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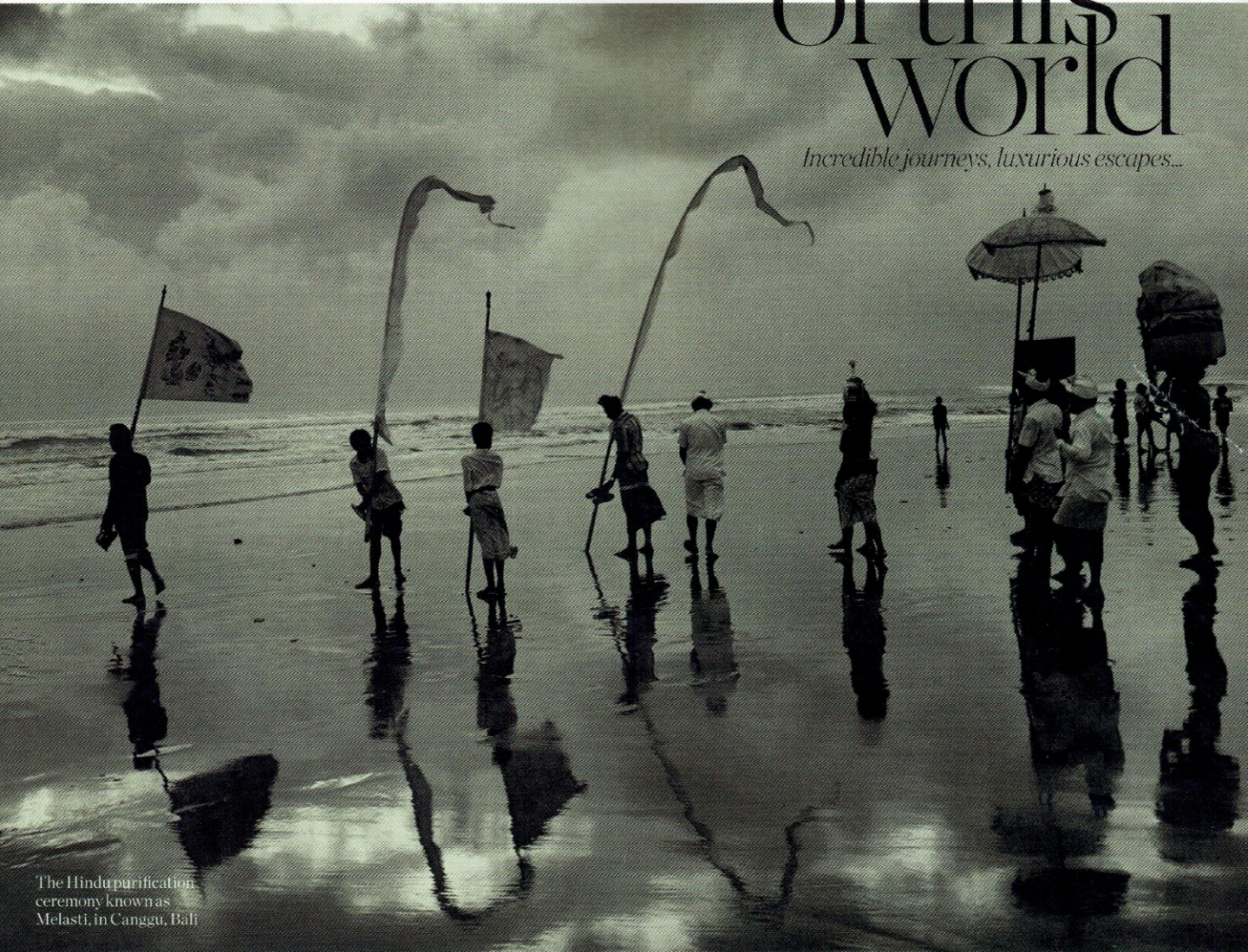
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SPRING
FASHION
special



Out of this world

Incredible journeys, luxurious escapes...



The Hindu purification ceremony known as Melasti, in Canggu, Bali

Eastern Wonder

Celebrating the sensuous and spiritual culture of SOUTHEAST ASIA and beyond, we travel through the vivid islands of INDONESIA and into the CHINESE hinterland, exploring emerald paddy fields and temples by land and sea, on adventures that reveal the Orient's serenity...

Edited by Catherine Fairweather

out of this world



THE ROCK
Bali's west coast Tanah Lot temple is an iconic pilgrimage site, built on a dramatic rock formation off shore

Photograph: Ken Kitchey



Paradise *Found*

From the evergreen, spiritual epicenter of UBUD to the cultural hinterlands at the foot of the sacred MOUNT AGUNG in the east and the newly anointed hotspot of CANGGU in the south – a surfers’ dream where the young and beautiful come to play – *Catherine Fairweather* celebrates everything the Indonesian island of BALI has to offer

I arrive in Bali in the weeks of festivities that follow Nyepi – The Day of Silence, a public holiday when electric lights are dimmed and bonfires forbidden, and even the airport shuts down, so that the islanders can concentrate on prayer, fasting and meditation – although, legend has it, the shutdown is to fool any evil spirit flying overhead into thinking that Bali is a deserted island.

