

DRIVING THE ISLAND OF THE GODS

Scarlett Mansfield uncovers
Bali's Land Rover scene

PICTURES BY SCARLETT MANSFIELD



Some of the members of the Bali Land Rover Owners club



Taking advantage of a local hidden gem, Pasut Beach



If you read Editor Patrick's feature on his time in Malaysia last year, you'll know how crazy passionate south-east Asians are about Land Rovers; Indonesia is no exception. As a freelance writer, I decided to head south for the winter to avoid those long British winter nights and set up base in Bali, known as 'The Island of the Gods'.

In the six weeks I was on the island, I only saw four Land Rovers. Curious as to where they are all hiding, I discovered there is a Bali Land Rover Owners Club (BLRO). Using investigative efforts sure to make Sherlock Holmes proud, I found the phone number of Putu Andy Panday and he swiftly organised an outing for me.

It's a classic Saturday afternoon in Bali – the sun is shining, sweat is dripping down my back, and every other road is closed owing to religious street ceremonies. The motorbike taxi I hail has to double back on himself as a result and a 20-minute journey soon turns into an hour-long ride and a very sore bottom.

I meet Putu Andy at McDonald's. I hop into his family minivan and am greeted by his wife and adorable children. He explains that in a turn of fate, his Defender broke down earlier that morning and I can't help but laugh at how familiar this conservation is. Five minutes later we pull up to Made Sutawijaya's house and I spot a Series III hybrid.

As an interesting side note, in Bali, it's really common to name your children depending on the order they are born, regardless of gender. At first, I thought just an odd amount of people happened to be named Putu and Made but it transpires that the first-born child is named Putu, Wayan or Gede, the second is named Made or Kadek, the third Nyoman or Komang, and the fourth Ketut. It can be quite difficult to

determine which Made someone is talking about, but they typically have nicknames or additional names to help identify each other.

Keeping with this tradition, Made tells me he named his 1968 Series III 'Nyoman Stoney' because it is his 'third child' and is a 109 Stoney hybrid. Opening his garage, Made then unveils his other 'children' – both a 1956 Series I and a 1961 Series II Land Rover as well as a several rare bikes and starts to tell me how he acquired all these vehicles.

In 2014 he swapped one of his motorbikes for a Series I in Surabaya, East Java. His daughter named her Beth, and she only constituted a small restoration project – nearly 95 per cent of the car is original – the paint isn't standard nor are the tyres. Made also had the Series I soft-top reproduced in Badung, Bali. While Exmoor Trim charge over £1000 for one, his cost £170 – though he does admit it's not as good in the wind as he'd like.

His Series II is named Apache, after the fictional Native American hero in the book Winnetou by Karl May. Apache has small modifications inside the engine but is still mostly built from Land Rover parts – it runs on petrol and has a camshaft, and spring bed taken from a Defender. It also has power steering and vacuum brake drum from a Toyota and a cover from a Series III. This does mean it no longer sounds like a Series though.

His Series III, Stoney, has even more modifications owing to the complexity of getting original parts. Made swapped the engine with a 300Tdi auto transmission, it also has a Discovery I front and rear axle as well as suspension from a Defender. "I focused on the basic needs first, and then I can change the parts later." A story all too familiar.

After exchanging stories about our adventures in our Land Rovers, we set off to explore the local area. His 17-year-old



Scraping through the lush vegetation of Bali

son drives the automatic Series III while Putu drives the Series II and Made drives the Series I.

Bouncing along the back roads of Bali, I'm reminded just how bumpy riding in a Series I is. Despite putting a new shock absorber on it and performing maintenance on the spring, we still jiggle around, and I have to increase the shutter speed on my camera to get a still photo.

As we scrape under the leaves of a banana tree and pass through rice paddies, I observe locals busy labouring in the heat wearing conical hats for protection. I'm convinced we're driving through someone's property, but they look at me confused when I ask who owns the land. After ten minutes off-road, we pull out onto Pasut Beach, the quietest beach I've seen on the whole island.

With this place being something of a hidden gem, there isn't anyone to clean up the rubbish that litters the shoreline. In all my trips to Bali, I haven't seen a beach this polluted. That isn't to say this beach is the only dirty beach on the island, rather there is nobody to clean it every day to attract tourists; it acts as a stark reminder of the plastic problem in Bali.

