

My journey to Bali begins long before take off, right when I make the decision to go. Then I get my knickers in a right knot: will my injuries subside? Will I be able to do the hard stuff? How hard will it be? Will I hurt myself? I'm such an injured junior, should I be going at all? Have I got enough pairs of shorts?

And on it goes.

We arrive in Penestanan well into the night. Near the entrance to Santra Putra Guesthouse, long, silent vines drape majestically from enormous trees. We will stay here for eight glorious days and nights. Our accommodation is in the traditional Balinese compound style where all the internal buildings are positioned according to religious architectural philosophy around a lush garden that is patiently attended to each day. It is quiet and comfortable and I am utterly overjoyed as I put my bags down to settle in for the night.

Next morning, we venture out to the quiet village of Penestanan. Offerings decorate entrances everywhere, reminding us of the sacredness of place and the everyday rituals of the Balinese. It is not long before my mind switches from the rattling of incessant anxieties about shorts and injuries to tranquillity, peace and a gratitude for how blessed I am just to be in this divine place, where the grace and kindness of the Balinese is so profound that it almost overwhelms me. With these feelings, I know the retreat has begun for me.

The following morning, the retreat officially begins. Our group is lovely and have come from all around the country. I know some, but not all. By the week's end we will have shared silence, food, practice and the joy of this village outside of Ubud which quietly offers all that we want when we are not practicing: massages, whole coconuts, coffee, turmeric drinks and luxurious walks. It's easy to be around everyone, we are united in our pursuit, but of course different in our experiences. Some are perceptibly troubled, distracted and having trouble landing, as if they are still back in Australia. I hope for them that they can be here soon to delight in the full experience, because it's so good.

Our room is right next door to the yoga room, so it's literally a hop and a skip next door and then we are there. The yoga space is light and cool, facing on to the lush greenery of the garden and when with meditation begins at seven, it is soft, blissful and tranquil. Again, I cannot believe how lucky I am to be here and how grateful I am to be happy, relaxed and full of anticipation for what the week will bring. I am bathing in a completely joyous state and am again moved to think of the beauty and profound graciousness of the Balinese. In all my eight visits to Bali I have been moved and astounded by their grace, particularly in the face of the relentless bombardment of raucous western culture that they receive.

It is 7:30am. Meditation is over. I have been having a few thoughts. I've been thinking how long it has been since I sung a terrible 80's ballad to my two chihuahuas. I thought about my available shorts options a couple of times. Notably, I have been experiencing quite a lot of bliss. I feel so good that I must be blessed. I am.

Next stop: silence, fruit and Balinese coffee. I love Balinese coffee. Its one of the things I stock up on to take home, as part of my way of remembering Balinese daily life. A month later and I will still be drinking it each morning in Sydney. I will be reminded of silence, fruit and coffee. The silence is comfortable and easy – and for me a relief not to have to talk to people. I am just happier just to be around them, to hang out together. This is like another form of yoga – you have a silent, connected experience with a room full of people. You just be and act together. You share the space, but you don't impinge on the space of others. Everyone is vulnerable. We are dealing less in the world of personality and more in the world of experience. I like it.

We have yoga at 9. It is soft, engaging and enjoyable. I am at the front of the room, so everyone has their eyes on my amateur bottom, my displays of extraordinary expertise and my special Bali shorts. It must be such a terrible distraction for them all. I must try to be more considerate. I worry about the caged bunnies outside and fantasise about them running wild and free in the yoga room with us. Meanwhile, Caroline is warm, jovial and easy, smiling with her amused, interested, smile. My partner, Julie, is in the corner with a broken kneecap and full-leg brace. Later, she will tell me how much she has been getting out of just being in

the room, watching and doing what she is able. I am struck by my regular thought that everyone is both comforted and challenged by Iyengar yoga – maybe in equal part. We are surely the lucky ones.

Between the morning and afternoon classes Julie and I wander through Penestanan in pursuit of the essentials: coffee, turmeric drinks and incense from Bintang supermarket. We buy about four packs of the latter, again, it's part of the desire to extend the Bali experience into our Sydney home.

In the afternoons we do pranayama and are spoiled with restorative. It's unseasonably cool. I still can't do a free headstand. Oh well. I quite like the wall.

As the days go by I find myself clinging a little to the thought of how I can bring the preciousness of peace, tranquillity, comfort and silence back to my daily life at home. Since my return I've noticed how enduring the effects my trip to Bali has been. I have meditated a bit. I've stopped putting the radio on as background noise filler. I've burned more incense. I have drunk Bali coffee every day. I am more obsessed with turmeric than ever. I'm more laid back about my practice. I've contemplated adopting The Asana for Emotional Stability Sequence that was included in our retreat info pack. Lots of nice inversions. I've started using a softer, frictionless form of breath during practice. I've not worn my Bali shorts yet. I might keep them ready for next year's retreat. I can't wait.