Deserted? Not quite. Last year, over five million tourists descended on the place. And today, almost as many seem to be on scooters in bikinis, revving behind a snaking column of pilgrims and festival-goers for the beginning of the 10-day festival of Galungan, when the victory of good over evil is celebrated. Women, balancing towering trays of rice and fruit offerings on their heads, follow the parade of drum- and pipe-playing children and elders through streets lined with ornamental penjors, tall arched bamboo poles beautifully decorated with coconut leaves. And it is this collision of the sacred and the profane on this tropical, ever-popular holiday island, itself an ancient seat of Hinduism, that makes it such a perennially exciting place to visit. For temple-going islanders, the ancient spirits, demons, shamans and mountain gods remain a very important part of the fabric of daily life, requiring careful management and appeasement. It is a culture that remains, as yet, undiluted and undiminished by the influx of Hollywood, superchefs, surfers, new agers and mixologists.



COMO SHAMBHALA VESTATE MUST-DO

CHECK IN for a health package with oriental medicine consultant Nancy Kim, who specializes in acupuncture and massage, and also offers nutritional consultations.

TAKE a paddy-field walk to the local village with guides who will gracefully introduce you to their families and community without you feeling like a clumsy intruder.

SET an alarm for a pre-dawn start and walk or cycle to Mount Batur volcano, which simmers with active sulphates that spew out of the ground and make for spectacularly atmospheric sunrise shots.



The islanders like to refer to their island as the “morning of the world”, and to Ubud as its heartbeat. At Como Shambhala, a world class retreat outside the town, one of the many pleasures is waking up to a day that feels pure and rinsed clean with the water, considered holy here, that cascades down from the gorges, spouts into our private pool, and drips off banana fronds as condensation. As the sun rises so does the humidity; a wake-up kiss for the jungle life that bursts into a crescendo of beeps, burps and chimes, invading the peace of our yoga pavilion. Our yogi, Budi, is impervious to the din, his face so still and beatific that it actually makes you feel good to be alive. But then, everything at Como Shambhala is a gift – from the perfect bamboo steamers in the picnic hampers to the fresh ginger tea presented after a therapist session and, of course, the balanced menus in the mainly (but by no means exclusively) raw-food restaurant, Glow.

Aside from the food and professional excellence of the therapists, the natural loveliness of the location, high above the sacred Ayung River, is itself curative. This is the place to come to decompress and recalibrate; a world away from the flip-flops and tie-dye aesthetic of downtown Ubud. And while you can go as spiritually deep as you like – spending hours navel-gazing with the help of a doctor – I’ve also been here accompanied by teenagers, fussy toddlers and octogenarians, who have all found their own niche (with distractions that vary from an extensive library to tennis lessons, rock climbing, white-water rafting and mountain biking) and their own favorite fuel (“best steak and ice cream ever,” said my son – with apologies to the purists). comohotels.com/comoshambhalaestate

Ampersand can organize a five-night stay for two, private guided treks, transfers and internal and international flights from £5,200; ampersandtravel.com

THE CENTER *Ubud*



Opposite and above: the master suite of Como Shambhala's Umabona Residence looks out onto a private pool, built around an ancient stepwell. Left: festivities during one of Bali's holiest ceremonies, Galungan, celebrate the victory of good over evil

UBUD LOWDOWN

PRIVATE RENTAL: STONE HOUSE

A true hideaway behind high limestone walls, nearly two miles out of the town and surrounded by paddy fields. These three villas, full of salvaged antiques and blissful nooks and crannies, are sheltered by Jasmine-scented gardens. There is also a pool large enough to swim lengths in. Both homely and seductive, it's a real find (stonehousebali.com).

BEST LUNCH: NUSANTARA

The most satisfying food in Bali is only ever a subtle extension of *warung* (or street food). But this is a cut above, offering high-end traditional cooking in a new, more relaxed environment than its sister restaurant, Locavore, with specialties including coconut soup served in the shell and bamboo pork with green chili (+62 361 972973).

BEST DINNER: MOZAIK

For Michelin-star standard, Mozaic (with its French-Indonesian menu), set in a tranquil garden, is the perfect place (mozaic-bali.com).

BEST COCKTAIL: BAMBU INDAH

Even if you don't stay at this boutique collection of 19th century Javanese guest houses, be sure to stop by for drinks on their Afrika deck, overlooking the rice fields (bambuindah.com).

