

Bali Bound: Three Friends, One Island, Zero Cash

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I

n the nascent hours of Anne's second day in Bali, anticipation hung thick in the air. The prospect of unraveling Uluwatu's mysteries, encompassing ethereal

beaches, a tapestry of culture, and world-class surf breaks, fueled the trio's excitement. Little did they know, their Balinese sojourn would weave a narrative filled with unforeseen challenges.

Touching down in Denpasar near the stroke of midnight, the trio confronted the daunting task of securing a ride to Uluwatu, a mere hour away. After a two-hour twilight vigil and a fight with the Gojek app, they finally procured a vehicle, arriving at their hillside hostel around 3 am. Under the shroud of darkness, oblivious to the visual spectacle awaiting them, they drifted into a fitful slumber.

As dawn painted the Balinese sky, the trio, running on a scant three hours of sleep, stirred with irrepressible excitement. Venturing outside, they were greeted by a panorama that transcended the ordinary. Perched on a hill, their hostel unveiled a breathtaking vista, overlooking the vast expanse of the ocean. A unanimous proclamation echoed, "This is going to be the trip of our lives," and indeed, the universe obliged.

Engaging the services of a private driver for the day, they embarked on a quest to uncover all of what Uluwatu had to offer. The initial stop led them to Padang Padang Beach and they saw "the most stunning crystal clear water I've ever seen in my life" Anne said "I just could not believe what I was seeing was real life" The beach was nestled between rocky cliffs and was actual "paradise on earth" Anne said "I don't think I've ever been happier than I was when I was swimming in that water."

Reluctantly departing this aquatic haven, the friends cascaded through several breathtaking beaches before ascending a mountain to a temple perched precariously on a rocky cliff. In the hallowed silence of the temple, serenaded by the rhythmic crash of azure waves below, Anne said she felt "so at peace in the temple. I loved the utter silence of everything except for the waves crashing below."

"Monkeys are a super common thing in Bali, a little too common if you ask me," said Anne. "They were all over this one part of the temple called 'the monkey forest.' The forest guides said don't make eye contact with the monkeys or they will jump at you. We were terrified." Warned not to meet the monkeys' gaze, the trio briskly traversed the arboreal expanse unscathed, only to unknowingly soon encounter a financial labyrinth that would alter the course of their trip forever...

Figure 1
Nusa Pendia
Bali, Indonesia



Figure 2
Uluwatu Temple
Bali, Indonesia

As the trio strolled back to their waiting driver, their anticipation for a delightful Indonesian lunch lingered in the air. Anne's eyes caught sight of an ATM, triggering the realization that they needed Indonesian Rupiah to settle their dues with Adam at the end of the day.

In a spontaneous motion, Anne inserted her debit card into the ATM, envisioning a seamless transaction. However, the fates had a different design. After a few button presses, the harsh reality unfolded – the machine refused to cooperate, and Anne's card was now ensnared in its metallic clutches.

“Actually, the card was not only stuck, it was swallowed up, absolutely devoured by the foreign machine. There was no hope for the card and I knew it was gone for good.”

The trio, typically adept at navigating challenges with a nonchalant attitude, found themselves thrust into an unforeseen predicament. “I am usually a very chill, go-with-the-flow type of person, but in that moment, my heart dropped. That was my only card that worked in Indonesia, and just like that, I was moneyless,” said Anne.

With Haley's credit card incompatible with the ATMs and Noah embroiled in a frustrating battle with the bank to unlock his debit card, the trio found themselves facing an unsettling reality. In this dire situation, Anne's card emerged as the sole beacon of hope to withdraw cash and compensate the driver for orchestrating the most memorable day of their lives.



Now stranded in the heart of Indonesia without a single dollar to their name, the friends confronted the urgent need to devise a solution. The ATM, once a source of financial liberation, now seemed an insurmountable obstacle. Anne, acknowledging the potential threat of fraud, promptly canceled her card. A quick decision that promised protection but left them grappling with the bigger predicament of settling their dues.

Once in the car, Anne, battled the apprehension of disturbing her mother in the middle of the night, dialed her number. “It was a 14-hour time difference between Bali and Chicago. She was going to be so worried that I was waking her up calling her at 4 am,” Anne said. To her relief, her mother answered promptly, and together, they settled on the decision to send money through a Western Union.

The subsequent challenge loomed large – locating a Western Union in the unfamiliar expanse of Indonesia.

The remaining hours of daylight became a the desperate search for an operational Western Union. Unpredictable hours compounded the challenge, forcing them to visit numerous outlets before the universe relented. “This wasn't America anymore, and just because there were set hours didn't mean that the store owner was going to follow that,” said Anne. “We genuinely went to about 25 Western Unions and were driving around for 7 hours.”

“It was pitch dark out and this point and our driver just about had it with us” The friends walked into that last western union and came out with millions of rupiah “the currency exchange rate was wild, so we were Indonesian millionaires,” said Anne. “The driver was beyond happy we could pay him, and he could finally drop us off back at our hostel.”

The 10-day Balinese odyssey, the trio navigated the financial maze with impeccable finesse. They budgeted perfectly and gave their last dollar to the driver that took them to the airport. Anne said, “Regardless of the situation, we made the absolute most of the trip, and I wouldn't change it for a thing.”