

MIDA MALENA

STEPS THROUGH INDONESIA

VOLUME I

~ When Bali Touches Your Soul ~

PLOIEȘTI, ROMÂNIA

Steps Through INDONESIA: When Bali Touches Your Soul

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**„Life is thoughts.
And in every thought, I choose – sometimes myself, sometimes
others.
But every time, I learn who I am.”**

Mida Malena

From the Heart of Vietnam to the Magic of Bali

I blinked for a second, and my thoughts started flying, like wild birds released from their cage. Fatigue and sleepless hours weighed heavily on my shoulders, but now, all of that was just an insignificant detail.

I was living in the midst of my own dream, reliving every moment in a carousel of memories. It was as if a film was playing before my eyes – a film so vivid that reality seemed to merge with magic.

A whole month in Vietnam... With the backpack on my back, carrying my memories like fragile treasures from one place to another.

Memories that flowed like a mountain river, clear and free: places, people, conversations intertwined with moments of excitement, melancholy and, yes, even pain. Ah, the pain... now a diffuse shadow, like a dream scattered at dawn.

Each chapter of that journey came back to me, like a book read breathlessly: *Hanoi*, where the rain greeted me like an old friend, with a disarming force, as if it wanted to tell me: 'Here you will never know boredom.'

Then, that frantic rush through the city, like a dance of discovery – to see, to feel, to taste every delight that came my way. However, every beauty came with challenges. My laptop, my faithful companion, almost abandoned me on the first day. For a moment, I

thought that all the thoughts and words waiting to be written might be lost forever.

But no.

Vietnam also brought me people – characters who would mark my path: *Tom*, with his mischievous laugh, like an echo of lost childhood, *Huy, Vhu* and her mother – like fragile butterflies that slowly but surely entered my story.

Ha Long Bay, with its rocks sculpted by gods, reminds me of that moment that changed my trajectory. And him... enigmatic, a presence that rewrote my life more than I anticipated. But Vietnam has many stories, and some are meant to remain hidden. Until you want to discover them...

I followed the road to *Sapa* – a journey into the heart of pure nature, where the mountains seemed to reveal their ancient secrets, whispered among the rays of sunshine.

Every corner pulsed with life and mystery, and the views that opened up before me filled my soul with a deep tranquillity, but also with an inexplicable longing, as if I belonged there.

I continued to follow the signs, like a traveller guided by the stars, and headed towards *Ha Giang* – a motorcycle adventure that I will always cherish, along with *Zen* and his meaningful silence. He was more than a travelling companion; he was like a presence that reminded you to listen to the silence.

The nights spent with *Sarah*, the endless laughter of the Spaniards and the ‘happy water’ that flowed into glasses as easily as the moments... There, I brought to the surface those forgotten ‘pieces’, deeply buried, without which I could not go on.

I let myself be carried away and, at every turn, I shed a layer of myself, as if I were throwing away clothes that were too heavy for this journey. Every kilometre travelled was a return to my origins, and the rain cleared my vision, making me see with new clarity.

Then I realised: *it was only the beginning.*

Ninh Binh revealed the 'old man' to me, with his deep gaze and measured steps, who seemed to watch over my soul, like an invisible guardian of tranquillity. The city brought me Lisa, Oscar, Trang, but also the monk with his divine music.

Phong Nha was like a forgotten chapter in a book, a tiny town where I shouldn't have ended up, but where I met the mysterious Luong... he remains a mystery even now, but a mystery that still whispers something in my mind.

Each place, each face patiently polished my story. It was as if my steps were carving an invisible map, a path of the soul, from one memory to another.

Hue, with its heavy, painful tears; Da Nang, with its wild sea and escape into childhood; Hoi An, with its famous 'Phongs' and enchanted lanterns. The Romanians I met in that little, hidden restaurant brought unexpected warmth to the middle of a magical land.