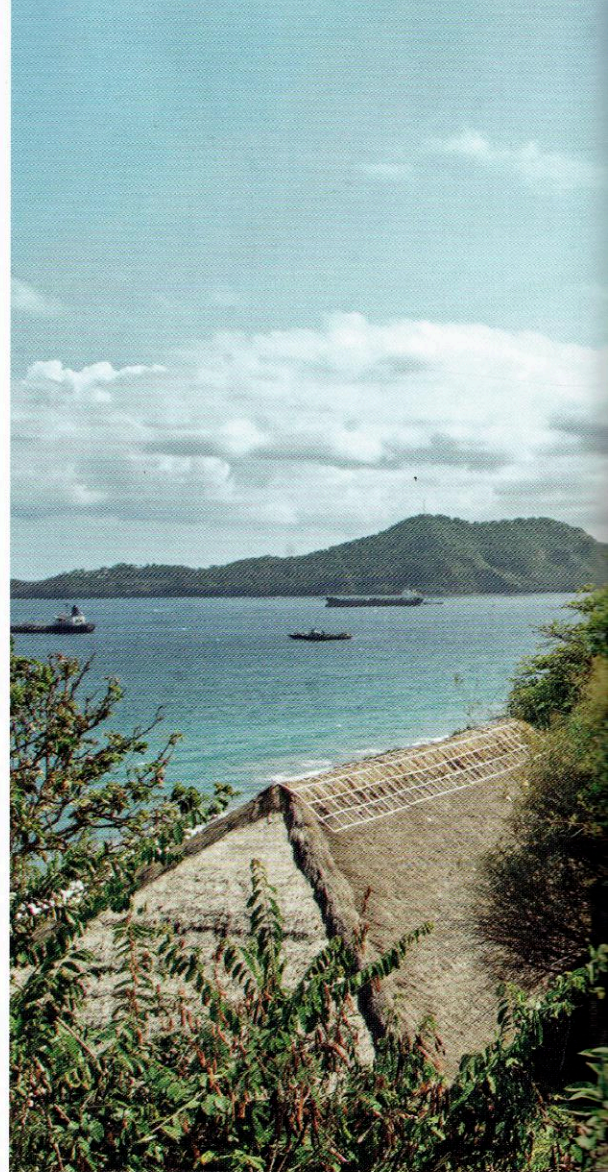
TAKE HOME: THREADS OF LIFE

This is the place to go for authentic tribal textiles and ikats from the outlying islands of Java, Sumba and beyond (threadsoflife.com).



THE EAST
Karangasem

Walking the tightrope across little bamboo bridges and along the edge of canals and water channels between the terraced paddy fields in eastern Bali is like entering another world, far away from the surf-shack culture of the island's southern beaches. Here, the rhythm of agrarian life revolves much as it always has done, around the oxen, the cycles of the moon and the thrice yearly rice harvest. One of the best ways to experience the land is by hiking to Bali's oldest village, Tenganan, a tiny socialist republic, whose Bali Aga tribe predate the Hindu-Javanese conquest. It is hot-going, but thanks to the guide provided by my hotel, Amankila, iced flannels and water and macadamia nuts are proffered to boost flagging energy. And how much nicer to arrive at the village on foot, from on high, trailing hibiscus pollen and mud, than being party to some coach tour spewing clients out into the parking lot. Tenganan, with its raised, neat grassy main 'street', on which mules and dogs but no vehicles can stray, is also filled today, on festival day, with sullen silent cockerels crouching under straw domes as though aware of their impending fate (cock fights are still popular and the loser's spilt blood, tradition has it, is a way of appeasing evil spirits). With its original architecture intact, this picturesque village is inevitably popular, but thankfully, Amankila has arranged my visit to bypass the hordes. I duck into a store to buy one of the heirloom double ikats, dyed from red tree bark, rare indigo and yellow macadamia



nut, for which this village is famous, and then we are off again, back to the hotel. Here, a couple of school girls, dressed in their saronged finery, are sitting in the entrance, making temple offerings and raising their palms to their foreheads in the Balinese greeting that always charms.

Indonesia is the Aman hotel brand's heartland, where the concept of Aman remains strongest. What is extraordinary is that after more than 25 years, the Amankila hasn't dated. The open-sided, airy architecture by Ed Tuttle, with its limestone terraces cantilevered into the steep jungly cliffs connected by raised walkways, the cascading three-tiered infinity pools and languorous daybeds, and indigenous *alang alang* (thatched roof) villas, were groundbreaking and inspired a whole new genre – much imitated but never matched – of tropical luxury resort design. Tuttle's

“Amankila’s architecture *inspired a whole new genre of tropical luxury resort*”

out of this world

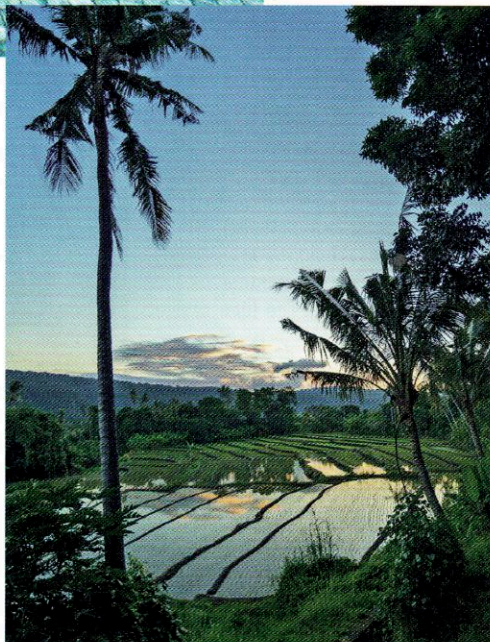
EAST COAST LOWDOWN

In the Karangasem region, the last raja built the lavish water palaces Tirta Gangga, surrounded by formal gardens with spring-fed pools based on Versailles. The volcano destroyed the palaces in 1963, but they have now been completely restored. Amankila can organize a visit by mountain bike to Tirta Gangga and also coordinate a visit to the bat caves and nearby salt makers.

