

Nyepi celebrations in Bali



A photograph of two young boys sitting on the ground. They are wearing traditional Balinese clothing, including white shirts, colorful sarongs (one yellow and red, the other red), and white headwraps (udeng). The boy on the left is pointing towards the camera with a smile, while the boy on the right looks directly at the camera. In the background, other people in similar attire are visible, suggesting a community gathering or ceremony.

There is one day each year, the Balinese "*Saka*" New Year, when the entire island of Bali honours an observation of silence that sees *Pulau Dewata* completely devoid of noise and commotion.

This is *Hari Nyepi*, a day of spiritual purification and retreat, of meditation and self-control, and a day free of bad spirits. *Hari Nyepi* always takes place on the first day of the tenth month of the Balinese lunar *Saka* calendar which means it is always around March or April. The Balinese Hindu religion states that the New Year should begin with nothingness, as all of existence came from nothing. *Nyepi* is part of a series of four events over five days. Some of Bali's most colourful and photographed ceremonies are held three days prior to *Nyepi*.

A group of women in traditional Balinese attire, including colorful blouses and batik sarongs, are gathered outdoors. In the background, a large, ornate ceremonial structure is visible, and a woman is carrying a tray with offerings on her head. The scene is set in a traditional Balinese village environment.

The first is *Melasti*, three days before *Nyepi*, which is a large and important ceremony to purify the temple deities (Gods) before the New Year.

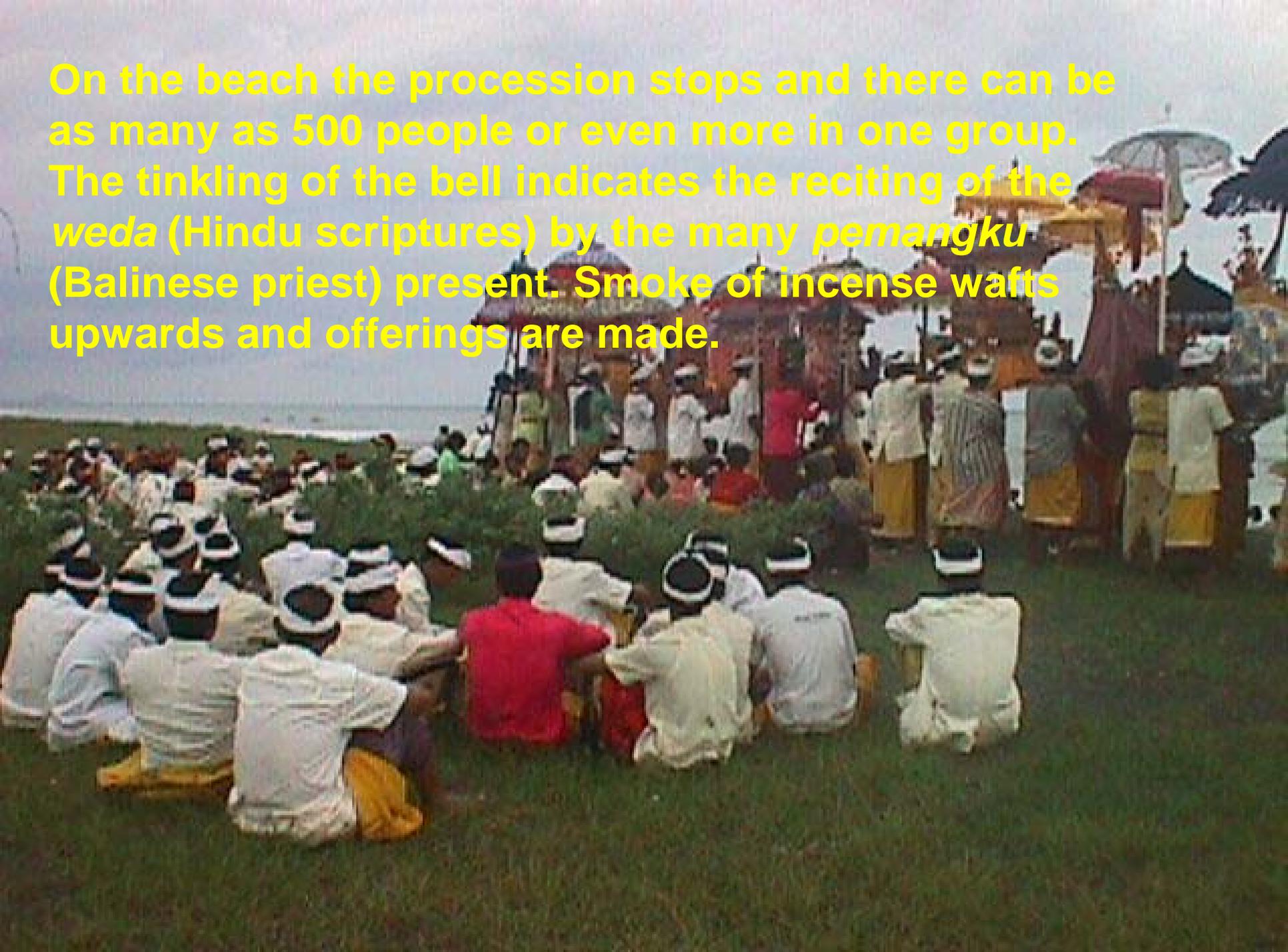
This day is very colourful; people wear bright traditional clothes and join hundreds of other celebrants in holy processions.