We begin to cruise along the beach with the others following behind us, leaving fresh tracks in the sand. As we drive, Made and Putu tell me more about the club. Putu founded Bali Land Rover Owners Club in 2010 but it became an official club with Made as the first President in 2015. Every two months they try to make a trip – usually involving off-roading, camping, or social activities. Every year they go on a spiritual adventure, too. The trip combines off-roading, greenlaning, charitable fundraising and praying at temples. In 2020 they want to drive to the zero-equator point of Indonesia. They also often join with other clubs around the country to meet fellow Land Rover fanatics.

To help make Land Rover an even bigger presence in Indonesia, in 2019 enthusiasts founded Land Rover Owners Indonesia (LROI). Inspired by the flag off the Last Overland, and by the Rovernuts festival in Langkawi featured a few months ago, the club hopes to establish relationships with Land Rover communities abroad and hold international events in Indonesia.

A few days later, over dinner with Ivan, the director of public relations at LROI, he tells me of their dreams to bring

the Camel Trophy back to Indonesia once again where it was held four times. Members have been trying to retrace routes and rebuilt cars to match the original specifications – they're hoping to invite international participants too, so I recommend keeping up to date with the club to see where they go with this.

Back at the beach, we wind along for a while, stop to take some photos, and watch as a group of four young Hindus place offerings by the shore at sunset. After heading back to Made's for dinner (nasi goreng – a favoured local stir-fried dish), I am invited to spend the following weekend with the club as they make their way up north to camp overlooking Danau Buyan Lake.

The weekend rolls around and I, unfortunately, fall ill – now would be a good time to mention that you should be careful where you buy your alcohol in Indonesia! Spirits can be mixed with methanol to increase the amount of liquid and potency and it can make you very sick quickly – so while those cheap mojitos look enticing, it's best to stick to the local beer, Bintang.

On Sunday however, I get on my motorbike at 7:00 am and ride an hour and a half north to meet the club at Taman Denbukit campground owned by one of BLRO members, Agung. Everyone welcomes me wholeheartedly and is very friendly, eager to tell me about their vehicles and their love of Land Rovers. A sign that says 'Land Rover parking only' is set up at the campsite and children push one another on the swing facing the lake.

After an hour spent chatting and jump-starting some vehicles, all ten Land Rovers convoy back to the city, winding through mountains with pristine tiered rice terraces that far outshine any I have seen in Bali so far.

When I am dropped back at my villa, I hail another GoJek and head to the airport to fly onto my next adventure in Komodo National Park. Just as I think I'm leaving my Land Rover adventures behind me, my driver, unprompted, starts asking me what car I drive back home. When I tell him a Freelander his face lights up and he jabbars on about his wish to own a Land Rover and that he spends his spare time watching Land Rovers overlanding around the world. I laugh realising just how much the green oval is their united religion.



Landy fans at Taman Denbukit campground owned by one of the BLRO club members

Made behind the wheel of his Series I



Club members vehicle in the North of Bali



Ivan borrowed WisnuAdji's Range Rover to film promo clips for his campaign to bring back the G4



Putu Andy Pandey in front of Agung Satria's Series Land Rover



Made and his wife enjoying the campsite

LRM TRAVEL FACT FILE

FLIGHTS

Combine your trip to Bali with a quick stop in either Singapore (Singapore Airlines), Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia Airlines) or Saigon (Vietnam Airlines). Expect tickets to be in the range of £450 to £650.

VISA: A free 30-day visa on arrival.

WHERE TO STAY

It all depends on what you want to do – Kuta and Seminyak are known for their major tourism and party scene. You'll find all the shops and food you find back home (from

H&M to Dominos) and a lot of drunk tourists. Canggu is my favourite area and is more relaxed, it has a good mix of both western food and local life and is well-positioned to visit the thriving area of Kuta while being an hour's drive to Ubud. Speaking of which, Ubud is another popular area and is considered Bali's spiritual home, filled with alternative medicine, meditation and yoga. It's close to most of Bali's major waterfalls too and provides a relaxing backdrop to enjoy your holiday.

WHEN TO GO

Visit in British Summer Time for the best weather – guaranteed heat all the time with no chance of rain. October is my favourite though as you miss the throngs of tourists but also stand a high chance of good weather and little rain.

Download the app GoJek to order whatever you need to your hotel room – including food or groceries. It's also used to hail bike or car taxis to wherever you need to go. You can also download GoLife and order a massage in your room for an hour for £4.

Make sure you visit BLRO member Putu Andy Pandey's Warung (local eatery), Warung 'Nasi Tekor' at Jalan Bypass, Ngurah Rai No 88, Denpasar. You can find it on facebook.com/NasiTekor too.

CONTACTS

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NOTE: CHECK CURRENT COVID-19 TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS FIRST BEFORE BOOKING ANY FLIGHTS OR ACCOMMODATION