There was no time to waste. I left behind every wonder, every marvel, because time showed me that I still had a lot to see. I climbed mountains, dived into seas, stepped into temples and castles, and talked to people who seemed to come straight out of the virtual universe of TikTok, that world that stole every trace of energy, leaving me with only an endless echo.

The sea... Ah, the blue sea, welcoming me into its foamy waves, and the clouds gathering like silent witnesses to my journey. The heat and the taxi drivers, who seemed to me like a separate species in this fascinating universe.

Nha Trang, with its bohemian air and vivid contrasts, and Dalat, where the piercing cold revealed my hidden vulnerabilities. The colourful gardens and the vibrant chaos of the night created a spectacle that seemed improvised just for me.

Without the internet, I felt lost, like a ship without a compass, floating towards Ho Chi Minh City. Frustration overwhelmed me, but

that was when I met *Trang* – the girl with the warm smile and gentle voice. It was as if we knew each other from another life.

She became the beacon that lit my way through the darkness.

We let ourselves be carried away by the rain in Saigon, dancing frantically to its rhythms, as if each drop of water revived my memories, imprinting that moment in my flesh and soul, a moment that would remain forever. In those moments, I was part of a symphony, a duet between man and nature.

There I met *Andrea*, *Moon*, *Darren* and *Queen* – new faces, but somehow familiar, like fragments of an old story intertwined with my own.

And then came the pain... Ah, the pain, always present, like a shadow that would never leave me, but which taught me to truly feel. The tightening in my stomach was like a reminder, like a final ‘test’ of my journey through Vietnam – a reminder that even in paradise, there are thorns. A dizzying game of feelings colliding inside me.

And yet, every step, every fall, every rise found meaning in my story, weaving me into a stronger and freer version of myself.

When Irina's message reached me: ‘Hey, you can come. The anti-COVID restrictions have been lifted,’ it was like a green light from the Universe, an approval that my path was clear.

Essra's morning message, like a guiding star, reminded me, even the day before my flight to Indonesia, that his existence was not a mere whim of fate, but a lesson that called me, once again, not to forget.

It was as if a ghost from the past had waved its veil in front of my eyes, bringing me back to life and making me understand: ‘Nothing is random.’

And so, I began to shed each worry, one by one, like old layers of skin that no longer belonged to me. I left them behind me, on the soil of Vietnam, until I felt light, like a butterfly released from its chrysalis.

And yes, now I smile.

I look at my life as a vibrant 'film,' full of vivid colours and intense moments, as if every step, every encounter, every tear was a brushstroke that contributed to the creation of this painting of my existence.

Can a month really change you?

Without a doubt, the answer is YES.

More than ever, I embrace the unknown, I let myself be cared for by the Universe, because why not? I am flying towards my dream, and I feel that reality is intertwined with fantasy in a bittersweet embrace.

Everything is so real that I wonder if there can be anything more intense than what I am experiencing right now.

Vietnam has shaped me, taught me to love the unpredictable and the moments that take your breath away. It has prepared me to embrace the unknown and see the magic in chaos. I have learned to view my pain as a teacher.

The shadows of my past – those things buried deep, that I didn't even want to bring to light – followed me everywhere, from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City.

But between torrential rains and the laughter of strangers, I began to see them differently. I haven't completely overcome them, but I've learned to dance with them.

But I know... his story isn't over.

Not yet.

Suddenly, I wake up, as if shaken from a dream. My gaze clears, and I notice the people around me, agitated and restless, as if unable to settle into their own lives. The noise of the plane envelops me, but I remain calm.

And then I remember...

Vietnam prepared me for something bigger, more intense!

Today, my soul is open, ready to discover the greatness of Indonesia.

But I wonder: will Bali give me answers to questions I haven't even asked yet? Or will it bring me new questions, harder, deeper ones?

What's next? I don't know. But that's what makes the story worthwhile.

And yet, when the plane's wheels touch the runway... I understand.

