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PARAGLIDING IN PARADISE

NO FEELING IN THE WORLD IS AS INCREDIBLE AS HANGING 750M ABOVE THE TURQUOISE SEAS OF BALI, CRUISING THROUGH THE SKY WHILE ATTACHED TO A FEW BITS OF CORD AND A LENGTH OF FABRIC. BELOW ME STRETCH ENDLESS BEACHES, IMPENETRABLE JUNGLES AND ANCIENT TEMPLES CRAWLING WITH MONKEYS.

Swirling around me are dozens of my mates, people of all ages and from all backgrounds, living their dreams beneath brightly-coloured wings. This is paragliding at its finest, and one of the best flying holidays anyone could ever hope to experience. Minutes bleed into hours as I dance along the mountains of Candidasa, catching thermals and riding the wind. The sun sinks beneath the horizon and I gradually ease my glider towards the landing zone far below, where my mates are waiting for me with an icy-cold beer and hearty congratulations. This truly is as good as it gets, and is something all aviation enthusiasts should experience, regardless of what sort of rig they usually take to the skies in.

Bali's best known to most Aussies for cheap beer, cheap tattoos and cheap Bintang singlets, but it's also one of the best places for paragliding on the planet, and at the right time of year it's possible to get some serious flying hours above the island's breathtaking landscape. When the trade winds come through from the south from May through October, the flying can be on for weeks at a time,

WORDS ROWAN STEWART

66 Minutes bleed into hours



flying sites. Helping out were Geoff Bednal and Steve Kilgallon, two extremely experienced (and patient!) pilots who are more than happy to help out - or lead bike tours around the island when the wind is whispering.

As a newer pilot with reasonably low hours, that's the sort of experience and expertise I was looking for when flying for the first time in a foreign country. Despite my lack of airtime in the two years since completing my training course, I love this sport more than just about anything. My fellow pilots on the tour were aged from 18 to 70, male and female, professional skydivers and retirees and stay-at-home parents, experienced flyers and novices barely out of their courses. But despite our differences, we were all brought together by our love of flying. Most of us were in Bali to rack up our hours and improve our skills ahead of the coming summer paragliding season, and the Cloudbase crew helped everyone exceed their expectations and leave with the confidence and skills needed to rule the skies.

I've met some of the best people I know through paragliding, and it's definitely a sport that attracts memorable characters and splendid individuals. I was happy to catch up with one of my best mates, Richard 'The Hamster' Ham, on the tour, but within hours of showing up I'd made plenty more friends, such as ZZ Top, who looks like he's just stepped off the stage with the band of the same name and Malcolm, the septuagenarian who thinks he's a teenager. Paragliding instantly bonded us.

One of my new friends was Lynton Dalla Rosa, a Grade 2 GA and Senior RA Instructor at The Recreational Flying Co in Gympie, QLD. With plenty of experience with fixed-wing aircraft, Lynton loves that paragliding provides him with a different, simpler flying experience.

"I think it's the most raw and graceful form of flying there is," he explained. "There's something out of this world about stepping off the edge of a cliff with nothing but string, fabric, and the wind, and staying aloft for hours at a time. No engine noise. No running costs. Just your body, mind and soul working in perfect cohesion together to keep you soaring across the sky. It's on another level of grassroots flying beyond the open cockpit, wind-in-your-hair type of fixed wing deal a lot of the older pilots would have started with.

"The tour exceeded my expectations in every way, and a definite highlight was launching at Candidasa for the first time and being ripped into the air at 500fpm,



topping out at 750m. My adrenaline was through the roof, and everyone was on such a high afterwards.

"I'll also never forget my first spiral dive. Being able to put a glorified bedsheet with nothing but rudimentary positive-only flaperon controls and weight shift into a spiral dive at -2500fpm, pulling 3-5gs, and exiting with nothing but those control inputs really gave me a perspective of the possibilities of this sport, and the drive to learn more."

Being on tour means heaps of laughs, plenty of hard-earned swims in the pool after long days in the air, and one or two cheeky Bintangs while looking out over the sunset. Sure, we were all there to fly (and boy, did we fly!) but the experience was about so much more than that.

