

# PARAGLIDING BALI 2009

**Rob Holmes**

LOOKING BACK OVER MY FLYING LOG IN MARCH THIS YEAR, I NOTED THAT I HADN'T ACHIEVED EVEN A COUPLE OF HOURS AIRTIME SINCE THE CHRISTMAS BREAK. INDEED, LAST SUMMER IN PERTH HAD TURNED UP THE WORST FLYING WEATHER SINCE



Rob over Gunung Payung  
Photo: David Leith

I STARTED FLYING FOUR YEARS AGO. WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT – GO SOMEWHERE ELSE? WHY NOT?

I made some phone calls. *"No mate, unless you get here in the next few weeks, Bright is off until next summer."* Queensland – *"Nope, don't bother until September."* Hmm! What about Bali? *"Best time for flying is June through to September"* (Bali Paragliders' Club). I made a few phone calls to friends who had flown in Bali before and lucky for me, David Leith agreed to make up the other half of the expedition. We chose July to make sure we were right in the middle of the most reliable flying weather and then booked our air tickets.

Next, where to stay? Obviously somewhere near the launch sites on the south coast of the Bukit Peninsula. Nusa Dua? Yeah Gods! All advertised on the internet in hundreds US\$ per day. Later, when driving through Nusa Dua I got to understand why – security guards on all roads leading in and a tourist parkland estate worthy of Singapore. Then there was a place that one of local pilots suggested, which seemed more like a rat hole from the reviews. More searches, downloading reviews. I then found a B&B (a pension) on Tanjung Bena – a little peninsula that juts up on the east coast of Bukit; a good review and about A\$25 per day that turned out to be the best possible – and run by really nice people. You can get a lot cheaper, but I like my comfort. The

pension organised a lift to pick us up and a Suzuki get around in. The Suzuki turned out to be a 'hire-a-bomb' (don't use that word in Indonesia), cash in advance and leave the keys with the pension when you go. Only a few dollars a day and it got us around; however, we had to turn the airconditioning off to get up the steepest hill in first gear.

I can recommend Tanjung Bena which has a few good pensions to choose from. There are also a couple of up-market resorts at the north end of Tanjung Bena that are mostly patronised by Indonesian and Malaysian holiday makers where the minimum rate is US\$90 per night – very cheap compared to Nusa Dua. We had a few meals at the one next door (The Princess). At night we were the only guests in a vast dining room and the staff fell over themselves giving us the best service for a really delicious and cheap meal. It's worth eating there just to see the ceiling – traditional Balinese craftsmanship, but the size of a cathedral dome with millions of hand-tied knots. Across the road from our pension was the beach where several dive companies operate; and if the seabreeze was brisk, there were chaotic para-soaring operations off the beach.

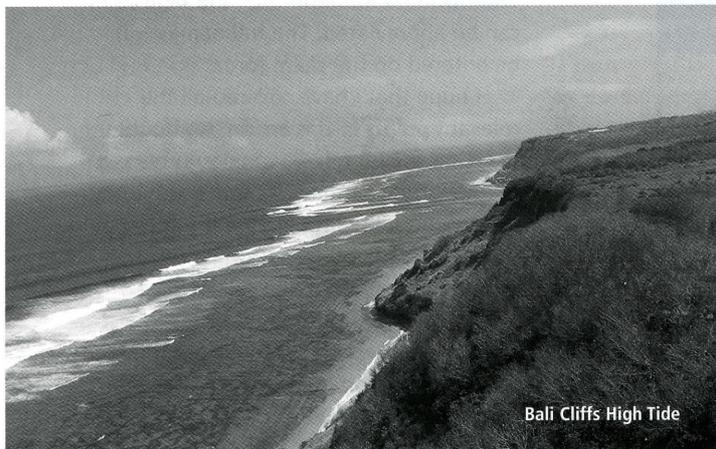
At this point I add a disclaimer. Yes, I know that thousands of Australian pilots

have been to Bali; this article is therefore encouragement for those who haven't or for the amusement of those who have.

The story so far – there is cheap accommodation and transport to be found. However, don't drive in Bali unless you have someone with you who has done it before! The only road rules seem to be mostly drive on the left hand side and stop at red lights most of the time. At night, unlit bicycles and hand carts without reflectors wander in and out of the dark without warning; in the day, motorcycles swarm around you on all sides and whoever gets ahead in a round-about has right of way – it's a game of chicken and requires driver eye contact. On dual carriage roads 60km/h is a white knuckle ride – no kidding! I love the attitude of Balinese drivers – nobody gets heated even though there are vehicles cutting in at every chance to get into queues or to change lanes.

You must carry lots of Rupia so you can pay on the spot if you are caught out by the police. Don't worry about handing over cash on the nail – the alternative, I was assured, is a day in court in Denpasar. Anyway, the police are very nice people, just like all the other Balinese we met, and they also need to earn a living.