That story was the beginning.

Now comes the answer.

Or another question.

Travelling Towards Nothing: Bali and the Fascination of the Unknown

There is a moment, somewhere between dream and reality, when you 'feel' that the road chooses you. We never know if the path of our life is already written, like a secret map in the stars, or if we draw it ourselves, with every step, every choice, every mistake. But somewhere deep inside, we like to believe that we have a role to play in this story.

It's as if I were sending myself mysterious signs – encrypted messages that only I can understand, only I can decipher, as I chart my already chosen path. But do we really know what is written in the stars? Or are we just puppets manipulated by an invisible hand?

Perhaps it's all just a game of chance, and we move forward, blinded by the intense light of life – like moths flying towards the flame, convinced that we are the masters of our own destiny. But are we? Or do we carry, without knowing it, unseen burdens – heavy bags full of fears and desires, which we carry without ever asking what is hidden inside?

Why are these thoughts echoing in my mind now? Perhaps they are just echoes of old questions, stirred up by the paths we have chosen. Perhaps it doesn't even matter. But everything leads somewhere. Every path, whether clear or chaotic, converges at a mysterious point – a point that calls to us.

In my mind, everything seems to boil down to one simple truth:
'Life doesn't end until we've lived everything we need to live.'

Every moment is a piece of a huge puzzle, a Matrix of billions of intersecting paths. Perhaps the meaning of this labyrinth exists only in my mind.

But these questions about destiny and chance have intensified with every path I have travelled, seeking not only answers, but above all, experiences. And so, one day, I left. I didn't leave with a specific goal. I left to lose myself – leaving behind everything I knew, everything I was, everything the world told me I 'had' to be.

And so, I travelled across Vietnam from one end to the other, lost in its mysterious corners, until, in a way I still cannot explain, I ended up exactly where I was meant to be.

Where? You already know.

Bali.

Finally, on this long-dreamed-of island – the famous BALI – desired, coveted, awaited like a promise. For me, Bali was more than a destination. It was a calling. A mirage I had been chasing for months, a dream I carried within me like a child who can't take his eyes off a toy on a shop shelf. I cried for it, I planned and hoped, until the entire force of the Universe seemed to conspire to bring me here.

And here I am now, on June 20th, 2023, when the Universe finally opened the door wide in front of me, whispering:

'Here you are, young lady, your dream is here!'

I was that stubborn child who didn't give up until she got what she wanted. Bali was the 'toy' of my dreams – and now, here I am, holding it in my hands.

My perseverance, that constant drop of insistence, brought me here. Perhaps this is the essence of our evolution: to dream, to insist, to fall and to continue. Step by step.

Since I left Romania, I have replaced routine with spontaneity and left comfort behind for the unknown. Bali is the beginning of a new chapter. Before me lies the 'Famous Island' in the heart of Indonesia – the island of sunshine, contagious energy, thousands of tourists coming and going, the island of peaceful Balinese people with smiles

on their faces, of love and contrasts. Here I found a place where the sunsets take your breath away and every corner whispers a story.

But why Bali?

That's the question I get asked most often. Sometimes I ask myself the same thing. I don't have a clear answer. But deep down, I know. To many, it seemed crazy that I wanted to move here.

'Why go so far away? What will you do there? How will you make a living? Aren't you fine here, where you have everything you need?' The questions came like autumn rain, one after another, but none of them managed to stop me.

And yet, why Bali?

Perhaps because it is the manifestation of my own beautiful madness. Of the desire to live authentically. To follow my own path, no matter how strange it may seem to others.

Bali is not just a destination.

It is a choice.

It is a leap into the unknown.

Today, I am here, living this 'DREAM' written in capital letters. I have learned that a dream is not a distant fantasy – it is a plan, a direction, a reality waiting to be built step by step, kilometre by kilometre.