During *upacara Melasti* the processions of different Banjar (village organisations), accompanied by music from gongs, wind their way to the sea or holy springs for the symbolic cleansing of the elaborately carved statues from the temple altars where the Gods normally reside.

The statues (representing the Gods) from the temples are carried to the sea or to holy springs. Everyone prays and is sprinkled with holy water to purify them before *hari Nyepi*.

On the beach the procession stops and there can be as many as 500 people or even more in one group. The tinkling of the bell indicates the reciting of the *weda* (Hindu scriptures) by the many *pemangku* (Balinese priest) present. Smoke of incense wafts upwards and offerings are made.



Seated on the beach, the congregation are directed in their devotions, raising their hands joined together and clutching a flower in between their fingers.



The ritual continues for an hour or so, as the prayers, ringing of the bell, and certain hand gestures are meant to achieve a temporary unity with God, so that the priest is able to purify the holy water. This is then taken around by assistants. The holy water is sprinkled on the people as a blessing and purification.



As the sun sets everyone begins to drift away and slowly the procession forms for the return home accompanied by the sound of the gongs and the people.



The annual seaside ceremony has been accomplished for the purification of the temples' Gods before the New Year.

All over the island these processions are a common sight three days prior to *Nyepi*. The women of the villages turn out in their *kain* and *kebaya* with a *selendang* tied around the waist.



The men wear *sarung*, *kemeja* and traditional Balinese headwear called an *udeng*.

The day before *Nyepi* a ceremony called ***Tawur Agung Kesanga*** is held at the Puputan Badung Square in Denpasar. At midday, rituals are performed by priests. Incense fills the air and the reciting of the *weda* is accompanied by the tinkling of bells. As the congregation sits quietly, the gamelan turns out solemn beats in keeping with the occasion.

Sacrifices of animals are made, including that of a buffalo head meant to maintain the balance of nature. As *Nyepi* is held after the rains and the beginning of the dry season, the ceremony is to purify the earth which has become soiled and return it to its state of harmony. The rains are believed to have unbalanced the harmony and therefore purification is necessary.



Later in the afternoon, in the villages around Bali, the *pura desa* are crammed with worshippers as whole families take their offerings to the temple for the Ngerupuk ceremony.

This ceremony last a couple of hours as hundreds of worshippers gather in the grounds of the village temple.



