

Visiting the guru in Ubud

Getting a cure and your fortune told proved a tall order for **Robin Bower**

On a sabbatical in Bali, the first book to read is the bestseller, *Eat, Pray, Love*, by Elizabeth Gilbert. Through brilliant marketing and a good sales network, this book has found itself in the hands of many tourists who come to Bali. The relevant section is *Love*, set in the Balinese mountain village of Ubud.

Liz, the writer, finds herself on a quest for enlightenment and spends most of her four months in Ubud visiting Ketut Liyer, a healer and fortune teller of a venerable age who spends his days officiating at the many Balinese ceremonies and healing the masses who come to his door each day.

I won't go into her particular journey; suffice to say this man is enjoying movie star status and his reputation has spread worldwide. On my recent trip to Ubud, I thought it would be interesting to see if I could find him and have my own "enlightening experience" in his presence.

I'd forgotten his name so asked the manager of my modest hotel. Yes, he knew the man who was on the speaking circuit at hospitals and very well known. Did he know where to visit him? We discovered that the man at reception had visited him to cure an ailment and an offer of a ride was soon forthcoming.

My friend, Christine, and I headed for two motorbikes and after twisting and turning down the usual circuitous routes in Ubud, we came upon a shingle, "Ketut Liyer, painter and woodcarver". He appeared to be a man of many talents.

We were directed to an old stained sofa and told the great man was at a wedding and was to return in 20 minutes. This stretched out to about 1½ hours, during which we talked to his son, Nyoman, an art teacher, and looked at his detailed Balinese drawings. I'd heard that a donation was sufficient for his services and to confirm this I asked Nyoman. He said 200,000 Rp (\$22.53) would be a good amount but whatever we could afford was acceptable.

Finally, the great man appeared in the carved doorway of his home. Gandhi-esque in long white robes, he came towards us, showing his one-tooth smile in a dark brown face.

"I am very pleased you have come," he said and asked if he could have breakfast before seeing us. More time was spent looking at the home temple, wedding photos of Nyoman's children and the homestay at the back of the family compound.

Finally, Ketut was ready to see us and we were beckoned to sit on

a woven mat near a doorway. A little girl who turned out to be Ketut's great granddaughter was ushered forward and wanted to show us her own paintings in a child's sketch book. Colourful pastel drawings of her friends, mountains and houses greeted us. I did the dutiful thing and said they were beautiful. When she said, "Would you like to buy?" I said no thank you, and quickly gave them back.

Ketut sat down in front of us, pulled out *Eat, Pray, Love* and asked if I'd read the book.

"So what does Liz say about me in the book?" His English was not good enough to read so I told him a few things she tells about him in the book. He seemed satisfied and asked Christine what she did for a job. She told him she was an art teacher and manager. He then looked at her ear, nose and mouth and said she was a "good girl, a

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smart girl". He read her palm next and revealed she would have plenty of money, be rich, get married soon and if she wanted to make a good match she should pay \$US200 for one of his paintings he called his "magic love painting".

A sideways glance revealed her displeasure at this outcome and she told him she couldn't afford it. He said that was fine, that she would still have good luck, get married and be rich.

I pushed her to ask him to heal her frozen shoulder. He studied it and said: "Call a doctor." At the request that he heal it, he said: "I cannot, you should do yoga."

Then it was my turn. Apparently, Christine and I have very similar destinies because I was also going to be rich, get married soon and have lots of luck. I was also a "good smart girl" but he didn't offer me the "magic love painting". It was time to pay. I handed over 100,000 Rp (\$10) for his time, made the hands-together-thank-you gesture all Balinese expect and we left. Our guru had let us down but had told us what he thought we wanted to hear. I just wonder how his reputation has spread or if, at the age of 87, his healing abilities have finally expired.