

A DAWN VISIT TO A TEMPLE IN UBUD IS
THE STARTING POINT FOR AN IMMERSIVE
JOURNEY OF RESTORATION.

91



BREATHE



STORY BY RACHEL LEES

WATER

BLESSINGS

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94 Incense drifts through the stillness of the morning, its gauzy smoke trail guiding my path through the temple. As I reach the ancient stone pool, where grey carp ripple in glassy water, the leaves of the surrounding banyan trees glow with sunlight. Swathed in an emerald-green sarong, I slip into the sacred pool and move along a series of wall fountains, bowing beneath each one as cool water rushes over my head. I’ve come to Pura Tirta Empul (tirtaempultemple.com), one of Bali’s Hindu temples, for a purification ritual known as Melukat – and there isn’t another soul in sight.

A 40-minute drive north of Ubud, Tirta Empul translates to “holy spring” and its reputed healing properties have drawn pilgrims seeking renewal and spiritual cleansing since the 10th century.

Then 20 years ago, a new wave of visitors started to arrive after American author Elizabeth Gilbert released her genre-defining travel memoir *Eat Pray Love*, inspiring a generation of travellers in search of meaning and balance.

The rise in wellness travel since has seen the temple’s (and Bali’s) popularity soar. Now, just after sunrise, before it opens and the crowds gather, guests of Amandari (qantas.com/hotels/amandariubud), a luxury resort built above Ubud’s Ayung River Gorge, are granted exclusive access.

Opened in 1989, the property, which offers personalised multi-day retreats, was designed to reflect the look of a traditional Balinese mountain village: its 32 grand pavilions and villas feature alang-alang-thatched roofs, Kamasan tapestries and sunken marble



bathtubs. A stay that seems to defy time, Amandari sets the benchmark for resorts on the island. The hotel’s infinity pool is said to have been the first in Bali, its organic form echoing the shape of rice paddies. “Amandari” means “peaceful spirits” and just being here encourages you to slow down. Be present. Breathe deeper.



Transparent turquoise water and schools of vivid blue-and-yellow-striped sergeant majors surround me as I arrive at Moyo Island, a 50-minute boat ride across the Flores Sea from Sumbawa Besar (an hour’s flight from Denpasar). Most of Moyo’s 32,000 hectares are designated national park and protected reserves, as well as being home to Amandari’s sister property Amanwana (qantas.com/hotels/amanwanamoyo), which means “peaceful forest”. The sole five-star resort on the island, it comprises 17 luxurious tents dotted throughout tropical forest along the beach, where native rusa deer and macaques roam. The Jean-Michel Gathy-designed camp,

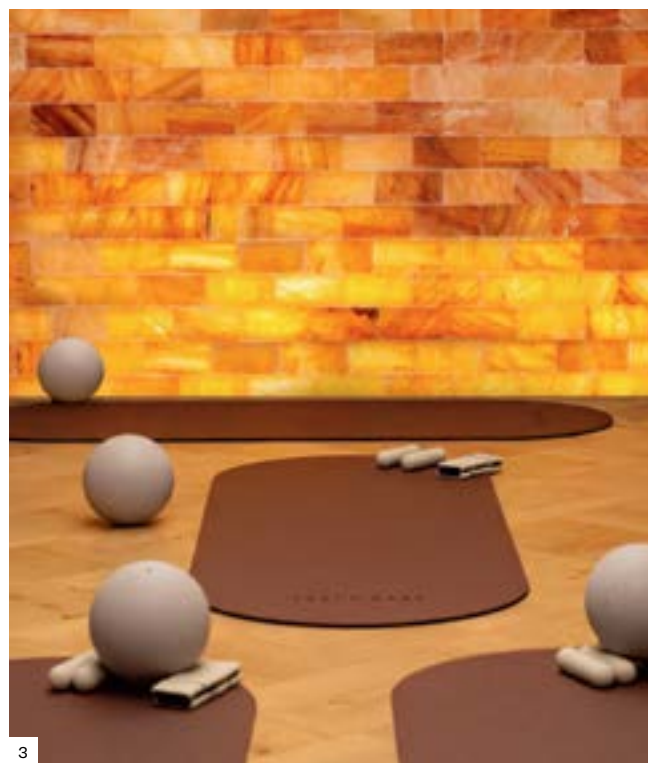
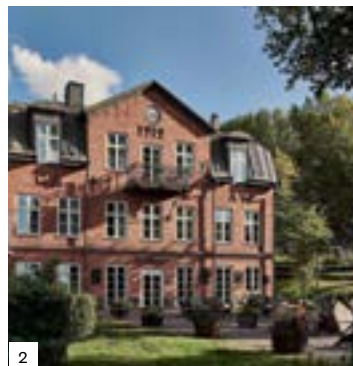
which has hosted celebrities including Mick Jagger and the late Diana, Princess of Wales, forms the calming backdrop for luxuriant morning swims, leisurely afternoon hikes and guided sunset meditations. At the restaurant, a thatched pavilion overlooking the ocean, there are warming bowls of bobor bayam (spinach cooked in creamy coconut milk soup) and fresh-off-the-boat seafood such as grilled red snapper with sautéed tomato, olives and capers.

