



Driving in Bali

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DRIVING IN BALI

You have decided to rent a car and drive yourself on Bali. This is bound to be a great experience you just need to know a few things before you commence to explore Bali by car. So please read this file to get an idea of what to expect once you arrive on Bali and you have picked up your car. The file is separated in a view parts that starts with what to think off when picking up the car followed by what to do when driving the car.

PICKING UP THE CAR

Assuming you have booked a car rental via Happy Trails there are a few requirements that you have to keep in mind.

International Driver's License

When picking up the car you will need to show an international driver's license. If you did not bring one you can get a tourist driver's license at the police station in Denpasar. This will then be valid for a month. It is however less of a hassle to bring one from your home country. Often these can be acquired in specialized shops. Each country has different requirements and prices that apply so please check these locally before departing for Indonesia.

Transmission

The majority of the rental cars in Bali will be with manual transmission. Automatic transmission cars are present but rare and more expensive. All the cars are right-hand drive as on Bali we drive on the left hand side of the road.

Insurance

Happy Trails works together with a respectable rental company that will make sure you have the correct insurance for the car. Still please always check upon pick-up what is included and have it clearly explained to you simply to avoid confusion for the future.

The Car

- Before signing any paperwork please inspect the car for any damages or problems. Have everything cleared up and registered before you leave with the car. Any damage that you missed will most likely be charged to you once you come back.
- Make a brief test drive with the car. Test the brakes, handbrake, clutch pedal, AC etc. Better check first than having to change the car later on.
- Fuel is normally not included. You will have to hand in the car filled up again.

DRIVING THE CAR

Before you consider driving in Bali keep in mind that driving on the island is nowhere near the same experience as it is back home.

Traffic Rules

One of the biggest differences is that everyone on the road seems to follow his/her own set of rules. It sometimes appears there are no rules at all. Especially the many motorbikes drivers seem unaware of any rules. Some of the rules that are ignored that you are used to are:

- *Driving on the wrong side of the road*

People have a tendency to drive on the wrong side of the road against traffic for no apparent reason other than it saves them time crossing the road.

- *Right of way*

This seems to be an unfamiliar concept to most drivers in Bali. Most motorists do not take other road users into consideration. So please keep this in mind.

- *Speed*

There seems to be no speed limit or at least everyone drives the speed they want. This does not mean everyone will drive very fast (however, the majority will) but you also have many people driving 15 km an hour on a busy road.

- *Roundabouts*

They do exist on Bali. They do not look exactly the same as sometimes it is nothing more than a statue in the middle of the road. The thing to keep in mind here is that people do not use them like we do. A roundabout in Bali simply means you can drive around it in any direction you please, clockwise or counterclockwise that does not matter, whatever is faster.

- *Traffic lights*

These seem to be one of the few things people do stop for. Once the light turns green though do expect some people from the other roads to run a red light. In short never pull out quickly from a traffic light or you will hit someone.

- *Looking ahead*

With any kind of maneuver a driver on Bali makes he will only look in a forward direction. He will not look left, right or behind him/her before driving into traffic. In that sense it is like skiing where the one coming from behind is the one responsible to ensure safety.

The Roads

Overall Bali's road network is quite extensive. You can get anywhere and all the main and even secondary roads have pretty good tarmac on them. Only when you get to remote areas or tiny villages the quality of the roads drop dramatically. As long as you stick to main roads there should not be any problem. There are a few things to keep in mind though:

- *Narrow:*

Overall the roads on Bali are very narrow. There are only four 4-lane roads on Bali. All other roads are 2-lane, narrow 2-lane or single lane roads. That includes one way roads in all of these categories, sometimes resulting in a long detour. Even the main road to Java is a 2-lane road in most places. When you combine narrow roads with a lot of traffic you get traffic jams. These are most frequent around Denpasar, Kuta, Seminyak, Legian and Sanur.

- *Signage:*

The road network itself can be quite confusing if you are not used to it. Signs are at best unclear and not consistent. Sometimes there are signs and sometimes there are no signs. Also the names of the towns change where the Balinese name is used instead of the Indonesian one. Best is to drive on GPS satnav (which is provided) or use a proper map (Bali Atlas).