Bali has two main sites to fly, Nusa Dua in the south and Candidasa in the east. Both are absolutely phenomenal and provide their own challenges and rewards, and the legends at Cloudbase organised for us to have a full week at each. With my wing ready and my GoPro charged, it was time to head into the sky.

HOW YOU DUA-ING?

The site at Payung in Nusa Dua serves as a brilliant introduction to flying in Bali. The launch is as straightforward as any you'll find, there's a ridiculously long ridge to race along, it's possible to get plenty of height, and the scenery is gorgeous. In front of the launch is a gigantic reef full of crystal clear water that laps up against a thick jungle full of palm trees. There's an ancient temple to dodge, world-class resorts to skim over, and friendly locals selling cold drinks. In a word, perfection.

After spending most of the year gallivanting around Europe, I hadn't flown in seven months, and was appreciative of the advice and assistance handed out by the Cloudbase boys as I prepared to get



back into it. In no time I was up in the air, chasing two dozen other gliders along the hill, mucking around and getting back into the swing of things.

The winds at this time of year are the perfect recipe for an incredibly smooth and easy flight that is perfect for trying new things or perfecting old tricks. The more experienced and adventurous among us were cracking out the wing overs and spirals, but everyone was learning heaps and really growing as pilots.

I was happy to work on both my top landings and beach landings, as well as improving my awareness in the air, which is pretty important when the traffic gets heavy! I enjoyed many long days cruising over Nusa Dua, building my skills and having the time of my life.

One of the most excited pilots on the tour was Alistair Hiscox, a former award-winning radio DJ and self-proclaimed sandwich enthusiast.

"Flying Nusa Dua for the first time was a spiritual moment for me. As a long-time PPL pilot I have often longed to be in the air in the most naked form, and paragliding has certainly scratched that itch. Whilst flying with a motor, cockpit and instruments is a fantastic way to see the world, there is something more natural about flying using mother nature to enjoy the world from a bird's eye view.

"For me, Nusa Dua provided countless hours of paragliding fun. The smooth, continuous air flowing up the ridge off the ocean meant I could throw my glider around like I had never done before. Being mainly a thermal pilot, the coastal winds let me push my glider to the limits and learn how to conduct big, strong wingovers that seem to go on forever. After I had lost my height I simply worked my way back up the ridge into the heavens to start it all over again without the fear of missing the lift.



"Top landings were also a great feature of flying in Nusa Dua. Before heading to Bali I'd only ever top landed twice, but this site allowed me to pump out touch-and-goes endlessly. My first day in Nusa Dua saw me hammering out an amazing 22 touch-and-goes, which really improved my skills. I flew for more than five hours that day.

"I love flying, it's been in me since my Uncle Dave took me up in his 1960's C172 and ever since then I can't seem to keep my feet on the ground, a feeling most pilots can appreciate. Flying a fixed wing aircraft is great, but there's something uniquely wonderful about being able to put your aircraft into a backpack and fly in places you never thought possible. Paragliding is as close to how we imagined flying to be when we were kids. I would strongly recommend to fellow aviators to take the step and get into it, you won't be disappointed."

ISLAND IN THE SUN

Touring with Cloudbase means you'll never go hungry, with most days ending with a feast at one of Nusa Dua's legendary restaurants. And it wasn't all Nasi Goreng, either - it was pizza one night, Thai the next, and more than a few German feasts.

The wind usually comes on late in Bali, which offers the opportunity to have some fun on land before strapping on the harness. The south of Bali has plenty to see and heaps to do, and a highlight of the tour was taking a convoy of scooters over to Kuta to relax on the beach and have a spectacular feed in the shade of a palm tree.

I'm not the most experienced bike rider on the planet and Indonesian roads can be more frantic than a mozzie in a zapper, so I was happy to jump on the back

of my Jed's bike and let him guide us through it all. Zipping around 800m above the ground is fine, but I've got no interest in risking those Balinese streets!

My final flight in Nusa Dua was a thing of beauty. After sitting by the pool all day waiting for it to come on (paragliding is a tough, tough life) we finally got the call an hour-and-a-half before sunset. With the clock ticking we raced up to the hill and wasted no time launching with the bleeding sun over our backdrop. With a week's worth of flying behind us, we all had the confidence to push our skills to the limit and get the most out of this very special location.