BEST VILLA Idanna Pucci's simple villa in the foothills of Mount Agung defines remote. Built out of volcanic rock and teak, with a library, swimming pool and lovely garden looking out over an amphitheater of rice fields, this is the ultimate Balinese private world (alilahotels.com/manggis).

BEST BEACH For consistent waves, suitable for beginners and experts, head to the beach break Keramas, known for its beautiful black volcanic beaches.

BEST DIVING SPOT Head to either the Blue Lagoon and Tanjung Sari, Nusa Peninda or Gili Mimpang for some of the best diving in Bali with an abundance of marine life just a short 20-minute water taxi from Amankila.

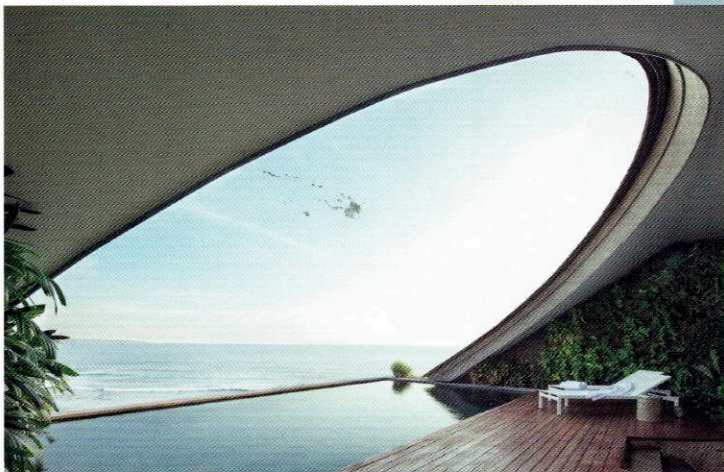


genius was about using the best local raw materials, including volcanic slate, limestone, woods and grasses – to give a sense of quiet, solid luxury that remains as relevant as it did in the decades when publicity-shy celebrities, such as Liz Taylor and Princess Diana, escaped prying eyes here. However, the five new self-contained villas and the dedicated spa, which will open this year, are set to raise the bar even higher.

It is the ultimate destination hotel, where you could hole up for days beside various pools or on the beach beyond the coconut grove, enjoying everything on offer: the boats and kayaks; gamelan concerts; Balinese teatime cakes; laughing yoga; and off-menu dinners set up wherever you like. It remains a classic of its kind. aman.com

Ampersand can organize a five-night stay for two, private guided treks, transfers and internal and international flights from £5,000; ampersandtravel.com

Clockwise from top left: the water palaces of Tirta Gangga; an *alang alang* thatched daybed poolside at Amankila; paddy fields at the foot of Mount Agung

