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THINGS THAT INTEREST, ENGAGE AND ENRAGE

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A Spicy Date

HECTOR'S DIARY

in the Bali Advertiser



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UBUD is the centre of much heritage and tradition in Bali. This remains its principal charm, which is offset only by its other role as a testing ground for the skills – or lack of these – of drivers of huge buses that service the growing Chinese takeaway tourist trade. The narrow streets of Aum Central are believed by package tour operators and entrepreneurial bus companies to be ideally suited to big vehicles.

Fortunately such impediments are only spasmodic. It mightn't seem that this is the case when you're caught in one of the regular hour-long crawls around the Monkey Forest-Raya Ubud-Hanoman horror, or the similar stop-start treks up from Lod Tunduh, but it would be churlish and quite wrong to assert that shemozzle is a round-the-clock affair. The roads are generally quite trafficable between midnight and 6am.

Ubud is also Festival Central. It's home to the Writers and Readers Festival (<http://www.ubudwritersfestival.com/about/>) (the 14th, this year, is from Oct. 25-29) and Bali Spirit Festival (<http://www.balispiritfestival.com/program/day-time-line-up>) (Mar. 19-26), and many other celebrations, especially those of the highly favoured navel-gazing variety. Some of these are delightfully boutique affairs where deep and meaningful navel gazing takes on an almost personal perspective. There's a lot to be said for navel gazing, if this is conducted with an open mind.

Janet DeNeefe's writers' festival has gone from strength to strength since its first rendition, which was held as a healing process after the first Bali bombing in 2002. A little while ago it incorporated a culinary element to its programming, which added pedas (spice) to panas (heat). Some wag at the time defined this as fragrant rice meets fragrant lies. The full degustation of the Ubud Food Festival (<http://www.ubudfoodfestival.com/>) grew from this early appetiser.

This year's festival is themed Every Flavour is a Story. DeNeefe tells us it is designed to reflect the rich cultural texts that underpin the diverse culinary traditions of the archipelago. Last year's event attracted around 8000 international visitors, according to the organisers, which naturally provided a spin-off benefit for local traders and accommodation providers. All good.

There are narratives attached to any set of food traditions, of course, and Indonesia's are richer than many, weaving stories that depict the journey your food has taken from farmer's plots and livestock owners to the dinner table. UFF, which bills itself as Indonesia's biggest culinary festival, has invited leading aficionados of the genre to share their insights and kitchen secrets. Leading restaurateurs, food manufacturers, and producers, food writers and gourmards will be on hand to spread the love.

During the three-day event, visitors will be able to join forums, cooking demonstrations, workshops, special events, food markets, musical performances and film showings. Among those down to attend are Tasia and Gracia Seger, known as the Spice Sisters (<http://www.news.com.au/entertainment/tv/reality-tv/spice-sisters-tasia-and-gracia-seger-win-my-kitchen-rules/news-story/2768dd456a1a6deed5b48db6bb97d3c5>), who recently won a nationwide cooking contest in Australia; Professor Winarno, an expert on tempe; (<http://www.ubudfoodfestival.com/indonesian-superfoods-tempe/>) and the "jungle chef" of Papua, Charles Toto (<https://trek-papua.com/our-treks/3-days-baliem-valley-tour-itinerary/papua-jungle-chef-community/>), who will introduce unique dishes made from the produce and heritage of Indonesia's easternmost province.

There's an international element as well. This year Bo Songvisava and Dylan Jones are down to appear. Their Bo.Lan Restaurant in Bangkok (<http://www.theworlds50best.com/asia/en/asiyas-50-best-restaurants/3140/Bo-Lan.html>) is on the best 50 restaurants in Asia list. They will feature in a special street food event together with Indonesian cooking legend Will Meyrick at his Ubud eatery Hujan Locale (<http://theyumlist.net/en/2016/02/hujan-locale-by-will-meyrick-ubud-bali.html>).

Also back this year will be the Kitchen Stage presenting Indonesian language cooking demonstrations. Look for appearances by Made Runatha and Made Januar from MOKSA; Chef Made Lugra from The Ayung Resorts; and Made Surjaya from The Standing Stones.

Full details are available at www.ubudfoodfestival.com (<http://www.ubudfoodfestival.com>).

