



DINE IN UPPER EAST

EXPERIENCE A LOCAL CULINARY ADVENTURE IN THE MIDST OF EAST BALI...

While most of my days start with an alarm sounding from my phone, there was one fine day last month when I awoke even before it went off. It was all because my thoughts were set on a culinary adventure at Bali Asli restaurant. Despite its location that is quite secluded in Karangasem's Gelumpang Village, Bali Asli is already popular as one of the must-visit restaurants in Bali. So when the restaurant's Director and Executive Chef Penelope Williams confirmed that I could join a fun activity at the restaurant, I couldn't hardly wait to visit Bali Asli and experience its magical vibe that is hard to beat.

MORNING BOOST

The two-hour drive from South Bali to Bali Asli was filled with beautiful views to see – lush greenery and clear blue skies were such a feast to my eyes. As I got closer to the restaurant I could see Mount Agung standing proudly afar. The majestic Mount Agung is also visible from Bali Asli, which becomes one of the main attractions of the restaurant. I mean, where else can one relish delicious authentic Balinese dishes with the view of the mountain and rice paddies?

I arrived at 10 a.m., and a waiter dressed in traditional Balinese attire with an *udeng* (a Balinese headpiece for men) greeted me. He was a local in Karangasem area, just like the other staff in the restaurant. It was

obvious that this restaurant really honors the locals, from the food they offer to the people they work with and the materials they used for the building. While waiting for the staff to call Penelope, I looked around the restaurant and noticed there was a wastewater garden with water streams where used water from the kitchen flows to a fish pond and is naturally recycled to water the other garden below the pond. In that second garden they grow plants and herbs that will become the ingredients they use in the kitchen. It is really interesting to see how Bali Asli strives to be self-sustainable. Eco-friendly restaurant done right, I must say.

Not long after, Penelope greeted me and mentioned that she would conduct a "Day in Balinese Salon" for me before lunchtime. It was a class for guests to learn to craft *jamu* (Balinese herbal drinks) and skin treatment. Penelope took me to the workshop where she sat in front of me at a big wooden table with coconut shells between us. The coconut shells were filled with many kinds of Indonesian herbs including turmeric, candlenuts, cinnamon, cloves, and many more. There was also rice, eggs, bananas, honey, virgin coconut oil, carrots, chocolate nibs, and others. First she taught me how to make *jamu kunyit asam* using peeled turmeric, white rice, lime juice, honey, and water. We made it from scratch, which means we needed to peel and crush the

herbs with mortar and pestle. When finished, it was the most refreshing *jamu* I have ever tasted. The yellow color showed how good it was as it was made of 100 percent unprocessed ingredients.

Then Penelope took me to the alfresco area where we reached a *bale* that was already filled with the same herbs that were on the wooden table. I thought we were about to make some other kind of *jamu*, but she surprised me by saying that we would craft something for skin care. We started by making a skin scrub concoction with chocolate nibs, candlenuts, virgin coconut oil, grated carrot and grated coconut, then continued on to create a face moisturizer with a ripe banana and honey. We also created a face scrub made of yam bean, ground rice flour and egg white. This was truly the best pre-lunch activity I have ever experienced, as it taught me how to make beauty products using pure natural ingredients. Penelope heightened my excitement even more



The view of lush greenery at Bali Asli.

when she said, “You can easily create more of these at home now that you know the ingredients are so easy to find.”

A LOCAL FEAST

Lunchtime had come, so now it was time to indulge in the restaurant’s authentic Balinese food served in *megibung* style. *Megibung* is

actually a traditional Balinese feast during ceremonies where people gather and eat with their bare hands. However, in Bali Asli we were free to use eating utensils if we wished. The highlight of the *megibung* at Bali Asli is that the dishes are made using ingredients and cooking techniques that are true to the roots of the Balinese. The menu also changes everyday, depending on the availability of the ingredients in the market and the herbs and plants that are currently blooming in the garden.

Megibung is usually made for more than four people, but since that day I came together with just one friend of mine, the Bali Asli staff prepared the *megibung* for two. Before the main course started, I had *Jukut Kelor Melikik* for my appetizer – a soup made of corn and moringa leaves. According to a myth, moringa leaves can lead black

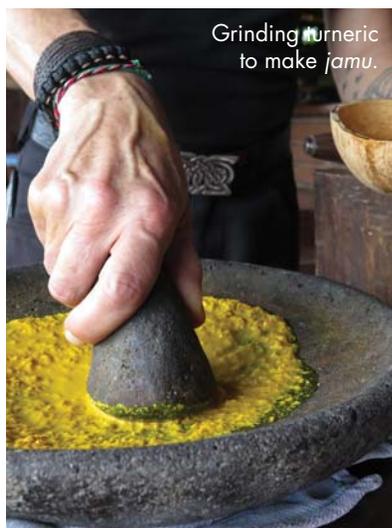


The colorful *megibung* dish.



magic practitioners closer to death. Of course, it was not an issue for me as I had never gone near such a thing – and I couldn't be more thankful as I couldn't stop relishing those fresh grated young coconuts mixed with moringa leaves and corn until the last sip.

The appetizer was followed by the *megibung*, which looked so deliciously colorful. The rice was placed in the middle surrounded by *Urab Pisuh Biu Bayam* (a fresh banana leaf blossom and Balinese baby spinach mashed with garlic and lime), *Jukut Cantok* (a mix of steamed vegetables fresh from the market with a thick peanut sauce), and *Pesan Telengis* (coconut curd wrapped in a banana leaf with bean sprouts and Balinese spices). The latter successfully introduced my palate to the real rich flavor of Balinese food where all the spices were blended smoothly with coconut curd. I'm pretty sure such tasteful dishes wouldn't be easy to find



Grinding turmeric to make *jamu*.



The ingredients for *jamu* and skin care.



anywhere but in Bali Asli.

The *megibung* also came with *Sate Lembet Be Pasih*, which are grilled fish skewers. The fish meat was soft and was even more tempting with its palm leaf fragrance, as it was wrapped in the leaf during the grilling process. Lastly, *Be Siap Mepanggang* was also served in the *megibung*. This dish consists of grilled chicken marinated in garlic and turmeric, rubbed with coconut oil and served with coconut sauce and sprinkles of *sambal matah*. Not to forget,

three kinds of *sambal* and assorted crackers were also among the side dishes of the *megibung*.

Of course the *megibung* wouldn't be complete without some Balinese dessert. After we finished the main dishes, a plate filled with guava and mango cuts, *godoh tapai* (fried fermented-cassava) and *sumping* (steamed jackfruit cake made of rice flour and wrapped in a banana leaf) was served. Beautiful food, a gorgeous view and the warm hospitality from the whole staff – I couldn't ask for a better culinary adventure. ■

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Bring a friend to join a cooking class at Bali Asli and get a 50 percent discount for two from November 1, 2016 until March 31, 2017. Reservations are essential.