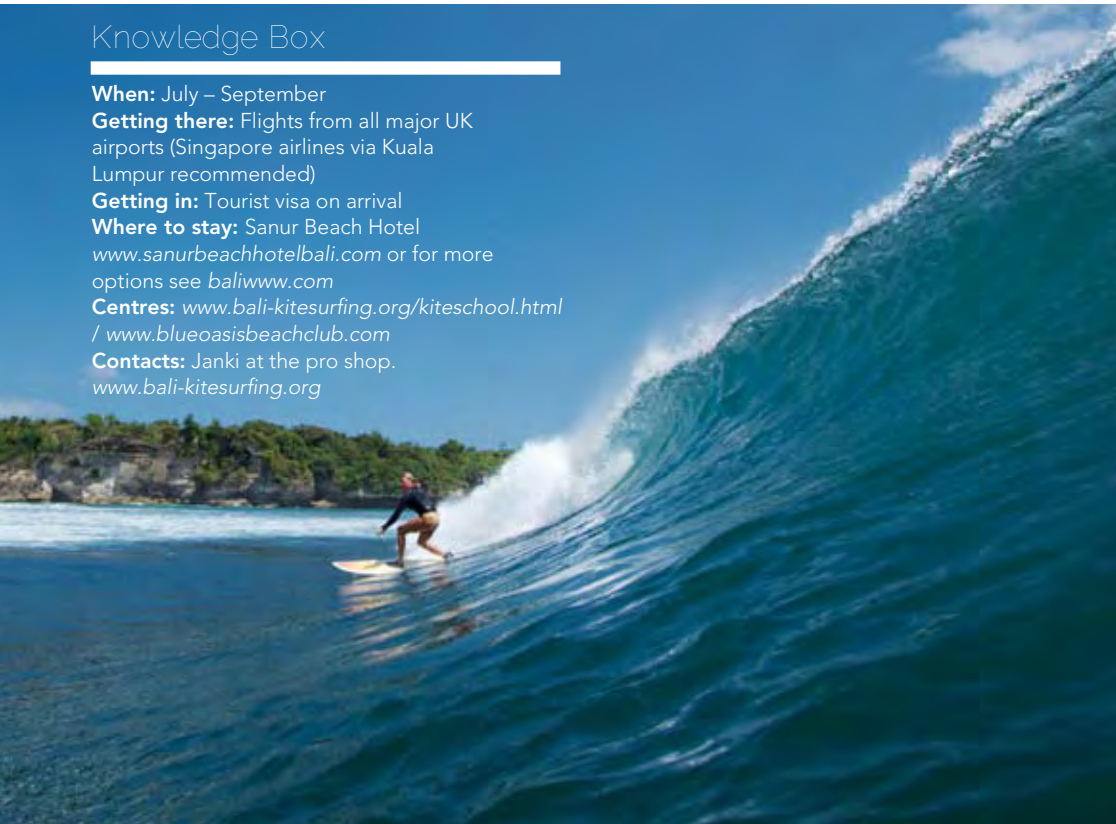
Getting in: Tourist visa on arrival

Where to stay: Sanur Beach Hotel

www.sanurbeachhotelbali.com or for more options see baliwww.com

Centres: www.bali-kitesurfing.org/kiteschool.html / www.blueoasisbeachclub.com

Contacts: Janki at the pro shop. www.bali-kitesurfing.org



The chase in search of the catamaran was the bumpiest ride ever, the sea was so rough and I got pretty worked bouncing around the boat. An hour-and-a-half later and we spotted the catamaran – and we were reunited again! Just in time, as the rest of the crew were on the verge of calling the coastal watch helicopter to come and look for me.

ISLAND OF THE GODS

Aside from the great kiting on offer, the vibe on Bali is so contagious. Everyone should take a leaf out of the Balinese books – their attitude to life, their smiles and friendliness, their helpfulness and warm way of being with each other, their gentleness and kindness – the world would be a more peaceful place! And if smiles aren't enough then Bali's average temperature is between 23 and 30°, and the water temperature remains steady at around 27° from January through to December. So we're talking "boardies and lycra" pretty much all year round! The myth kept up for a long time was that there was no wind on Bali. In reality the months with the biggest swells (June to September) are also the time of the eastern trade winds. It may be the case that, as a pure kitesurf destination, Bali's wind statistics are not reliable enough (either in strength or consistency), but if you arrive with kites and a surfboard (or hire a SUP) during the main season, then you are pretty much guaranteed to experience the magic of the Island of the Gods every day... I hope it's not ten years until I return, but even if it is I'm sure the unique vibe that makes this particular island such a special place will be just the same...



(TOP)
A local guy checks out the bottom contours.

(MIDDLE)
Mornings and evenings...

(BOTTOM MIDDLE)
Helmet, Gabi, helmet.