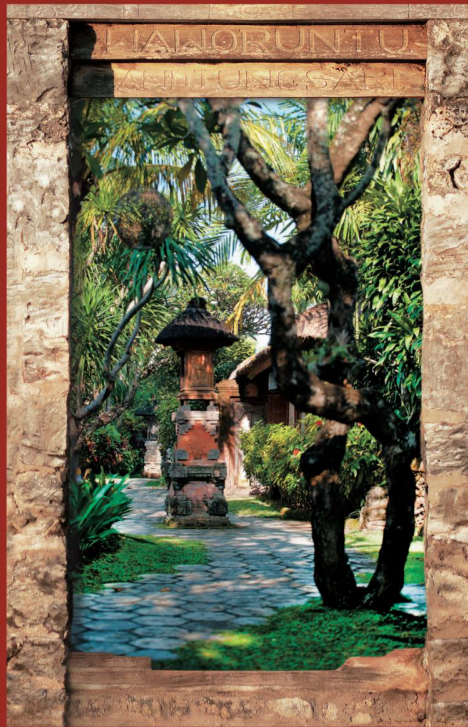


tandjung sari

A Magical Door to Bali



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FRONT COVER: Montage of garden path at the Tandjung Sari framed by the lintel of the original north gate.

BACK COVER: Wija Wawo-Runtuu.

PAGES 2-3: (Background) A religious procession on Sanur beach, with Bali Beach Hotel in the background, circa 1968.

(Inset) Detail of a Balinese wood sculpture in the lobby pavilion of the Tandjung Sari.

PAGES 6-7: The Tandjung Sari beachfront, between two canal gates. Centre right is the bar. The north gate (far right) is the oldest structure of the hotel.

PAGES 8-9: A glimpse through the south canal gate, guarded by stone sculptures, into the comfort of a Tandjung Sari lounging pavilion.

TANDJUNG SARI: A Magical Door to Bali

INTRODUCTION

Sanur in the 1960s and '70s

The Tandjung Sari is an ageless beauty. At fifty years old, this small hotel on Sanur beach, shaded by huge trees and quietly sheltering treasure at every turn, remains serene, discreet and elegantly modest.

The Tandjung Sari did not intend to become the seminal boutique hotel of tropical Asia. It began in 1962 as a place to spend the night for its owner Wija Wawo-Runtu (1926–2001) and his English wife Judith when they came to Bali from Jakarta on shopping trips for their antiques business. Soon extra bungalows were built to accommodate friends, then friends of friends. It became a hotel almost without anyone noticing it; but within a few years it was internationally renowned among smart people as the place to stay, if you could get in.

What drew people was the Tandjung Sari's judicious blend of the low-key and the luxurious. The architecture was simple, using local materials and Balinese building techniques; yet the location was on prime beachfront with wonderful gardens; the rooms were furnished with Balinese antiques; and the hospitality was warm and sophisticated. Guests had the feeling of experiencing a highly refined version of "the real Bali" with all its sounds and silences, its deep perfumes, its bare-handedness and hilarity, and powerful



Vintage Tandjung Sari postcard with a view toward the restaurant, the bar and the sea, probably from a two-storey bungalow.

OPPOSITE: Interior of the reception pavilion, a restored building from a Balinese palace.

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enchantment at the edge of a spangled sea – while still being able to luxuriate in a good bed or over a gin and tonic.

All this was orchestrated by the very central figure of Wija Wawo-Runtu, a multi-talented man with more than his fair share of beauty and a ceaseless, good-natured charm. Rather informally and with much flair, he was a filmmaker, interior designer, collector and dealer of art and antiques, amateur architect and scholar of Balinese culture. He was a reader, a scotch-drinker, an entrepreneur, and the devoted father of six children – or ten, if one counted, as he did, the four children brought to the marriage by his second wife Tatic, the Javanese beauty he married in 1964 and with whom he transformed the family house on the beach into the legendary Tandjung Sari hotel, to this day still a family-run business.