Over breakfast on the lawn on my first full day, I’m rewarded with the sight of blacktip reef sharks feasting along the shoreline. It’s the ideal viewpoint; if I were in the water, the timid creatures would scatter. In the spa tent later that day, thunder rumbles overhead and black-naped orioles swirl as my therapist, Dona, who was born and raised on Moyo, conjures ancient magic (and lemongrass oil) to relieve me of aches others have failed to shift.

At the remote Mata Jitu waterfall, I float on a li-lo in a plume of incense. Amanwana’s resident healer, Frendy



Agung Dewanta, chants quietly as he taps a metal singing bowl, sending vibrations across the clear green water in a sound bath designed to quiet the mind and restore inner clarity. As it comes to an end, light rain drifts through the canopy, pitter-pattering on fern leaves and the surface of the water. On my way back to the jeep and the cosseted warmth of my stay, I wander, bare feet on damp earth, soaking up these last moments of stillness in the rainforest.



Three more places to visit for a spiritual refresh...

1. MAYAKOBA, MEXICO ALILA MAYAKOBA

Experience ancient wellness techniques with traditional healers at the new Alila Mayakoba (qantas.com/hotels/alilamayakoba). The luxury resort in Mexico's Riviera Maya, a 40-minute drive from Cancun airport, has 182 rooms spread across 24 hectares of mangrove and jungle along the beach. The two-storey, six-suite spa offers experiences inspired by the sacred Mayan calendar, including guided temazcal ceremonies – ancient rituals that take

place inside a traditional sweat lodge – or body pampering treatments that utilise local ingredients, such as a coffee scrub followed by a warm cacao body mask.

2. STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN HOTEL J

Embrace Swedish *bastu* (sauna) culture in a 19th-century seaside villa on the fringe of the Stockholm archipelago. Hotel J's (hotelj.com) recent renovation has seen the 158-room property add

a new sauna and 27 “hotel within a hotel” rooms that are ideal for retreats. Enjoy forest bathing nearby, sound baths and tours of the herb garden and, if you book a Signature Seaview room, make use of a red-light therapy lamp and herbal supplements.

3. LONDON, ENGLAND THE NEWMAN

It's now possible to find enlightenment in London's Fitzrovia, a neighbourhood with a bohemian edge where The Newman

(qantas.com/hotels/newmanlondon) opened in February with wellbeing at its core. The property has 81 Art Deco-influenced rooms and suites dressed in a calm biscuit-hued palette but it's the subterranean wellness centre across an entire floor that really wows. There you'll find everything from a hydrotherapy pool to a salt room, sauna, steam space and “ice lounge”, plus a spa and 24-hour gym. Even the bar has a wholesome bent; its cocktail list includes 10 drinks that can be made with or without alcohol. ✨