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SPIRITUAL

Idling on Bali

Along Bali's honeyed coast lies a peaceable retreat: the Ashram Çanti Dasa. BY ANNIE OSBURN

Enter Ashram Çanti Dasa, and you step into a place of candy-colored flowers, where time is measured by the ocean's rhythms, where Hindu chants summon moonlit ceremonies.

Ashram Çanti Dasa (Sanskrit for "servant of peace") is a 20-year-old spiritual retreat on Bali's east coast, in the village of Candidasa. A tidy covey of simple cot-

tages clustered in dappled palm shade around open-air pavilions, the ashram is up the coast road from the traffic of tourist meccas Kuta and Legian (an ashram shuttle collects you at the airport with advance notice).

Founded by Ibu Gedong Bagoes Oka ("Ibu Oka"), the widow of a Balinese Hindu leader, Çanti Dasa is dedicated to the pacifist beliefs of Mahatma Gandhi. Pacifism is practiced literally here: The tranquil days are as long as a drink of cool juice from the inside of a young coconut. Indeed, ashram members will happily shinny up a nearby palm tree and toss down coconuts, then carve a tiny spout

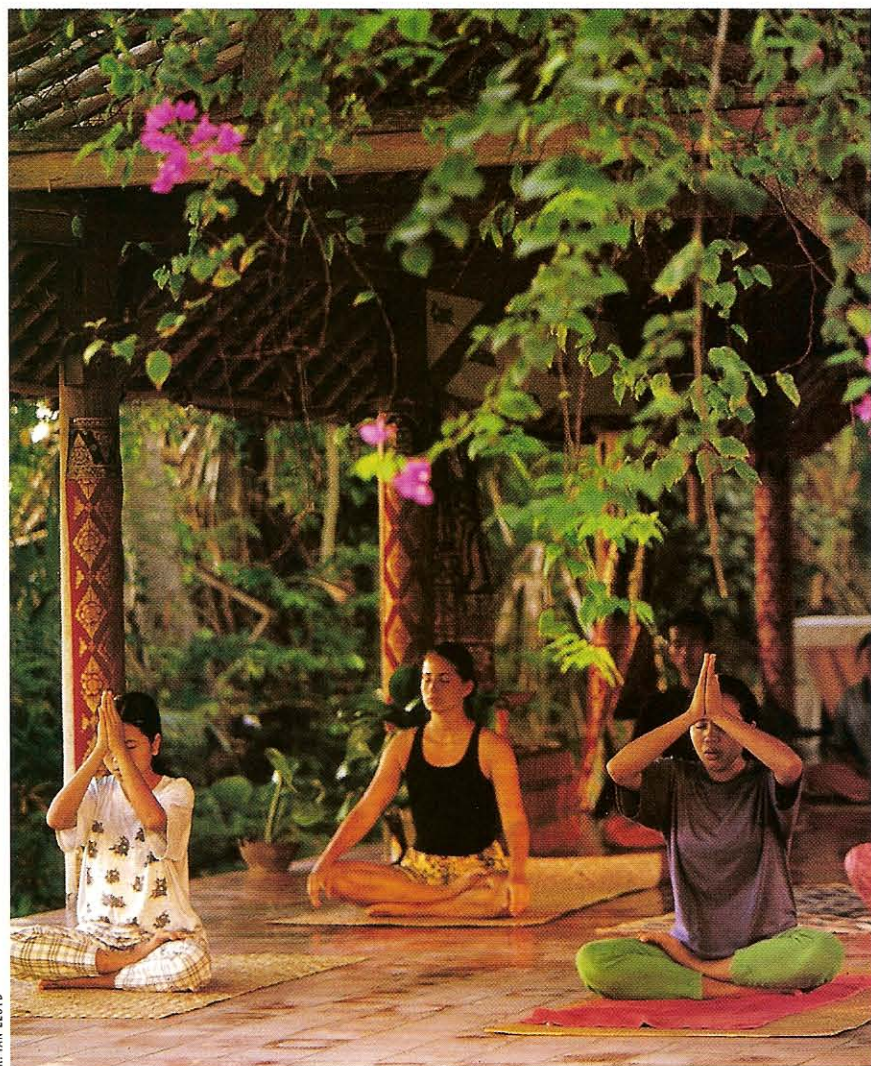
in the shell from which you can drink.

First, though, buy yourself an authentic sarong to wrap around your waist. There, you are fully in Bali. Now settle into your *balé*, an open-air bungalow that typifies Balinese architecture in its simplicity (even rusticity, to some American eyes). Ibu Oka, 77, a tiny woman with the ability to pretzel herself into yoga positions you couldn't manage even in your flexible youth, will appear at your bungalow with a warm welcome.

As the serenity of the ashram seeps in, you find yourself staring at the Indian Ocean from your veranda and wondering why the staring never gets old. Your toes become so accustomed to soft grass beneath them that you forget how to wear shoes. Which is fine, since you won't be going anywhere. The three daily vegetarian meals, all prepared with fresh, ashram-grown produce by cook Ibu Ruki, are served in an open-air pavilion—and have made at least one ashram guest propose matrimony to the chef. Afterward, as the moon rises, you drift to sleep (tucked inside your mosquito netting) to the cadence of night creatures—crickets, geckos, frogs—and to distant drums from the ancient village of Tenganan, where many Balinese traditions remain unchanged.

Pujas, or ritual prayers, are held three times a day. Guests may participate as much or as little as they want. If you choose little, still don't miss the sunset fire ceremony. For then, as ashram members intone Vedic chants and Ibu Oka stokes a concoction intended to cleanse the environment, the spirit of this humble sanctuary finds its fullest expression.

TRAVELWISE ■ **Best For:** Travelers favoring simple pleasures and simple facilities. Adults and children are encouraged to participate in activities, many performed in the native language. ■ **Basics:** The ashram is located north of Bali's capital, Denpasar. Lodging and three meals run about \$25 a day. Many guests are repeat visitors and friends of friends. Fax your reservation request three months in advance to 011-62-363-411-08.



Open-air pavilions dot Çanti Dasa's tropical grounds, providing flower-wreathed venues for such ashram activities as yoga (above), meditation, and dining.