

# TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS

## Traditions & Customs



Bali is a land of many **adat**, or traditional customs. Traditions and customs focus on being **adab** (respectful and courteous), which should be **abadi** (eternal). Some traditions are slowly changing as a result of factors such as increased political and social **democracy**, international **globalization**, and affluence from expanding **tourism**.

### **Straight Teeth** Balinese believe that

straight teeth are an important feature and have their upper front teeth filed by a priest. This is done in a ceremony, often just before marriage. Evil spirits traditionally have crooked sharp teeth in Balinese culture.

### **Two Hands**

To show respect when giving something to an older person or person of higher caste pass it with both hands.

### **Not the Eyes!**

Looking directly at a person's eyes in normal daily talk is considered disrespectful, especially to elders or people in positions of higher authority.

### **Over Here!**

To beckon a person to come to you, use the right hand with fingers together and pointing downwards. Do not use the bent index finger, it is considered rude.

### **Look to the Mountains!**

Mountains are thought of as sacred and all homes and temples in Bali point towards a mountain, while the entrance faces the sea.

### **Kamar Mandi**

Mandi means to wash and a kamar mandi is a bathroom. In the bathroom is the bak mandi, which is a large tub of clean water (usually cold). You pour water over yourself using a large ladle, then use soap and rinse by pouring more water with the ladle. Do not put anything in the bak mandi, as this would dirty the water. Western style baths are only normally found in international hotels. Some bak mandi may be connected to a shower.

### **Hinduism**

Most Balinese are Hindu by faith and believe that a person's spirit is reborn into a new body after death. How well a person lived doing good deeds will determine what type of new body a spirit will receive. The aim is to be born into a higher level of life until one is ultimately reunited with the great World Spirit.

### **Hands Off!**

In many Asian cultures it is offensive to touch a person's head such as patting a child on the top of the head, as this is where the soul is thought to be.

### **Pass with the Right**

The right hand is used to eat and pass things to others. The left hand is used to for tasks that are thought unclean such as wiping the bottom.

### **Soles of the feet**

The soles of the feet are the lowest part of the body and the closest to the ground which is thought impure. Therefore it is offensive to show the soles or point the feet at people when sitting.

### **Spirits**

Balinese believe good and bad spirits dwell in nature, and therefore make many offerings at shrines and temples to appease these spirits.

### **Let's Discuss it!**

When buying items in Bali it is often expected that the price will be discussed and that a price acceptable to both the buyer and the seller will be negotiated. Once the buyer makes an offer that is accepted by the seller, the buyer is obliged to buy the item at that price. If the seller suggests a price to which the buyer does not agree, then the buyer is not obliged to buy.

### **Get the Point?**

Pointing with one or more fingers or toes is rude. Use the thumb instead.

### **Let's talk**

Talking with hands on hips or with arms crossed is considered impolite, as is shouting at people.

### **Aling Aling**

Just behind the doorway is a wall called the aling aling. It stops any evil spirits that **manage** to get through the door. Balinese people believe evil spirits find it hard to turn at right angles.

1. Why is it bad form to step over a person lying on the ground or to walk by the person's head?
2. If one is eating and has greasy fingers why would they say sorry as they pass a pot with a clean left hand?
3. Why don't people drop the soap into the bak mandi?
4. How are spirits stopped from entering family compounds?
5. Why might Balinese funerals be happy events?
6. Why might it be hard for a Balinese person to have a crooked smile?
7. Why shouldn't you start to bargain for an item you do not really want?
8. How would you signal a friend to come join you?
9. Why do Balinese make daily offerings at shrines?
10. Why is it bad form to pat a child on the head?

