



ULUWATU, BALI
RUBBER TIME

BY MARA WOLFORD

I'd first heard of Uluwatu watching those original images in *Morning of the Earth*, like most folks did, I suppose. I must have been about 12, and the movie was already a decade old.

When I finally got there, it was as breathtakingly beautiful as I'd imagined.

It's no mystery why Uluwatu has become one of the most visited spots on Bali, with up to 500 tourists on buses, motorbikes and cars filing through each day. It's the most crowded surf spot on the island, and certainly changed from my first visit 20-odd years ago, when you slept in the warungs, maybe got lucky enough to be invited into somebody's home, or split back to Kuta to hit the Bounty or the Sari Club.

An aquaduct out to the Bukit freed up construction around 15 years ago, and there's been no looking back ever since. Luxury resorts and villas have replaced all the cliff-side cow

fields. The traditional Bukit family compound, with losmen integrated within, and the along-thatched-roof homes the bulés built are outnumbered by charmless concrete blocks erected in haste by Asian investors. The warungs in jati wood, pandas and bamboo have been replaced by massive concrete structures that appear stacked haphazardly up the cliff. There's an espresso machine at Sudi's warung now.

Many of us mourn the Bali that was. The flipside is that land-owning Balinese have become largely middle- and upper-class: children are educated, healthcare exists and the trickle-down effect from Bali's tourism stimulates the entire Indonesian economy. Many folk do live better than a few decades ago. The price to be paid is heavy: filthy water, uncontrolled construction and hallucinatory road conditions.

Every day on the Bukit starts the same. Arriving

from the Temple stairs, the first thing I hear is the traditionally rhythmic sweep-sweep sound of semi-effective and anatomically abhorrent reed brooms. Sweeping aimlessly is a morning tradition throughout Indonesia: It is the sound of the start to the day. Leaves and flowers on the ground are unacceptable, piles of trash waiting to be burnt are not.

It's quiet still. Between *TGIF*, the high morning tide and average swell, the crowds aren't swarming down the cliff yet. The day starts slowly and gently. I head to the beach for a quick morning dip. The cave is cool and dark, and popping out of the tunnel on to the beach shocks with a startle of light. It's refreshing to feel something that feels nearly like chilly in Indonesia. I swim around the corner to watch Temples for a spell.

Back up at the warungs, things fall into swing around midday and folk start trickling slowly down

the steps and pathways. Tosca's already on duty lifeguarding. Sudi's in the kitchen. Made and Phil Murray are back home with Jacko. Chookie Martineer is on his way out tomorrow, last surf. Matt Hurworth just pulled in yesterday to shape. Bali is transient, people come and go incessantly, but there still exists a decades-old, hardcore gang of local dudes at Ulu's. Aussie banter and male laughter predominate. The air smells of that ubiquitous Indo-specialty: the fried-to-death egg, plates of fried rice are devoured, and everyone gears up for a surf.

Temples is working, with relatively clean head-high sets. The tide is still a little high and the paddle up-current from the beach and around the corner is trying. Once I hit the channel between Secrets and Temples, the current sucks me straight out across the bowl and I pop out on the peak. There are maybe 60 guys out at Racetracks,



but there's only half a dozen of us up top. I've always wondered why this is. Maybe it has to do with the dozen local photographers who work from the cliff edge above Racetracks and take photos of every wave to sell to every surfer. In any case, the crowd at Temples is generally older, calmer and more pleasant to share waves with.

A dozen or so zippers later, I catch one into the beach, which is scattered with girls in small bikinis, as it is every weekend. The first day of winter is irrelevant 'round these parts. I head up the cliff.

The crowds have arrived in throngs. The warungs with a sea view up top are packed. A soto ayam and a juice in a quiet spot off the beaten path is the direction to take. As I slurp bihun noodles, Shauna Lana strolls in with her two little daughters. The owner is her family, but nearly all the warung owners are family in one way or another at Uluwatu. A tranquil hour of quiet

conversation proceeds in a secluded corner of one of the busiest spots on this frenetic island.

The tide drops and I go check the shitty right at Impossibles. I love surfing here when it's small. You can always find a couple of local kids out there to joke around with. I head down to the beach and leave my stuff with Nyoman. As we're talking, I realise that she's been here, fighting pesky monkeys off her roof for 25 years, more than half our lifetimes, and we've known each other for nearly as long.

It's two foot at Padang Padang and there are 20 girls out on beginner boards wearing G-strings. None of them speak with each other and no-one appears to be having an ounce of fun. A miniscule set rolls through and they all throw their boards, run each other over and yell. It's as if all the most undesirable aspects of women have found a new forum for expression in surfing.

I paddle down to the lefts, where a couple of local kids are shralping around. Another girl is out. I think her name is Kadek. She's been ripping this fun wave for years and I'm glad to see her after what I've just witnessed. We're fully covered in lycra and have our faces zinked out. We have a good laugh about the G-strings, mutally declare a burn-fest, and along with the kids, try to jump on each other's boards while up and riding. We laugh so hard we all swallow water.

Back to Kiki's Losmen for a shower and the obligatory sundowners at The Edge. Made Lana has taken his official position upon the stairs. The gang are all here. Steps are sat upon, beers are downed, belly laughs prevail.

I sit next to Curtis Lowe, an American kid who surfs like a bat out of hell. He explains to me what he's doing out here at Ulu's (apart from getting pitted). He fell in love with this place a few years

back and decided he needed to give something back. His association, Eco Surf Rescue, pulled 30 tons of rubbish from the ravine that washes down into the cave. He's created a recycling program for the warung refuse, as well as the collection of used cooking oil that goes to biofuel now, instead of into the lineup. He's currently working on a liquid-waste management system for the cliff-side warungs. We talk on, and the day sinks into twilight.

We finish our beers in the dark and head up the crumbling stairs to Single Fin, where things risk to get silly. Saturday-night-levels of revelry will be attained, followed by a couple of Brazzo fights in the parking lot to end the evening in grace.

Winter or summer, the days just blend into one another - the very real Indonesian concept of "rubber time". It's just another day at Uluwatu, and it has already stretched itself into the next.