Collectors' Items

There's a lot of rubbish in Bali. It is a constant problem that becomes most foully evident when it rains and all the stuff everyone's dumped out of sight – and sometimes just out of olfactory range – in previously dry watercourses gets flushed out into the sea and ends up on the beaches.

Fighting pollution on the beaches is also a constant problem. Many are recruited to the forces deployed against this threat, by means of regular clean-ups and their commitment to public voluntary service is commendable. It's true of course that the new mass market tourists, from China, along with the increased Indonesian component and the growing Indian one, are less fretful about rubbish than the western tourists who hitherto have been the preferred market.

But this is not an excuse to continue in the false belief that rubbish is not really a problem. The dengue figures alone prove that, as well as the increase in rats that these days, due to other shortsighted policies, are preyed upon by fewer feral dogs.

There is, too, a lot of rubbish talked about rubbish. Those who might assert that no one cares should study the efforts made by the Denpasar city authorities to implement workable local rubbish collection policies, fund these, and enforce the law concerning them. A very good rule is always credit where credit is due.

Denpasar is a city of more than three-quarters of a million people, in a densely settled and therefore more easily administered area, with a revenue base that is beginning to be workable, and an administration that is keen to create and sustain liveability. Other areas of Bali do not have that civic benefit, the services of broadly educated administrators, or the resources to fund effective waste collection and disposal. That, like so much else here, remains a work in progress.

This element of life in Bali needs to be understood by critics who briefly occupy plush villas and wrinkle their noses at the despoiled environment beyond their privileged walls.

Catch a Chill

The Diary is just back home from a brief visit to that other place, the big island to our south where, to quote from a now venerable pop song (<http://www.songfacts.com/detail.php?id=2962>), women glow and men plunder (not chunder, just by the way) and Vegemite sandwiches are all the rage. So it's really good to be home, for all sorts of reasons, not least for the reliability of warmth as a constant factor in Bali's climate.

Our flit this time took us to the southwest corner of Western Australia. A good friend who lives in Bali's southern suburb was celebrating an important birthday and we had to be there. It was a lovely show, at a surf lifesaving club on Perth's fantastic beachfront. It was hot in Perth.

Then we went further south, into the karri forest country that is the ancestral territory of the Distaff, and hit one of those quirks of climate that make life in that part of the world so interesting. Rain's OK – we're used to that in Bali. But if we ever want thermometer readings in the teens we can trip up to Kintamani or Bedugul and sample these very briefly before getting back in the car and returning speedily to lower altitude and higher temperatures.

It's summer in the great southern land. But for some reason, Murphy's Climatic Law has always followed us on our travels. It's most unfair.

Water Rites

The unusually heavy rains of this year's strong La Niña wet season will have partly replenished Bali's groundwater reserves, which is a good thing. But these reserves have been so heavily plundered by over-use and shockingly absent planning and regulation that it would take several successive La Niña events to make any noticeable difference. The reality of global climate cycles is that nature will not provide that benefit. The girl child's drought-fixated brother El Niño will inevitably return.

Conservation and responsible use – enforced by both law and the effectiveness of price signals on usage – are the only way to prevent terminal decline. There are of course some things humans can do to build sustainable water resources. They could fix deficient reticulation systems, for example, though that seems to be a bridge too far under water for Bali's authorities at the moment.

Innovative science can help, where perennial and pervasive losses from leakage and thievery won't. So it was good to see the IDEP Foundation (<http://www.idepfoundation.org/en/where-we-work/bali>) unveil a recharge solution on Feb. 27 designed to counter Bali's water crisis. It did so by means of a media launch of its demonstration recharge well under the Bali Water Protection (BWP) scheme started in 2015. It's part of a longer-term solution to the problem of rapidly depleting aquifers, many

of which are being invaded by salt water because of the depletion of the water table. It's apt that this is the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development.

The program calls for a network of 136 recharge wells to be installed across Bali, harvesting water to balance consumption. The Bali Water Protection program involves educational programs in 132 schools located along rivers, and a media campaign aimed at raising public awareness for water preservation in the province. The demonstration well has been funded by Fivelements (<http://www.fivelements.org/en/about-us/sustainability>), a luxury wellness resort, which is showing the way by supporting the concept of the entire pilot program.

As IDEP Executive Director Ade Andreawan says, it is vital that Bali's business communities offer strong support for the program.



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