Wija Wawo-Runtu, founder of the Tandjung Sari, 1970s.

OPPOSITE: (Top) Villagers gathering for a religious procession on Sanur beach, with Bali Beach Hotel in the background, late 1960s. (Below) Map of Bali. Ink drawing by Ida Bagus Nyoman Rai (circa 1915–2000).

If you conjure Sanur in the early 1960s when the Tandjung Sari was born, the vision you get will be a quiet one. The beach then was nearly deserted during the day, except for the coming and going of fishermen in their bright little boats, and at low tide the harvesting of coral from the lagoon's protective reef. The Balinese considered coral a handy building material for walls, and as they burned it on low fires to make slaked lime for mortar, the smoke spread a pungent gloom smelling of the sea. At night it was very dark unless there was moonlight. The Balinese didn't live on the beach. The sea was understood to be a place of magical danger, and for this reason they built a string of small temples along the coast. They planted coconut trees at the edge of the beach and tethered their cows in the shade to graze on the rough grass. The ancient settlement of Sanur village was inland. The few lights here and there along the beach would be the tiny flames of little kerosene lamps; electricity was still scarce in Bali in the 1960s. Evening was a time to gather close to home. The night sounds would be crickets, frogs, owls, the sea and the wind.

The people of Bali were very poor in the 1960s but they still had much on their side: the natural bounty of the land and the sea, and a very old civilisation whose holy music, architectural canons and ritual lore had governed their lives for many hundreds of years. People still lived very close to the earth and were adept in their communion with it.

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TANDJUNG SARI: A Magical Door to Bali

Gunung Agung, Bali's highest mountain, seen from the Tandjung Sari. The volcano was thought to be extinct until it erupted, calamitously, in 1963.



Were they ever bothered by Sanur's famous invisible beings that are said to haunt the seaside? Pedanda Istri KOMPIANG made sure the offerings were complete and said they had never had any trouble. Strange things happened, of course. She told of a Swiss family who were staying with them – husband, wife and two children. One day the mother opened the door to the room and saw that her two children had become four children, doubles of themselves. Another Swiss guest, recovering from a motorcycle accident, wanted to leave a tip for the kindly old Balinese lady who sat on his balcony keeping watch over him. Pedanda Istri said the old woman could not have reached his balcony unless she had flown there.

The opening of the Segara Beach Hotel in 1956 was followed soon (or slighted preceded, depending on sources) by that of the similarly modest Sindhu Beach Hotel several hundred metres to the south. This was built by Holland's shipping line KPM, which had managed tourism in the colonies and built the Bali Hotel in Denpasar in 1928, and continued to own these properties after independence until they were nationalised in 1957. But foreign visitors were as likely to stay with Jimmy Pandy, a cosmopolitan Indonesian artist and art collector whose house and gallery in the neighbourhood of Sindhu had two or three bungalows in the back garden. Jimmy Pandy would figure importantly in the history of the Tandjung Sari.

SANUR IN THE 1960s AND '70s



Bali Beach Hotel, postcard, circa 1970s.

In 1963, a year after the Tandjung Sari home first showed signs of becoming a hotel, work began on a structure that must have astonished the people of Sanur: the 11-storey, 300-room Bali Beach Hotel. The Balinese world in those days was undergoing wrenching changes. Early that year Bali suffered the eruption of Gunung Agung, the island's highest volcano, which had been presumed to be extinct. It was a natural catastrophe of vast proportions, causing famine and killing some 1,500 people.

The Tandjung Sari came into being as the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union was hurtling toward one of its most ferocious yet least known confrontations, played out largely on the islands of Java and Bali in 1965 and 1966. In September 1965, in response to what is usually described as an attempted coup by members of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), hundreds of thousands of suspected Communists were murdered in purges led by the nationalist general Suharto. The history of those times is still shrouded in rumour and innuendo. The PKI had been a legal political party at the time and had done well in local elections; but the backlash to the attempted coup toppled Sukarno's government and ushered in Suharto's thirty-three-year New Order regime.