I don't remember exactly when this dream began. Maybe it doesn't matter. What matters is that I am here, that I have arrived and that I have gained a moment of respite to spread my wings. The road does not end here. Bali is just another stop on this journey into the unknown.

Recently, someone asked me:

'What are you looking for, actually?'

I replied simply, with a smile:

'Nothing.'

Because if I knew what I was looking for, would I still be here?

The fascination of the unknown is overwhelming.

Bali is just the next chapter in my story.

So I invite you, dear reader, to sit back, relax, and join me on this adventure. Let the magic envelop you.

Let's discover together the joy of living and searching.

Because, without knowing it, you are already part of my story.

And **I thank you** for that.

Dancing with Destiny

Thursday, 20 July 2023

Ngurah Rai International Airport, Denpasar – Bali, Indonesia

At 7:55, the plane took off from Ho Chi Minh City, carrying me, as if in a dream, to Denpasar, Bali – the destination I had dreamed of so many times. The four hours between heaven and earth were a dance between lucidity and dream.

Beyond the window, the sky was a watercolour canvas, and the clouds unfolded at the edge of the horizon, wandering my thoughts in a silent dance.

The captain's echo announcing turbulence floated among the clouds, but I sat motionless, like a wax doll, immune to the noise and commotion around me.

The cold air froze my tired body, but inside me pulsed impatience – a silent thrill that pushed me forward. Bali seemed like a forgotten song, a refrain I knew but couldn't yet hum.

I knew this road was one-way, and my heart skipped a beat with every image of the island.

At the immigration counter, I answered decisively, without a trace of hesitation. I was no longer the insecure woman who got lost in airports. Something inside me had changed. A silent force told me clearly: *'You are exactly where you need to be.'*

"Welcome to Bali," the officer said, handing me my passport with a smile. I felt light, as if I had just received the key to a new universe.

'How simple it was... and how good it feels...' I said to myself, feeling joy permeate every fibre of my being.

At the checkpoint, the officer asked me for a QR code. I looked, confused, at the panel in front of me. A friendly employee came to my aid, so I scanned the code and followed the instructions. A few minutes later, the problem was solved. I sighed with relief and returned to the checkpoint.

"There you go, you're in Bali," the guy at the checkpoint said with a smile, and in my mind I heard a triumphant 'Yesss!', like a silent cry of victory. My passport felt like a talisman. A small object that opened the door to this moment for me. The euphoria was complete, and nothing could disturb it.

I made my way through the maze of faces and luggage, the bright lights of the shops and billboards dazzling me at every turn. They called out to me, tempting me to stop and get lost among their offers, but I had no time for distractions. I had to get to Circle K to find a fixed point in this vibrant airport. Each step was a mixture of hope and impatience that pushed me forward.

I asked an airport employee, who pointed me in the direction with a quick gesture: "After the information desk."

I set off confidently, impatience running through my veins like a wave of enthusiasm breaking into thousands of droplets inside. Energy danced through my body, as if someone had put 'Lambada' on repeat, and every fibre responded to the rhythm. It didn't even cross my mind to check my phone for Wi-Fi. All that mattered was finding Gusti.

I stepped outside and was hit by a wall of suffocating heat that clung to my skin like an invisible veil. The roar of voices, horns and laughter mingled with the hurried patter of footsteps in an orchestrated chaos – unbearable and fascinating at the same time.

In front of me, a crowd of people was lined up behind a barrier, holding signs in their hands. *'It's like a movie,'* I said to myself, with a smile on my lips. My eyes scanned the names clumsily written on

the signs – nothing familiar. It was like an emotional roulette, every second amplifying the crowd's excitement and the feeling that I was alone.

Had he forgotten me? Or maybe he hadn't come at all?

I ran my hand through my hair, trying to control my breathing. Still no sign of Gusti. The crowd continued to move, dimming my hope with every passing second. The wait turned into a game of imagination.

