

NOCTURNE

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After several weeks in sanitized urban Canada, where even a tiny spider on the wall is cause for alarm, I returned to my cottage at the edge of the jungle in Ubud with relief. What an adaptable species we are, I thought sleepily as jet lag propelled me towards the bed and I nodded to the big tokay who lives behind a picture in my bedroom. The concept of lizards in the bedroom would be outrageous in Vancouver. In the 25th floor apartment my 90 year old parents had recently rented (after fleeing the comfortable assisted living facility they'd settled in after selling the family home last year) there was not so much as an ant to be seen. I slept in the small white cube of a bedroom far above the ground, dreaming of my lush garden at home and its many creatures.

As always after a trip, I was very glad to be back in Bali. I prepared for bed and the dogs bounced into the bedroom to flop down in their usual posts. Outside, the parrots grumbled softly. A few metres away the jungle welcomed me back with rustles and squeaks and sighs. There was a huge splash in the pond, as if a small whale was sounding among the water hyacinths. I went to sleep with a smile.

Hours later when the night was darkest, all the dogs started to bark at once. Upon investigation, they'd been disturbed by a couple of glossy rats chasing one another along the top of the bathroom wall. I reminded myself to talk to the staff again about the merits of acquiring a small python. They were still quite resistant. ("If I saw it, I would have to scream and run," explained Wayan Manis.)

Back in bed and reaching again for sleep, I recalled some of the other nocturnal visitors I'd encountered over the years. Once as I was reading in bed I noticed all the dogs staring onto one corner of the room. I squinted to see what they were looking at, and a long, snake-like shadow rose against the wall. After locking the dogs in the office, I returned with a broom. There had never been a snake in the house before and I was hoping the intruder would prove to be something else. Indeed, it revealed itself a moment later. Rolling out of the corner on a moving frill of legs was a large, blue-tinged centipede.

Gentle reader, do your utmost to avoid being bitten by a centipede. There is something quite horrid in their venom that not only causes a large, painful swelling, but the twin entry points of the wound turns the flesh to jelly for a few days. (By the way, there only three creatures on Bali that leave two fang marks when they bite -- the snake, the centipede and the spider.) Centipedes move with astonishing speed; there was not a moment to be lost. I grabbed a big book, dropped it on the intruder and jumped up and down on it a few times. Centipede legs flew out in all directions. When I was quite sure it was flat, I scraped the remains into a glass jar and carefully washed the floor. The next

morning when I showed the jar to my staff, the vestiges of the mangled centipede were still moving. "These are very hard to kill," said Nyoman, taking it into the garden and carefully chopping it into small pieces.

A whole new cast of characters takes the stage after dark here in Ubud. We are all used to the lovelorn vocalizations toads and frogs, but my friend Susan reports that every few months she is kept awake by the koi in her pond, which thrash and splash in an excess of amorous ardour that can go on for days.

My patio has been the arena of many nocturnal adventures. A few days ago I came onto the patio in the morning to find a large splat of half-digested wild figs on the floor, evidence that a fruit bat had been hanging out there. The next morning there was another splat in the very same place, which thoughtfully avoided the dining table and the cushions. I became intrigued.

Judging by the volume of evidence, either the bat had been very large or it had brought several of its friends back to party. That night I caught the visitor in the act. It was quite a small black bat, hanging by one foot from the ceiling while liberally decorating the tile below. Wayan said that bats were seldom alone, and probably a group of ten or so would gather here later to sociably digest their figs together. Not wanting my dining room to become Fruit Bat Central I turned off the light, asked the bats to leave, and they never came back.

The dogs killed a civet in front of me on the steps one night, where it had unwisely followed a juicy bug. Once I was woken by strange noises, and went out to find Kipper the pit bull in enthusiastic sexual congress with Kalypso on the dining table. I had to dispatch a green pit viper which Daisy had dragged in from the garden at three o'clock one morning. Another time I found two big tokays on the table locked in a death battle which had, by the look of the carnage, been going on all night.

I used to tell my family and friends about the wildlife that shared my space, but they were always so horrified that I eventually stopped. How could I live like that? they wondered. Why didn't I seal up my windows and install air conditioning so glacial that no self-respecting reptile would take up residence in my bedroom?

Well, I could. But what fun would that be?

Ibu Kat's book of stories *Bali Daze - Freefall off the Tourist Trail* is available from:

1. *Ganesha Books in Ubud and Seminyak*
2. www.balidazethebook.com downloadable as a PDF file
3. *Amazon downloadable for Kindle*