At the height of the political chaos in 1966, the Bali Beach Hotel was inaugurated. This was a favourite project of President Sukarno, who understood

I think boutique hotels like the Tandjung Sari and, later, Amandari and others actually come from the old tradition of the European inn, with their very personal, very special service.

- Adrian Zecha



HISTORY

From Guest House to Legendary Hotel

“We ought to have a little place to stay in Bali,” one can imagine Judith Wawo-Runtu saying to her husband Wija one day in 1960. “We always stay at Jimmy Pandý’s. It’s not fair to him.”

“But he loves it when we come to stay. He adores company.” Wija and Judith had met in London where he had gone on a scholarship to study photography and cinema. Wija was born in Utrecht, Holland in 1926; his mother was Dutch, and his father was from Manado, North Sulawesi in eastern Indonesia. The family moved to Sukabumi, West Java, when Wija was a child, and he grew up there. Judith Bell was English, a young painter. They married in London in 1952, and their first child, Fiona, was born there. (Their five children – Fiona, Iskandar, Timi, Yaya and Ade – were born within six years.)

In 1953 the couple decided to move to Indonesia. They lived with Wija’s parents in Jakarta, on Jalan Haji Agus Salim in Menteng, and had a shop there called Rama Sita from which they sold antiques and did interior decorating, mostly for the community of diplomats posted to the embassies in the capital. Ibu Tien, the wife of General Suharto – who would become Indonesia’s second president in 1967 – sold her batiks in the Wawo-Runtus’ shop on commission. Judith and

A very early bungalow at the Tandjung Sari, circa 1965. OPPOSITE: Wija and Judith Wawo-Runtu with their children – (from left to right) Iskandar, Yaya, Fiona, Ade and Timi, circa 1960.

Wija also designed and produced bamboo furniture. It was for the collecting of antiques and art objects that they went often to Bali, where they would buy old statues and other Balinese exotica with which people still love to decorate their homes; and that naturally brought them together with Jimmy Pandý.

Jimmy Pandý was a flamboyant and influential art dealer who settled in Bali in the 1940s as a guide for the Thomas Cook travel agency. Although he was Indonesian, he has been described by Indonesian writers as an “expatriate”, perhaps because of his mixed Indonesian and Dutch parentage, or perhaps because of his conspicuous sophistication. He was something of an artist himself, well-travelled, and multilingual with good English – he had been educated in England – and he had a great talent for entertaining, particularly if his guests were in some way important. Pandý had a house and gallery north of what is now the Tandjung Sari, with two or three guest cottages which were available to people who amused him. The British tenor Peter Pears, travelling with his companion the composer Benjamin Britten, wrote of their visit to Jimmy Pandý’s in January 1956:

Adrian Zecha on Jimmy Pandý

Although my brother was in high school with Wija in Sukabumi, West Java, I knew Wija and Judith from Jakarta in the 1950s, before I ever went to Bali. I was in Jakarta from 1953 to 1955 when I was working as a stringer for *Times Magazine*, my first job after college. Wija had been in England and he came in 1954. There was only one nightclub in Jakarta and I often saw them there. For six months in 1954, I was a stringer for *The New York Times*. One day Bob Holder, the number two to the Southeast Asian bureau chief of the *Times*, wanted to go to Bali and he asked me to come with him since I knew the language. When I told my father I was going to Bali, he said, “Look up a friend of mine – Jimmy Pandý.”

“Where does he live?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “He’s a beach bum.”

So when I got to the Bali Hotel, which was the only hotel in Bali at the time, I asked at the desk if they knew a Mr Pandý.

“Oh yes,” they said, “he lives in Sanur.”

I said, “Where’s that?”

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