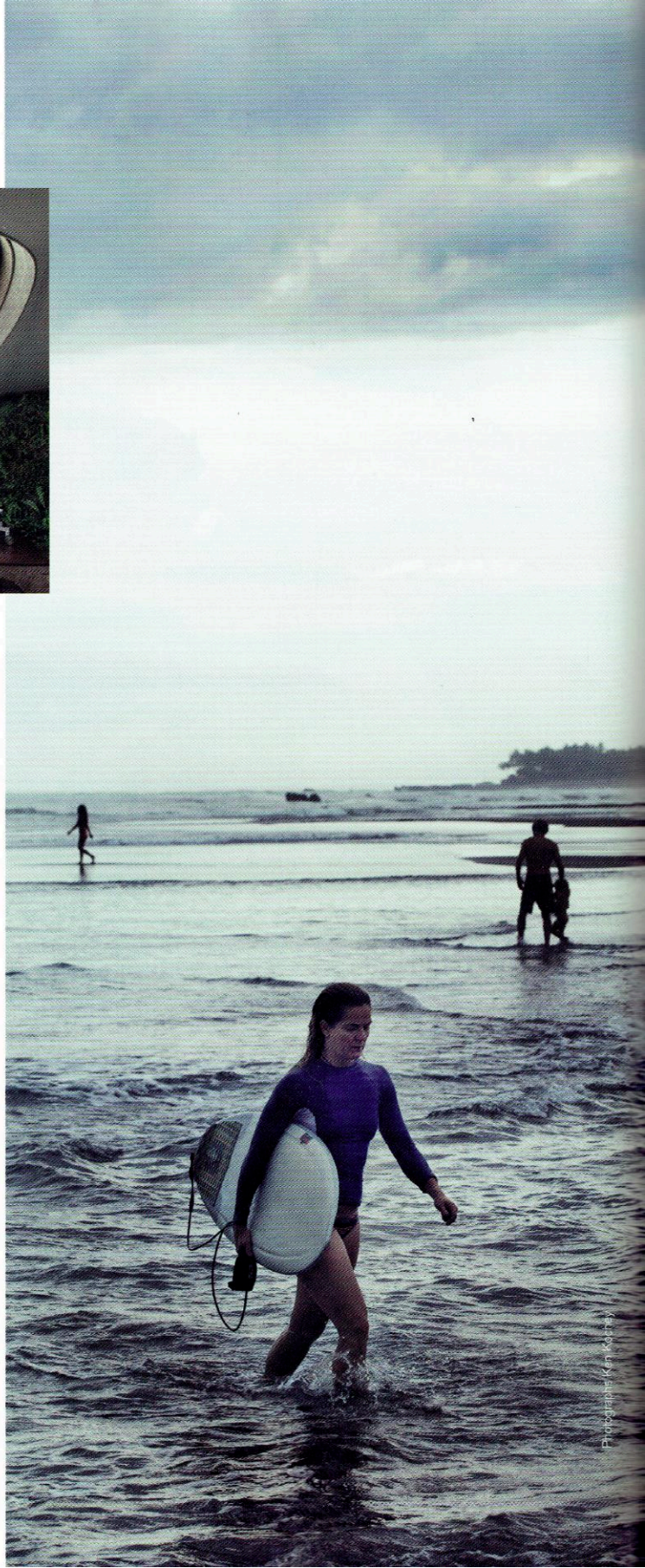


The slow life is a state of mind and a modus vivendi in the hip, super laidback beach enclave of Canggu and outlying Echo Beach on Bali's south-west coast, where millennial surfers and beautiful people migrate to escape the congestion of overdeveloped Kuta and Seminyak. It is a place to stay put, feel the sand between your toes, decompress and pootle about on a cycle or scooter. If you are up for negotiating mopeds, ambling hounds and pot holes, scooters are available to hire everywhere and enable you to come off the bustling main street and down narrow lanes between the rice paddies, where cows share elbow room with the mushrooming luxury hotels, shops, bars and restaurants.

Canggu is also the center for Silicon Valley expats who have settled here, sending their kids to the Green School up near Ubud, and working in the co-share 'office' spaces that are sprouting up throughout the village.

As yet, the place still feels unspoilt, with a charming, slightly distressed, weather-beaten and sun-blasted rusticity that has spawned colonies of ecofriendly, vegan outlets on either side of the main street and off the epic surf breaks. Recently, the opening of some new high-end hotels and retreats are lending a little more polish to this hippy mix of local homestays and *warungs* (basic local eateries) that line the beach. Hotel Tugu, with its incredible access to the surf and sea, has long pioneered the idea of the experiential retreat in Bali, not only with its rotating calendar of yoga and surfing activities, but also with its ethnic chic and nomadic-style interiors and museum-worthy collection of artefacts that lend the allure of an Aladdin's Cave (tuguhotels.com/hotels/bali). Until now, it was a lone star, but the just launched Como Echo Beach has changed that with its tactile low-lying architecture and design by Como favorite Paola Navone, adding a touch of modernist sophistication to the scene on a property that

THE SOUTH *Canggu*



faces the six-mile stretch of beach and some of Bali's best surf. Airy bedrooms (there are 119) and suites and villas with every comfort are tailor-made for the dotcom generation. Erstwhile beach bums turned millionaires will also appreciate Echo Beach's dedicated surf team's control of head count out on the breaks and their brilliant handling of the kids at beginner level (comohotels.com/echo beach). Meanwhile, The Slow, a short walk from the beach, is another luxe addition to Canggu, channeling the same sort of relaxed vibe and attracting similar young crowds – although the sexy environs of this hotel-cum-boutique-cum-restaurant-cum-gallery work best as a child-free zone. It is an essay in architectural 'tropical brutalism' and where the creative crowd meet to work, play and enjoy some of the best food in the region (made from local sustainable produce), before taking in art and photography shows. The shop offers a brilliant capsule wardrobe of relaxed classics, while the bar stars London mixologist Maja Jaworksa, who works with specialty batch spirits and tonics and essences served in custom-made flasks. The Slow brings an unforced, casual modernity and culture to what was once a simple, dusty, quiet corner on Canggu's main street (theslowbali.com).

Wiz Squared can organize a five-night stay at both Hotel Tugu and Como Echo Beach, including spa treatments, surf lessons and transfers from £1,500; wizquared.com

CANGGU LOWDOWN

APRES SURF: OLD MAN'S

This institution on the black sand and lava reefs of Batu Bolong Beach is where surfers gather to come down from their last adrenaline rush and neck icy Bintangs, lounging on beanbags – it turns into a more raucous arena for drinking games on a Wednesday night, when you might want to give it wide berth (oldmans.net).