One of the resorts below us was hosting a lavish wedding with hundreds of guests dressed in white. If I'd been hungry, I could've dropped down there to pick up a couple of party pies and a pig in a blanket, but I decided to carve through the dying light instead. As I made one last pass, thousands of balloons spilled from the wedding and floated into the amber



“ the septuagenarian who thinks he's a teenager



sky. It certainly made for an interesting obstacle, and I was just glad they didn't release doves instead.

And let's just forget that, when I landed, I put my wing over a very large and very spiky bush. Alright?

SWEET LIKE CANDI

It was during the second week that the immensity of the Bali experience became apparent. Candidasa is an amazing part of the world and much-loved by sun-lovers, but the only way to truly enjoy it is from the air. It's the best place I've ever flown, and as far as I'm concerned I can divide my life into two parts - BC (before Candi) and AD (after Dasa). Yes, it really is that good!

The site is as unusual as it is spectacular. The launch is on the remnants of an old peanut plantation, with the uneven terrain putting everyone's skills to the test. After making it off the ground, the challenge only increased as I scraped up the side of the cliff, barely making it over trees and ridges while trying to gain height. It's fun and a great learning experience that demands smart flying. And then, once I made it to the top of the mountain, everything changed.

It was as if the whole world opened up. With the other gliders sliding around me I made it to 400 metres, 450, 500. I climbed up into the endless blue while the ground fell away. Even the temple that stands guard on the top of the mountain became little more than a speck as I sat there in my canvass seat, feet dangling into nothing.

I'm not going to lie - that first time on top of Candi was equal parts spectacular and terrifying. It took me half an hour to take my hands off my brakes and reach over to turn on my vario, but I wouldn't trade that first experience for anything. I finally settled down and was able to enjoy the buoyant ride, only heading down to the beach when the light finally faded away.

The landing at Candi is one of the best parts. It's a challenge to make it onto Black Beach due to the number of outriggers littered across it, but it's definitely worth it and a great way to perfect landings - especially with Mark and the other Cloudbase fellas on the radio.

There's a wooden shack surrounded by palm trees and filled with cold Bintang, and it's a regular meeting spot for pilots after an exhilarating afternoon. I spent most evenings hanging out on that beach, sharing experiences and joking around with my mates.

Of course, not everyone avoided the boats, with a mate of mine, Chris, earning the nickname Captain Pugwash after landing in one!

The conditions just got better over the week and we all racked up some monumental hours - a few people were smashing four hours a day or more. The skillsets of the pilots improved out of sight, with many pulling off stunts they'd never even dreamed of doing.

“something uniquely wonderful about being able to put your aircraft into a backpack”

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THE FLYING HAMSTER

My good mate Richard 'The Hamster' Ham found his time in Candidasa to be an almost spiritual experience, and the former elite paratrooper was more than happy to tell us about his adventures.

"Candi really is the gift that keeps giving, and as a location it's just great in every respect," he exclaimed. "It's such a laid back beautiful place, and the paragliding isn't too shabby either!"

"As a coastal site with thermal activity, you can tick off so many boxes. From the launch, which can be quite gnarly, especially in stronger conditions, you're straight into working the ridge to get up and out, away from the launch area and into the next bowl. From then you just climb and climb until you're looking down at this beautiful island and questioning whether it's bloody real and you're not dreaming!"

"What was particularly noticeable for me this time round was how much more comfortable I was with my flying. I went from panicking from every lump and bump to not being remotely phased by the turbulence. I started to see it as a good thing, a possible thermal that I could work to gain height!"

"The confidence and skill improvement I walked away with was insane! All the boys at Cloudbase work tirelessly to make sure you get the most out of the tour, whatever level you're at. I felt by the end of this tour my paragliding umbilical chord had been cut!"



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WHY PARAGLIDING?

Did you know that paragliding is actually the cheapest and safest form of free-flight on the planet? The concepts are simple. Pilot, glider, harness, reserve, helmet - that all fit into a backpack, and the sky is your newfound wonderland. The pilot sits in a harness suspended below a rip-stop fabric wing comprising of a large number of interconnected, baffled cells.

As aviators, you'll be no stranger to the knowledge that wing shape is maintained by the suspension lines, the pressure of air entering cell openings in the front of the wing, and the aerodynamic forces of the air flowing over the outside. Despite not using an engine, we can fly for many hours and cover many hundreds of kilometres. In Australia, with our abundance of coastal and mountain opportunities, we have the luxury of being able to choose between coastal ridge soaring and inland thermic flying.

