

Eat stay love

Follow in the footsteps of Elizabeth Gilbert and find peace and harmony in Bali

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The little clinic of Balinese healer Wayan is already full of perfectly fit-looking foreigners by the time we arrive mid-morning. "God gave me special gift," she explains to us while plastering leaves all over a bod with earache.

Helpers deliver trays of vegetation to the assorted people sitting around. A healthy-looking Australian girl who hasn't enough cash for the treatments she wants is directed to an ATM around the corner.

A steady trickle of impressionable tourists, particularly Americans, has been making the pilgrimage to the town of Ubud in central Bali ever since Wayan's friendship with writer Elizabeth Gilbert featured in the American's autobiographical book, *Eat Pray Love*. An endorsement from Oprah Winfrey considerably boosted the book's sales.

Now, with the imminent release in UK cinemas of the big-screen version of the story, starring Hollywood mega-celebs Julia Roberts as Gilbert and Javier Bardem as lover Felipe, the flow of clients seeking Wayan's help - and no doubt the number of other healers setting up shop hereabouts - is likely to escalate.

Wayan, and in-

deed the rest of the people on this idyllic Indonesian island, will surely welcome the interest. The after-effect of terrorist attacks in 2002

and 2005 severely reduced the numbers of tourists, thus bringing economic hardship for all the islanders who rely on visitors for their living.

Around 150,000 British nationals a year visit Indonesia, and the chief lure is Bali. With its livid green rice terraces and fields of crops, humid forests, massive volcanoes, serene, smiling people and more than 20,000

temples and shrines, no wonder it's called the Island of the Gods.

Most of Indonesia's population are Muslims, but 93 per cent of Bali's residents practise Balinese Hinduism, an intriguing blend of Indian Hinduism, Buddhism and animism. It is

this exotic, intoxicating mix that draws the spiritually curious, including Elizabeth Gilbert.

In *Eat Pray Love*, after a painful divorce and love affair (and having secured a book advance), Gilbert runs off to Italy for the food (eat), India to meditate (pray) and Bali for "healing" (love). On the Indonesian island she meets the Brazilian she's now married to - and she's written another

book about that.

In her search for self-knowledge and physical and spiritual healing, she latches on to a few characters she hopes will help do the job for her, Wayan included.

But seriously, why put yourself through all that navel-gazing when all you have to do on Bali is enjoy...

Eight degrees south of the equator and just 153km wide and 112km north to south, Bali is a laid-back playground with a diversity of attractions, from diving and sports galore, to arts and crafts; from sun, sea and sand, to captivating culture and souvenir shops, bars, clubs, restaurants and all the tourist trappings in the main towns.

The young and poor take to whizzing around on scooters and staying in basic B&B accommodation. I was surprised by how buzzy the towns are. But I don't do basic, and fortunately, Bali does have a number of top-notch resorts to hide away from the hippy types and recon-



nect with yourself in style.

Orient-Express Hotels' two luxury

Such a blissful ambience lends itself to a bit of soul- searching, no guru required



properties - Jimbaran Puri Bali and Ubud Hanging Gardens - together offer a great twin-centre Bali holiday, with not a backpacker in sight. First, for sun, sea and sand, there's the newly refurbished Jimbaran Puri Bali beside one of the island's best beaches, 15 minutes' drive from the airport at Densapar.

Accommodation, scattered around nice gardens, is in 41 cottages and 19 one-bedroom and three two-bedroom villas. Each luxury villa is set in its own Balinese garden and courtyard with a private pool big enough for a proper swim. Each also has a massive day-bed to crash out on with a novel and pretend you're engrossed while slyly having a snooze, even though you've only been up ten minutes. Come on, this is what holidays are all about!

If you somehow do need help to switch off, book a massage or three in the spa.

Eating al fresco at the beachside Nelayan Restaurant while watching the hypnotic Balinese Kecak, a dance performed on the sand by 60 local men and beautiful girls in exquisite costumes, is a highlight of a stay here.

Orient-Express's second Bali resort is a jungle retreat called Ubud Hanging Gardens, a 90-minute drive from Jimbaran. If you don't fancy the drive, or can't afford the available helicopter ride, the hotel can arrange for you to cycle there.

I was praying I wouldn't fall off/expire from exhaustion, but the good news is that the trip is downhill most of the way, along tracks and backroads with little traffic.

The journey provides a great opportunity to have a look at the real Bali, away from the tacky tourist shops and money grabbers. In the countryside, paddy fields are still cultivated by hand and families live in traditional compounds complete with their own mini-temple where incense burns and offerings of

flowers, rice cakes and fruit are laid.

If you can't find inner peace at the Ubud Hanging Gardens, give up. Opened in July 2005, the resort seems to float magically in gardens so rampant you feel as if you can actually see the big-leafed vegetation and winding vines grow as you sip a cocktail by the amazing infinity pool and gaze across the valley at beautiful Pura Penataran Dalem Segara, a temple mirrored in the architecture of the resort's main buildings.

Such a blissful ambience lends itself well to a bit of soul-searching, no guru required - must learn to relax, stop working so hard, take more holidays...

The "Eat" part of the journey is no chore here either at the Beduur

Restaurant where, after sunset cocktails at the Buki Bacik bar, dinner is enjoyed al fresco in an impossibly romantic setting overlooking the temple twinkling with lights.

While it is tempting to hole up in the resort for your entire holiday, you should do a bit of sight-seeing. Pura Ulun Danu Bratan, an important Hindu Buddhist temple dedicated to Dewi Danu, goddess of the waters, presents one of Bali's most iconic images.