SUNSET DRINK: LA BRISA

Nowhere does surf-shack vibes better than the new La Brisa – perfect for sunset drinks overlooking Echo Beach (labrisabali.com).

BREAKFAST: CANTEEN

Hang out, fuel up and grab a great flat white before hitting the waves (+62 878 6228 1755).

YOGA: THE PRACTICE

With its excellent teachers and workshops, this vast shala is one of the most sophisticated (and dare we say glamorous?) yoga spaces on the island (thepracticebali.com).

BEST FACIAL: GOLDUST BEAUTY LOUNGE

This unpretentious Australian owned salon offers gold leaf treatments to lift and firm skin, and soothing oil pedicures over a glass of ginger tea (goldustbali.com).


TAKE HOME: MUKA INTUITIVE HERBOLOGY

Stock up on organic skincare treatments and natural hand-crafted products made on premises in neighboring Pererenan Beach.

GO GLUTEN FREE: SHADY SHACK

Nudging Echo beach, this buzzing alfresco café captures the freewheeling boho vibe of Canggu, with its mismatched furniture and vegetarian, gluten-free fare. It's everything the best-selling smoothie, Lost in Paradise, implies.

Sarah Laird



SURF SUP
From top left, the pool at Como Echo Beach for those who want to observe the surf; Echo Beach offers some of the best breaks in Bali; The Slow is one of the latest luxe boltholes in Canggu



out of this world



BOAT TRIP

Offering the best of both worlds, Rascal is a cutting-edge contemporary superyacht with the soul of a traditional Indonesian phinisi sailing boat. Opposite: a horse race on Nili Sumba beach.



Passage to *Sumba*

Tracing pink beaches and underwater coral gardens across an arc of volcanic islands in INDONESIA, *Catherine Fairweather* boards a superyacht from FLORES to the island of SUMBA, the southern hemisphere's cowboy country – formerly a land of headhunters, which now boasts one of the most joyful community-minded resorts in the world

Even at the pre-breakfast hour, the harbor front of the cheerful scruffy outpost of Labuan Bajo (on Flores, a one-and-half-hour flight and a whole different world away from the lush sophistications of Bali), is bustling with noise and color. Crateloads of pineapples and mangoes are being loaded onto day boats, jostling for space with outrigger canoes and fishermen plying tourists with ikats and strings of vivid beads, while the superyachts and elegant traditional phinisi are washing down their decks in preparation for the next charter. Against all this, is the constant, immutable trajectory of ferry boats stirring up a foaming wake.

Indonesians know the ferry-boat timetables by heart from a young age. But then, this is a culture of boats, and Labuan Bajo in particular is a gateway to the rare dragons of Komodo National Park and to some world-class dive sites only accessible by sea.

In order to get a handle on an unwieldy nation still in the process of counting all its many thousand islands that stretch from the Aceh province in the north, to Melanesia near Australia, across 3,000 miles, three time zones and many languages, it is good to get afloat.

I relished the prospect of a week-long seabound voyage that would take us into ancient Wallacea; from Flores and its islands on the other side of the so-called Wallace line – just beyond Bali, where the species, flora and fauna are much closer aligned to Aboriginal Australasia than the western Orient – to the island of Sumba, one of the last megalithic cultures on earth.

The nine members of our immaculately attired crew are lined up to greet us as we board *Rascal*, a new 100ft superyacht. It may have been built to age-old traditional Indonesian phinisi techniques, but in style and design it is nothing like the piratical masted schooners that have >

out of this world

plied these waters for centuries, carrying spices and sandalwood, and in whose wake wars were started, boundaries redefined and kingdoms toppled.

Today these red-sailed beauties are more likely to be crammed with day-tripping scuba divers and dragon seekers. There are many live-aboard diving trips, sometimes charging as little as \$100 per person for the thrill of seeing a Komodo dragon and diving some of the most thrilling sites in the Pacific. But there are only a score of really top-notch private charter superyachts like Rascal, offering a crew member to match every guest and carrying their own scuba equipment and instructor, rib tenders and every toy imaginable for even the lowest-attention-span, highest-net-worth, adrenaline-seeking client.

Rascal, as its name would have you believe, does party-time and seafaring adventure with verve, sporting an Englishman called Gaz as master of ceremonies. Rascal's 180-ton ironwood and teak frame and generous girth, sitting solidly in the water, allows for plenty of room to play and relax. Instead of pinched, gloomy berths beneath deck, you get five large, light-filled cabins with picture-book windows and huge bathrooms, louvered blinds and high rattan ceilings, directors' chairs and creamy textiles that conjure a Hamptons beach house. The holiday vibe continues with a large games room and bar, different deck levels for shaded dinners and lounging on bean bags and a flat roof space from which we competed to dive and twizzle-jump. This also doubles as a cinema and a star-gazing platform for balmy nights of free-spirited adventure and fun, which is what this boat charter is all about.