What if he doesn't come? What if Irina's messages were wrong? Or maybe... maybe he left me to fend for myself.

My mind raced wildly, clinging to chaotic scenarios. In an instant, Bali, which had seemed like a destination full of promise, had become a maze of uncertainty. And yet, somewhere deep inside me, a thin thread of confidence refused to give way: *'Bali didn't bring me here to abandon me.'*

I took out my phone. No Wi-Fi. Roaming refused to cooperate, leaving me shrouded in the chaos of doubt. I felt the confusion creeping deeper and deeper into me. I glanced in all directions, hoping for a miracle, a sign to guide me.

I realise I know nothing about Gusti – I don't know what he looks like, I don't know who he is. He's just a name and a price, an invisible character in my story, like a ghost I'm trying to find in the crowd.

The phone has abandoned me, and Irina's advice now seems like useless echoes. My mind races, frantically searching for a solution that refuses to appear. I see the Circle K building in the distance, but no sign of Gusti.

'Why doesn't he turn up? Why isn't he coming?' I ask myself, as thirst and heat push me over the edge. Beads of perspiration trickle down my back, and the air gets heavier. I'd take my shirt off, but stop myself. It's that strange feeling that now is not the time to give up. That maybe, just maybe, the solution will turn up at the last moment.

A taxi driver in red, with a reassuring smile, approaches. With a simple gesture, he offers me Wi-Fi and, unhurriedly, calls Gusti for me.

“Stay here, here comes Gusti,” he says calmly.

And then, out of the bustling crowd, he appeared: a man with brown eyes that glistened like damp earth after rain. He wore a white T-shirt and sandals, and his calmness contrasted sharply with the surrounding din.

“Yda?” he asked, and I answered immediately. With a natural gesture, he grabbed my backpack, as if he knew I needed a helping hand, and led me towards a black car. When he opened the door, it was as if he was extending a bridge to heaven.

The interior was simple, discreetly scented with lavender. On the dashboard, a small statuette of Ganesha watched over the journey, and a strand of dried flowers hung from the rear-view mirror – probably left there after a Balinese ceremony. Every detail told a story of tradition, spirituality and a life lived without haste.

“Santai, santai,” he said with a laugh, holding up a hand, as if to dispel my unease in the air. “Take your time, time slows down in Bali.”

His infectious laughter started in his eyes, and his strong hands gesticulated naturally, as if his stories also needed air to come alive.

I laughed too, feeling his presence chase away my nervousness. Every word, every intonation told me to let the rhythm of this place carry me away.

As the car drove on, Gusti pushed his glasses up his nose and, like a fairy-tale narrator, began to tell me about the island I had just discovered.

“First time in Bali?” he asked, smiling with genuine curiosity.

“Yeah... and I think it's my lifelong dream,” I replied, letting the words slip out like a secret released.

“Hmm,” he muttered, sending me a brief glance in the rear-view mirror. “You're not just in Bali. Bali's already in you.”

His words caught me off guard. I fell silent, feeling them settling in me, slowly, like a revelation.

“In Bali, nothing is random,” Gusti continued, looking at me with a mixture of curiosity and certainty, as if he had seen more than just a tourist. “Fate has its own timetable here.”

His smile seemed to whisper, ‘*Hey, we already know each other.*’

We both laughed, and the car weaved through island traffic. Small offerings – palm-leaf squares filled with flowers, grains of rice and crackers – were laid out on the pavements in front of each shop. The smoke from the scented chopsticks drifted lazily skyward, like a mute conversation with the island gods.

“In Bali, traffic is a kind of test. If you can withstand it, you can withstand anything,” said Gusti, as a motorbike passed us, almost glued to the car.

It amused me, but there was a subtle truth in his words. Everything here was chaos – but a living chaos that seemed to dance to a rhythm of its own.

‘YOUR DREAM IS REAL NOW, YDA,’ I whispered to myself.

‘YOU’RE IN BALI!’