

ANOTHER DAY IN PARADISE

Amanda Ang, head of international expansion at Voyagin, has the enviable job of uncovering Bali's serene and little known nooks of beauty and heritage.

words LUYAWEN

1. How often do you visit Bali?

I have visited Bali seven times last year on behalf of Voyagin, a travel activities marketplace for Asia, to search for authentic and unique local experiences. I spend a great deal of time in Ubud, the island's artistic and cultural heart. Surrounded by villages filled with silversmiths, painters and wood-carvers, it has become a popular destination for artists, yogis and raw food aficionados from all over the world.

2. What do you love about the island?

Bali's unique culture—an amalgam of Hindu and Buddhist influences—and its friendly people. I've travelled to over 25 countries but the Balinese stand out as some of the kindest and gentlest souls I have ever met. I admire their philosophy of Tri Hita Karana, which attributes a peaceful balance in the world to harmony among people, god and nature. It is amazing to see how they keep this in mind as they go about their daily lives.

3. We don't want to head to the crowded beaches in Kuta and Seminyak. Share with us a little known beach.

Yeh Gangga beach in Tabanan on Bali's west coast. Unlike other white sand beaches, this one has its own unique charm because it has black sand. The beach is wide and flat with very soft sand, making it perfect for a romantic walk at dusk. It is mostly visited by locals in their leisure time and the sunsets there are really vivid in colour.

4. Please recommend a quiet spot for those who aren't beach goers.

There's a serene village about an hour's drive from Ubud called Sidemen. It is still underdeveloped and laidback—you have to look out for signs at a fork in the road to locate your hotel. The village is surrounded by steep rice terraces, which are great for scenic morning hikes and jaw-dropping views of Mount Agung, the tallest peak in Bali. Last October, I booked a rooftop garden suite in a quaint property called Cepik Villa and just ate home cooked food and did yoga while taking in the sounds of nature around me.

5. Where is the best place to enjoy *babi guling* (suckling pig)?

The most well-known joint for that is Ibu Oka, a humble eatery that has turned into a big brand with three outlets around Ubud. If you're feeling adventurous and have a local driver to take you around, there's a small *warung* (roadside stall) in the

village of Lodtunduh (10 minutes away from Ubud centre) that serves an incredibly tender version with lots of spicy green chillies sauce for that extra kick. Just ask the locals and they'll point it out to you, there's only one *warung* serving *babi guling* there, so it's hard to go wrong.

6. Where should we go for a meal with a view?

Bali Asli is a gorgeous restaurant with a fabulous view of Mount Agung and the lush green valley below. It is run by a lovely Australian chef named Penelope Williams, who used to be the executive chef at Alila Manggis. After falling in love with Bali years ago, she set up the restaurant to share the taste of authentic Balinese cuisine she learnt from cooking at temple ceremonies.

I once attended a cooking class conducted by Williams on her balcony, and I can still remember the smell of the *ikan pepes* (fish parcels wrapped in banana leaves) toasting over her charcoal fire. Do try the mouth-watering Megibung lunch comprising a sharing platter and three different kinds of sambals.

7. Where do you usually stay in Seminyak?

Room & Vespa is a personal favourite of mine for its accessibility and modern interior décor. The place has only four rooms and is right behind Seminyak Square, which puts you within walking distance to the boutique French bakery Monsieur Spoon. I always get their flaky and buttery croissants, and salted caramel tarts.

8. Name two eco-friendly accommodations we should check into.

The Green Village bamboo mansions near Ubud. Designed by the amazing bamboo design firm Ibuku, these private homes, which overlook the Ayung river valley, are built entirely out of bamboo. One of the largest houses boasts six storeys and four bedrooms fitted with luxury furnishings from hand-hammered copper fixtures to bamboo hammocks.

Another place I love is Bambu Indah, which is a unique eco-resort composed of 11 antique Javanese bridal homes facing the Sayan Valley. The Udang House, in particular, is built above an actual freshwater shrimp pond. The resort also has its own organic vegetable garden and a natural spring water pool for swimming. It's worth visiting to marvel at its architecture, especially the design of the massive centrepiece, Minang House—it is an exact replica of the last great clan house in Sumatra's Padang highlands.



1 Amanda Ang and one of her Balinese guides, Agung
 2 The four-storey Pagoda at Bambu Indah
 3 Yeh Gangga beach
 4 Nasi Campur at Bali Asli
 5 Udang House at Bambu Indah
 6 A bamboo hammock on the balcony of Sharma Springs House, The Green Village