And Komodo National Park offers adventure by the lungful. Forming part of a volcanic arc known as the Ring

“Rascal does
party-time
and seafaring
adventure
with verve”

of Fire, these islands sit where the Pacific and the Indian Ocean meet – the colliding currents and nutrient-rich waters attract a unique marine biodiversity, with over 1,000 fish species, a dozen types of dolphin, turtles and manta rays, as well as most of the world's coral. Here, the reefs, as bright as flower beds, earned the islands their name – Flores. There are endless legendary dive sites, like Batu Bolong and Lighthouse, attracting

great shoals of fish and feeding sharks and tiny critters like pygmy seahorses sheltering in the coral. Manta Point – where the manta rays with their vast five meter wing spans home in on you like a bombardment of B-52s – is even shallow enough to snorkel. It's a scuba diver's playground, but you certainly don't need more than fins and a snorkel to get a sense of the kaleidoscopic marvels of the Blue Planet universe just feet from the boat or the beach.

While the crew set up shady arbors on the pink coral beaches for picnic lunches that morph into starlit seafood barbecues, we spend hours in these semi-enclosed bays, face down, trying to separate the angelfish from the sweetlips in the riot of colors and the feeding frenzy going on below the water's surface.

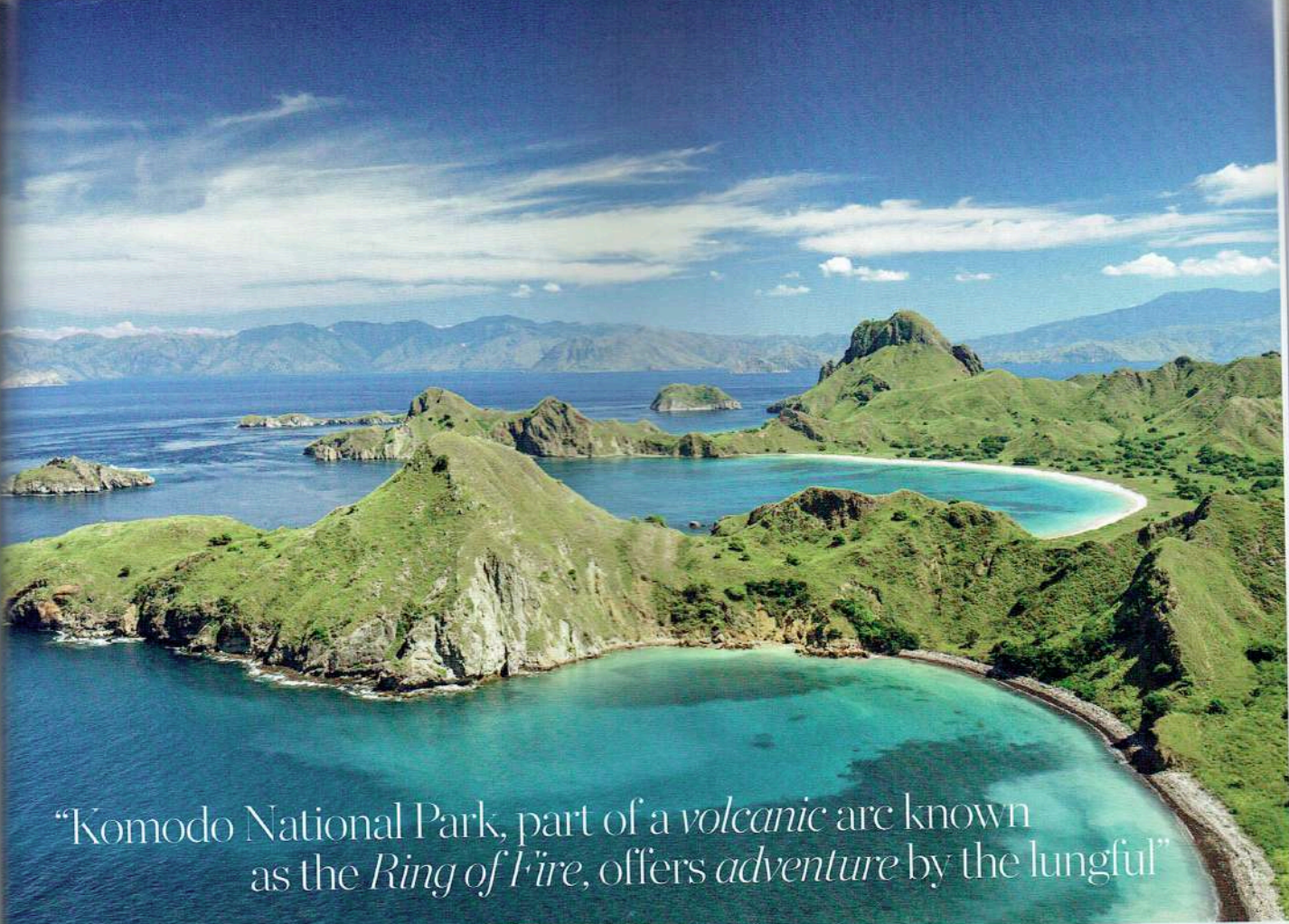
Above the water line, it is another story. The mostly uninhabited islands of windswept grasses are as barren and wildly beautiful as Hebridean Scotland. In this strange habitat, and here alone, the Komodo dragon stalks, climbing trees as soon as it is hatched to escape its cannibalistic mother, before growing up to 10ft. It is the largest known lizard on earth. We watch from as close as we dare, given the swell beneath our rib, as an enormous dragon plays 'grandmother's footsteps' with a family of monkeys foraging on the water's edge. When the dragon's forked tongue flickers, the monkeys scarp, leaving the frustrated dragon, with its highly developed sense of smell, to turn his attention fiercely on us, offshore in the bobbing boat.