- *Ceremonies:*

One of the main attractions of the islands, its culture, also has an effect on the roads. There are many ceremonial processions for which an entire road will be closed no matter how important the road is. You will be directed onto a side road but there the assistance stops. From there on you will have to find your own way back to the road you were on. The best tip is to simply follow the car(s) in front of you. Alternatively you can park the car and go and see what the ceremony is about.

- *Busy:*

The roads can be quite full in the southern part of the island. Any roads around Denpasar, Ubud, Kuta, Seminyak, Sanur down to Nusa Dua are crowded. As soon as you leave this area the roads become less crowded and therefore easier to drive.

- *Obstructions:*

The roads in Bali are not only occupied by cars, trucks, motorbikes and the occasional bicycle. There can be anything on the road from food carts, animals, children, construction material etc. In short there are many things to keep an eye out for while driving.

An Accident

Having read all the above information about the road situation and the traffic rules on the island you can conclude there must be many accidents. Surprisingly not as many as you would think. Also as long as you pay attention, drive carefully and thoughtfully you should be fine. However an accident can happen. There are two scenarios:

- *You are not directly involved but you see an accident happen:*

What to do? Drive, never stop! This sounds very harsh but what most of the times happens is that the foreigner will be blamed for the whole thing (especially financially). Even if it is impossible for you to be the cause in any way.

- *You cause an accident or someone hits you:*

Check the other party and try to solve things without involving the police if possible. Stay calm and as polite as possible even when you get blamed for something you did not do. Try to solve it financially as quick as possible and get out. When police do get involved also stay calm and polite. Follow the instructions from the police and when you feel you need help then contact Happy Trails and/or your travel insurance.

The Police

Although Bali being a wonderful tropical holiday destination, Indonesia is rated one of the most corrupt countries in the world. There are improvements but corruption is daily business. Most of it you will never see or encounter on your visit to Indonesia and Bali. The only place you will come into contact with it directly is with traffic police. Their wage is limited (they feel) and so they try to earn some extra cash by handing out fines. The most success they will have with foreigners because these they can charge a lot without them knowing the actual amount for the fine or the bribe. This results in police often pulling over foreign drivers (motorbike or car does not matter) for no apparent reason.

The biggest excuse for a bribe they have is your driver's license. Bring an international driver's license to Bali. When you can show this to the police officer combined with the car papers (you will receive from the rental company) they will most likely let you leave. If however you did not bring a driver's license or they pull you over for another silly reason the best thing is to simply negotiate about the price and pay. Act dumb, stay calm and polite while doing this, and speak softly! This is all very important as this will make it a fast process and you can be on your way. Aggression and anger is frowned upon Indonesia and will only make your bribe higher or worse. Even if bribing goes against your personal morals and beliefs most of the time this is the best way to deal with a situation like this. The alternative is you pay the official fine and ask for a 'blue note' as prove of payment. They might impound the car and papers though. Getting the car released will mean a lot of hassle and the simple rule is the more people get involved the more people need to be paid and thus only making everything more expensive and time consuming. A good indication for a fine is anywhere between 100.000 and 200.000 Indonesian Rupiah.

Driving Tips

- Look in front of you and act accordingly
- Expect the unexpected
- Drive carefully and thoughtfully
- Watch you speed
- Always bring your papers with you (the drives license (international) and the car registration papers)
- The larger vehicle has right of way (they will take it anyway)
- Honk your horn to warn people to move or when coming around a blind corner
- Always use your indicator to show oncoming traffic that you are about to overtake, flash your lights to show you will not stop. React accordingly to oncoming traffic using the same signals.
- Only fill up your fuel at a Pertamina gas station, other local ones might overcharge a foreigner. Still do check the meter starts at zero when having the car filled up even at Pertamina. Gasoline overall is very cheap compared to Europe.
- When there is an accident and you are not directly involved as a foreigner NEVER stop.
- Try to leave the southern part of Bali when renting a car. The rest of the islands is less crowded and easier to drive

CONCLUSION

This file is not to scare you but simply to prepare you for the Balinese roads. You need good driving skills and patience when driving on the island. Happy Trails still believe it is very much possible to drive on Bali yourself. However we do recommend you give the matter a good deal of thought and only experienced drivers should attempt it. If you are a new driver better simply have us provide you with a driver that takes you around the island