The villages surrounding Ubud are all famous for a particular craft - Batubulan for stone carving, Celuk for silversmiths, Tohpati for batik, Mas for woodcarvers - and buying direct from the artist has to be good karma.

Then there's the bustling town of Ubud itself, with festivals and religious ceremonies galore. This is also the place to try suckling pig, a popular Balinese lunch.

Or, like Elizabeth Gilbert, you might visit a healer - the name Ubud comes from the Balinese word ubad, or medicine, after the local herbs and plants used to treat ailments.

Back in Wayan's clinic, numerous "patients" have

come and gone, and we're still having trouble getting her undivided attention.

Suddenly, on the ledge above our heads, a life-and-death fight breaks out between a rat and a large ginger cat. Blood-curdling screeches echo around the "clinic", thoroughly disturbing the peace, inner or otherwise.

We leave Wayan to her clients and cash register, and retreat back to Ubud Hanging Gardens. It is all the healing that I could ever need.

THE FACTS Audley Travel (01993 838110, www.audleytravel.com) offers a 12-day tailor-made Bali holiday from £2,435 per person, including five nights in a pool villa at Jimbaran Puri Bali with daily high tea, bottle of wine on arrival and jetlag massage; four nights at Ubud Hanging Gardens with complimentary spa treatment and dinner for two at the Nelayan restaurant; flights from Edinburgh or Glasgow with Malaysia Airlines and daily breakfast. Eat Pray Love will be in cinemas from next Friday.



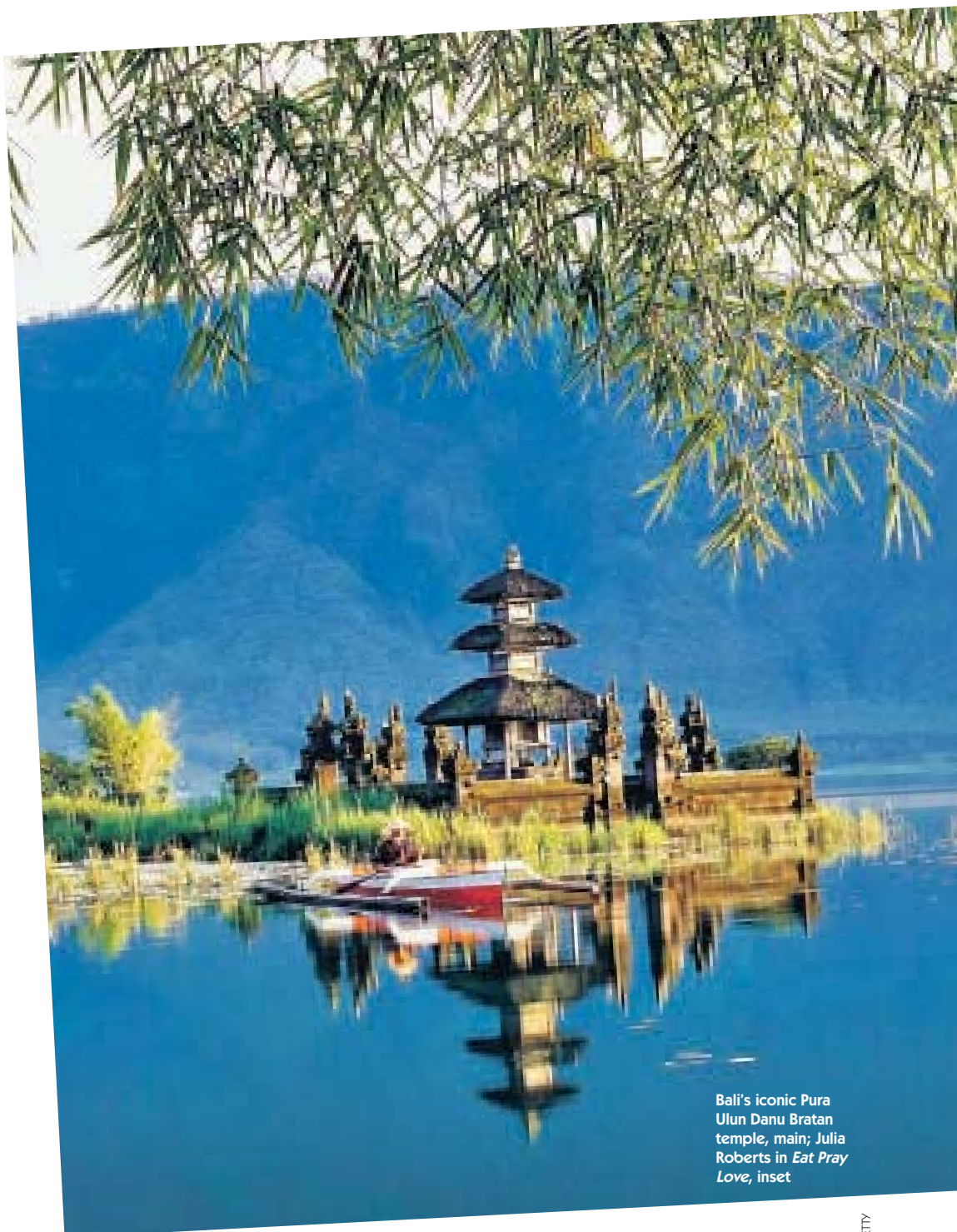
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The idyllic Jimbaran
Puri Bali hotel





Bali's iconic Pura Ulu Danu Bratan temple, main; Julia Roberts in *Eat Pray Love*, inset

OGRAPH: GETTY