What about flying? The Bali Paragliders' Club website says that there are



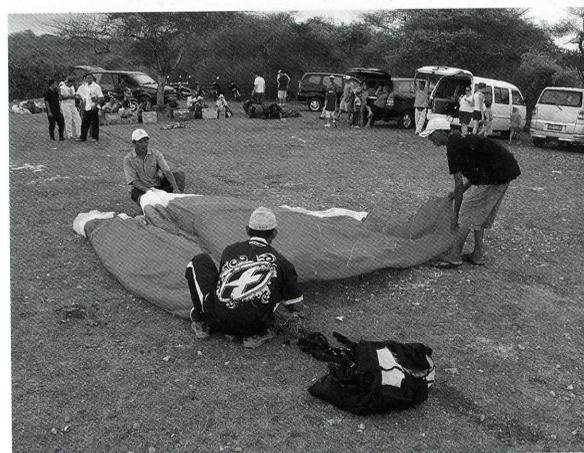
Bali Cliffs High Tide



...and low tide



Gunung Payung Temple



Folding Service

two flying sites on the south coast of the Bukit peninsula. I can assure you that it takes local knowledge to find them. My advice is either to go with a flying tour or, as I did, go with someone who has been there before. Last time David was there was four years ago on a tour, and he only had a hazy memory of where the sites were – as happens if someone else is doing the driving. We crashed along rough roads and tracks, asking locals the way; they either shrugged or else pointed in opposite directions to the last advice. Intrepid paragliders that we were, we pressed on over bone-jarring tracks and untracked wilds and ended up

surrounded by bush and bored looking cattle. Eventually we hit on a bush track that clearly had been used by four-wheel vehicles (a good sign as most Balinese drive motor bikes) – we kept following it until we nearly drove over a cliff into the sea – Hurray! We had found Timbis Launch. Soon, one of the group, who work with the site owner, appeared looking for the Japanese tourist group that had arrived just after us. *“Wind too east,”* he explained, *“Come, we go other site.”* How lucky can you be, as we might never have found ‘other site’.

As a rough guide, the Gunung Payung temple is right on the cliff edge and is



Lonely Gum Tree Gunung Panung



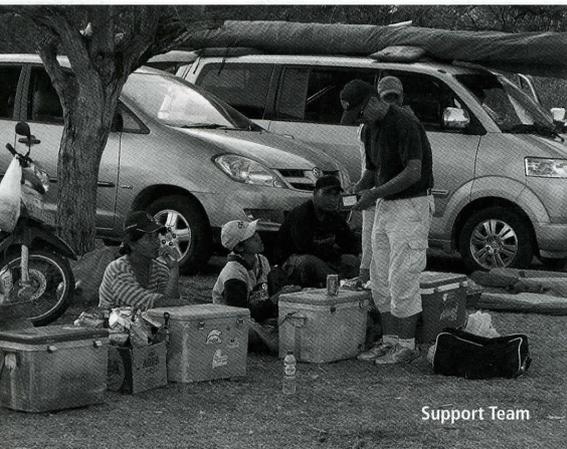
Nikko Resort  
Photo: David Leith



Parawaiting Timbis



Room and Transport



Support Team

located in between the two launch sites. You need to take the road of the same name that leads to the temple. Once you have crossed over the wide track that runs parallel with the coast, there are bush tracks that lead to either Timbis Launch to the west or Gunung Payung Launch to the east – the latter taking the name of the nearby temple. There were quite big pilot and tourist turnouts on some days, all of whom came down the Gunung Payung Road via an inland route. We were astounded that some of the tourists actually got there in standard road vehicles; I don't know what sumps and mufflers would have looked like afterwards. I strongly suggest that you hire something with good ground clearance. We preferred the coastal route via Nusa Dua from Tanjung Benoa that cuts across Gunung Payung Road. This was despite the last couple of kilometres from Nusa Dua being over bone-jarring limestone and motor bike tracks. We preferred the 20 minutes of rough stuff to the longer inland obstacle course through local villages. I say obstacle course because you can't do more than 30km/h due to the stream of motorbikes, animals, cars and bikes parked almost blocking the road or just people standing in the way having a chat. On our second last day there was the prospect of some serious parawaiting ahead, so I went off

and did a bit of scouting on foot. I soon found that by taking a short cut through a little village and then across about 100 m of farmland we could cut out all the 20 minutes of rough stuff to the Gunung Payung launch!

Timbis has a launch direction SSE and Gunung Payung SE. To the non-pilot the launch sites are not more than God-forsaken hell-holes – hot, humid and remote. The coastal bushland does not conjure scenes of tropical paradise – rather desolate low scrubland where farmers scratch a living somehow. The lesson is, don't take any long-suffering spouses/partners along with you – they will cease to be long-suffering during long periods of para/hangwaiting; better that they go to the beach or do some shopping. But, when standing at the edge of launch in the seabreeze, humidity and heat is forgotten as you take in the view.

The southern Bukit cliffs run for 15km between the Nikko Resort in the east to as far as can be flown (in the right conditions) to the west. At the base of the cliffs a reef platform, dry at spring low, extends out for 100m or so where breakers roll in at high tide. Along the reef platform seaweed farmers are out working their plots as soon as it is daylight enough to see and shallow enough to stand until the tide returns. This explains the little dark rectangles and lines that festoon the reef.