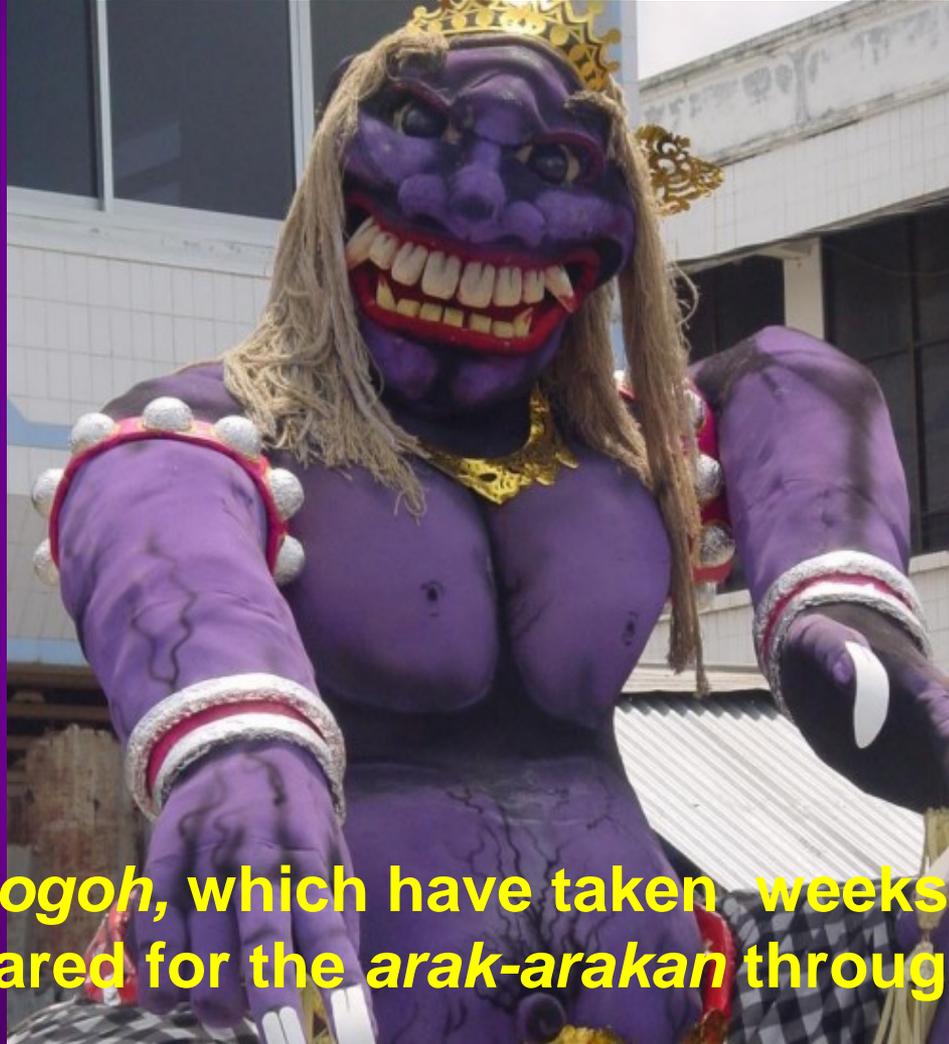


At certain times during the ceremony the worshippers take turns to perform various rituals and prayers under the leadership of the *pedanda* and several *pemangku* present.



As the day ends, families stroll home from the *pura desa* to their family compounds to return their sacred deities to the family shrines where another short ceremony takes place.

And now the party begins. . . .Young and old people alike gather in eager anticipation as dozens



of *ogoh-ogoh*, which have taken weeks to make, are prepared for the *arak-arakan* through the streets.

Ogoh-ogoh of countless shapes, colours and styles are paraded energetically along the streets. . .









Each ogoh-ogoh needs about fifteen strong young people to carry it on their shoulders. Once the signal is given the cacophony of sound becomes even louder and the young people move off in front of and behind the parade of ugly monsters.



As the *ogoh-ogoh* approach street corners, they are spun, at times uncontrollably, around and around before moving on.

There is the continued deafeningly loud beating of drums and other instruments, even pots and pans. All these loud noises to drive away the evil spirits. This cacophony of sound is accompanied by lit torches in an effort to exorcise the evil spirits.





The sound of the kul-kul at dawn the next day signals the beginning of Hari Nyepi. The fire and noise and the earlier offerings have paved the way for *Hari Nyepi* - the beginning of the New Year to start again from nothing but in harmony with the forces of nature in a land purified and fit for the Gods.



On the morning of *Nyepi*, the spirits find the streets empty and purified from the activities during *Ngerupuk* so they leave Bali alone. So as not to break this good omen for the new year, everyone in Bali follows four *Nyepi* traditions:

- no light (including fire and cooking)
- no physical work
- no entertainment
- no leaving the home

Nyepi is a time for quiet reflection and gathering spiritual strength for the New Year.

To see that the stillness is preserved, certain members of each *banjar* act as *pecalang* or security guards to keep silent watch at certain points on the roadsides to ensure that people do not venture out.



To do so would risk a fine or other penalty imposed by the *pecalang* representing each *banjar*.

The day after *Nyepi* is *Ngembak Nyepi*. People visit each other and ask forgiveness for past mistakes. They also go to the mountains, lakes, and beaches to relax and socialise with their families and friends



Selamat Hari Raya Nyepi