Paragliding is a sport (and I say that loosely because there isn't a huge amount of sweating involved) that becomes a lifestyle. You'll meet some of the most incredible people and characters and share the most life-changing experiences.

GOVERNANCE

In Australia, the sport is governed by the HGFA (Hang Gliding Federation of Australia - via CASA oversight), requiring a week long approved course with a Flight Instructor (FI) and registered paragliding school. A supervised pilot rating is awarded once the demonstrated competency level is achieved and associated examinations and assessments are completed.

BALI

With over 15 years of flying, teaching, and touring Bali, we offer the most comprehensive tour and CFI qualified training programme annually. With a massive tour offering that runs between the months of August to October, we concentrate on pilot skill development and rating progression for pilots wishing to expand their range, and evolve to the next level. We're joined by

pilots from all over the world because we offer world class training and advice, exceptional value for money, and above all - fun and friendships for life.

COURSES IN AUSTRALIA

Based in the Port Macquarie local area on the NSW Mid North Coast, our instructor group of five offers over an un-paralleled combined experience of nearly 50 years in the sky.

Running between October and May our license courses commence with low glide training hills, where you will start with learning the art of ground handling (kiting the glider above you with input stability) and evolve to flying mountain sites. The training is structured for participants from the age of 16 onwards, and requires a basic level of fitness. Gliders can accept pilot weights from an incredible range of 50kg-145kg and there is approximately 40 hours of theory and an examination during the comprehensive training phase.

Please consider joining us for one of our world famous no-obligation two-day free intro courses where you will be exposed to the concepts and skills to better understand the sport. It's the first couple of days prior to our licence course, and we will work extremely hard to have you experience your first solo low glide down to a beach from a training hill via full instructor-led radio support or undertake a thrilling tandem flight with us. This is also a great way to add another two days to an eight day licence course that would see you leave with your supervised pilot rating.

“ Paragliding is a sport
becomes a lifestyle



“equal parts spectacular and terrifying”

“But the massive stand out thing about the tour is the camaraderie and banter with all the other guys on the tour. It is priceless! The friends that you make are definitely friends for life and the belly laughs are endless! I’m the former drummer of a Wang Chung cover band, and a few of us even formed a rock group to perform at some of Candidasa’s pubs. We’ve been asked to leave the instruments alone next year, but that’s the sort of fun that’s to be had!

“They are but memories for me now, the epic flying, the landing by the Black Beach bar, the end of day beers and winding the hours down watching the sun set laughing with your mates. Memories that will be re-created in less than a year!

Of course, it was probably too much to ask the Hindu Wind Gods to look after us every day for a full two weeks, but the few down days we had gave us an opportunity to explore the island from ground level. Some of the gang hopped aboard their scooters and visited various shrines and beaches, while others just lay around and soaked up the sun. The burger shop in town did brisk business, too, and I certainly felt as if I was struggling to get off the ground by the end of the week.

One night a bunch of us headed off to a nearby village for a full moon ceremony that was a definite highlight of the trip. We were the only westerners there, and spent the night eating fantastic street food and dancing with the locals. We even dressed up in traditional sarongs, which backfired for my mate Luke, who accidentally wore a garment meant for women only and was the subject of much laughter for the locals!

We also enjoyed a sumptuous feast overlooking the ocean to celebrate Mark’s birthday. The food was brilliant and the company even better, with the only problem coming when a storm rolled in and washed us out.

The next day the wind came good in time for me to have the best flight of my life, and one of the proudest moments ever. A perfect launch was followed by three hours of glorious flying that only ended when a monster storm cell moved in. I cruised down to the beach, landed right in front of the shack, and had a beer in my hand before my wing had hit the sand.

I could just look towards the sky, a tear of joy in my eye, and think of how far I’d come in just two weeks. I’ve gone from being a novice, with the nerves and lack of confidence that come with that, to being a fully-fledged pilot able to take on the best sites in the world and come out on top. Epic doesn’t even begin to describe those two weeks.

Honestly, I just want to be back there, in Candi, flying with my mates. How many days is it until the next tour? *

8

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