Timbis Launch

For those who drop out (preferably at low tide), there are pathways back up the cliff where the seaweed farmers make their way up and down. If the breeze is just right, one can fly to almost over the edge of the reef where breakers roll in below – the scenery out there is worth the trip to Bali. When flying out over the reef, little huts and plots for drying produce come into view that are tucked into the base of the cliff just above the high tide mark.

I was very happy that we were able to fly on four of the six days we were there – even if we only got an hour after 5pm on one day. The weather was wet and windy enough on two days for us not to even bother thinking about going to the launch sites. While we were there, the wind pattern appeared to be an early easterly becoming more southerly around noon as the seabreeze took effect. On a quiet day at Gunung Payung I became impatient waiting for the seabreeze. I launched in about eight knots which was still coming in at nearly 30 degrees from the left. It also happened to be high tide at the time with a metre or more of sea drowning the beach below. My first pass back in front of the launch was about 10m below launch height – consequently I found myself planning a strategy to avoid ending up in the sea below – probably by landing through the roof of a seaweed farmer's hut. Luckily for me there was enough lift in the corner to the right of launch behind the temple, just enough to pop me back over the edge onto launch. Of course, within an hour the breeze had swung around to the right and had picked up with the seabreeze.

Below launch the tide presents a risk when it is in (no safe bottom landing), but plenty of space on the beach when the tide is out – in which case you have a hot

walk back up the cliff. You need to watch how top landing is done because the local thorn trees are absolutely vicious – you don't want to land any further inland than you have to. Get your glider caught in one of those and you might as well go and read a book for the rest of your trip. The secret is to come in low – the lift at the edge of the cliff is enough to pop you up a few metres for an easy top-landing.

Of course, the quest when flying the Bukit south coast is to fly the Nikko Resort. In lighter conditions, or if the breeze is a little off, the lift is a little tricky between Gunung Payung and Nikko in places and one could drop out. Luckily, on the last day we had stronger conditions which gave all the lift we needed. It was quite a buzz doing passes in front of the multi-storey Nikko over hectares of swimming pools while waving to a family who had made their way up to the central Nikko tower. However, we didn't get the wind direction we needed to fly the cliffs for any great distance beyond Timbis Launch to the west. I am told that this section of the coast can be hazardous with no bottom landing; so it is important to stay in clean lift when you can get some good distance along to the west. As we were there for only six days, we didn't think it worth the effort of flying off Mt Batur or Candidasa as these launches require long trips from where we were staying. I would definitely suggest these sites if you are there for a couple of weeks.

There was quite a festival atmosphere on launch some days with up to a dozen or more in the air at times. A steady stream of tourists kept the local site owner busy doing tandems. There was a Japanese instructor with several students and novice pilots as well as locals and ex-pats and pilots from India, Australia

and Sumatra – the latter being hangies driving overland from Jakarta for the weekend. In contrast to the chaos on the roads, I was impressed by the attention to safety shown by all pilots. We were approached by the Sumatran guys and also the site owner to run through the safety and give-way rules. By the way, a site fee needs to be paid on the first day; it is a cheap and worthy contribution to some excellent flying.

Para/hang gliding from the two south coast launch sites supports a small community. You can order lunch and buy cool drinks, chocolates, chips or beers that are brought along to the site for sale. Timbis T-shirts, sarongs and cheap jewelry are also sold for you to take back to Aus. They also offer a very expert paraglider folding service – a good idea for packing your paraglider for the plane trip home. Like any other site in the world, it is a good idea to keep in with the locals and give them your support – don't argue about the prices, they are cheap enough. A recent attempt by a developer to buy the Gunung Payung land fell through with the economic downturn. On two occasions we passed surveyors working near the launch sites; who knows what they were up to and for how long these sites will be available? – the resorts are crowding in already.



## Letter to the Editor

### Public Discourse

Through the pages of Soaring Australia, I get the view that the flexible wing community is public and articulate in its discussions about sport aviation and where it is going.

I wish to commend all those involved.

Sport flying attracts people with strong personality and is an activity where continuous review of how we go about things is essential for success.

I find it heartening that a full range of opinions and subjects can be publicly

tabled and challenged. Decision by vote then provides both sides a gauge of where majority interest lies (including the apathy option) and things can move forward from there.

As a pilot from the sailplane side, the reason I am writing is that I find the flexible wing public discourse on all topics to be a tonic, compared with the feeling I get that on the fixed wing side, some topics are taboo.

A decade ago there were advocates in favour of combining the two organisations, Soaring Australia was a precursor

toe-in-the-water to that thinking.

My view from reading the magazine is that the flight forms have shown themselves to be different enough even in the way they go about their future re-positioning, to remain separate organisations.

My personal recipe for the future is that diversity embedded in systems gives the greatest potential for most people to draw benefit from sport aviation. For that, I am opposed to centralisation and prescriptive single path solutions imposed on all.

Emilis Prelgauskas