With some hundreds of dragons inhabiting Rinca Island, you would have to be unlucky not to see them stalking this shoreline at Nusa Kode, on Rinca's Horseshoe Bay. With its lurking reptiles on a beach shrouded in mist, this desolate and eerie landscape was the inspiration for Hollywood classics *Jurassic Park* and *King Kong*. The weird silence of a sky devoid of birds (perhaps due to the lack of trees, or because they are dragon prey) and the deep inky blackness of the water that pounds at the sheer cliff face and rushes into the open sea make it feel like the edge of the world.

And the open sea is where we are heading next, after five days blissfully moored up in the languid blue and green mosaicked bays of Komodo National Park. Happily, the day breaks on a sea as smooth as glass, boding well for our passage across the Sumba Straits. This is a migratory route for whales, but today only flying fish and the rocking fins of a distant pod of dolphins break the mirrored surface. Time passes, we drink another glass of Chablis and >

WATERWORLD
Rascal's rib tender allows guests to explore and go scuba-diving





“Komodo National Park, part of a volcanic arc known as the *Ring of Fire*, offers adventure by the lungful”



Clockwise front above: a view of Padar and the outlying islands of Flores; Rascal's roof deck is perfect for jumping into the sea; the master cabin, with steps leading to the alfresco cinema



“Nihi Sumba continues the sense of unbridled *freedom*”

ISLAND LIFE
Nihi Sumba Island resort's one-and-a-half-mile sandy beach is the perfect place to canter along the Indian Ocean on a polo pony and Sumbanese cross-breed



our chef produces our last lunch, as the slumbering silhouette of Sumba appears on the horizon.

Cast off from the Nusa Tenggara chain of islands by these sometimes tumultuous straits, Sumba is in many ways a land that time forgot. Its fierce reputation for headhunting and blood sacrifices seemingly protected it from the attentions of the seafaring Portuguese and Dutch. Before that, for several hundred years, Chinese and Arab merchants came and left, trading the horses that now thrive on the island's grasslands for slaves and sandalwood.

Reaching the port of Waikelo in northern Sumba we wave goodbye to the lovely crew and climb aboard the Nihi Sumba Island resort's jeep, which has open sides like an upmarket safari vehicle. "Let the adventures begin," says the driver, handing us seed cake wrapped in a banana leaf. For sure, as we cruise out of the harbor town, this does feel like a wild frontier, with groups of Sumba cowboys, bare-chested and with magnificent machetes tied around their waists, smoking the local kreteks cigarettes as they race their horses bareback down the untarmacked highways.

If Rascal offers the free-spirited thrill that only being the master of your own boat, destiny and destination can bring, Nihi Sumba, in all its abundant wild 567 acres on the coastal plains and forests of western Sumba, continues the sense of unbridled freedom. I can think of only a handful of places in the world where you can canter without being fettered by health-and-safety tape down one-and-a-half miles of beach, on a polo pony and a Sumbanese cross-breed; where you can swim in waterfalls and trek stunning butterfly trails; where guests can witness ancient jousting ceremonies and harvest rituals. Where a raw cocoa and oil massage can continue as long as you like, and where you have privileged access to one of the best left-hand surf breaks in the world. This place redefines the meaning of luxury.

The resort is the biggest employer on the island, and its greatest asset is the staff – mostly members of the local community, who ride their oxen down to the sea to bathe and who emerge at dusk to collect winkles and crabs in low tide, and with whom the resort has a symbiotic relationship. Because they are empowered and allowed to be themselves, the hospitality at Nihi feels real and genuine, and the culture of the unique island undiluted and intact. Arriving on the slow route by boat felt like a gentler and proper introduction to this alien island of shamans and ancestor worship. Only on day three did the sensation of rocking at sea abate and our land legs return. And then it was time to drag ourselves away and take the small plane back to Bali, covering the week-long journey we had made by sea in a short hour-and-a-half. It simply didn't seem right. *nihicom*

NEED TO KNOW *A five-night trip on the Rascal, sleeping up to 10 guests in five cabins, plus a four-night stay at Nihi Sumba, including all food, non-alcoholic beverages, crew – dive master, chef and expedition leader, all activities, internal flights and transfers, can all be arranged by Ampersand, from £43,240; ampersandtravel.com ■*