

Welcome to Ubud, My Sweet Neighbor!

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by Dani Sulisty - UbudProperty's Director



"In a gentle way, you can shake the world." - Mahatma Gandhi I heard on occasions a question by my friends and clients from outside Ubud who want to buy a property in Ubud: "Is it true, the local people can be annoying there?". Well, I'm not a Balinese, nor am I coming from Ubud, therefore they feel free to ask me such question. I also heard a few less enchanting stories from foreigners living in Ubud, like: my local neighbor is a nightmare for me" or "they just want my money" and similar ones.

What happened actually? Who is wrong? Is the local community here sometimes really horrible? Or could it be the 'new comers' behave inappropriately and are upsetting their neighbors, therefore have provoked a negative reaction?

In my daily work, I'm dealing with my Balinese team from Ubud, with vendors and many of the local community. I found that all of my Balinese colleagues have a great personality.

All of them, no exception and regardless of their education level. We have been through good times and bad times and I can say that they are great companions whom I always want to keep. I also do not see significant problems with the local vendors. There are at times some difficult ones, but these kind of people can also be found in my hometown far away.

Indeed, there are some villages and their leaders, having a few uninviting rules for newcomers, for example by applying an unreasonably high joining fee. But it is listed in their local regulations (awig - awig) so that disappointment can be avoided at the beginning. Naturally you do not have to stay there if you do not want to pay that much. My experience as being a newcomer to Ubud myself is, that the local people are very nice here. I have a house in the east of Ubud. Next to my house there is a villa owned by a foreigner. Both of our houses overlooking the same rice fields which are owned by the same local farmer. Our houses were completed at about the same time. After a few months, this local farmer planted some banana trees along his land border, blocking the view of my neighbor's property. Oh God! My neighbor has no longer his beautiful view to the rice field! I happened to be there when the banana trees were planted, but I decided not to ask the farmer if he would plant them as well in front of my house. I immediately thought that my neighbor was perceived as unwanted and he would do the same to me. Two years have passed and I still have my unblocked rice field view. There are no banana trees in front of my house. I was questioning why he treats me differently and I think I actually know the answer. This is what I have understood from my experience during the interaction with the local community here. I will share my thoughts with you so that your life too becomes almost always very enjoyable in our Ubud 😊

1. If you want to win the game, you have to know the rules.

Before you decide to live in a community or banjar (village part), make sure you know the updated local rules for the newcomers so there will be no future surprise. Come and visit the head of the banjar to request a copy of their local regulations about newcomers. Most newcomers choose to trust in the information given by their local friends or a local freelance agent. Those unfortunately do not always have the knowledge of these regulations and even if so, are likely to suppress the serious aspects. Being unaware of the complete local rules leads easily to the beginning of conflicts.

2. "In a gentle way, you can shake the world." - Mahatma Gandhi

The local people tend to wait rather than be proactive in interacting. They will react positive or negative depending on the stimulants they received or perceive. When I built my house, I sent a small gift to my aging farmer neighbor while apologizing for the noise and dust that resulted. They now were of the perception that I am a nice new neighbor and showed a positive attitude to me. My neighbor, an old farmer who previously suggested the possibility of renting out his rice field as view (perhaps this is the reason of planting the banana trees), now does not bring up this issue any longer. Until now I keep sending small gifts every Galungan and spend about 10 minutes in 6 months to talk with him. He simply became a very nice neighbor to me.

A small gift is always welcome. A box of JCO donuts for example, which you give to your neighbor as a gift for his little son or grand child will drastically improve your relationship with the neighbor. But please never ever give money as a gift! Money may create a dependency that you will not like over time.

The key is to have a good relation. Local people here really appreciate a friendly relation. Even a stern policeman will not fine you when passing in front of him by motorbike without a helmet, if you know him well.

3. Open your hand. - You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist.

As newcomers, we should be prepared for unusual experiences and compromise with a few small ones. A little sound from geckos, roosters; the road was closed suddenly due to a ceremony, etc. If we expect people to act like we are used from back home, we will be getting angry because we are not going to experience that we are used to. If we show anger, the 'environment' would make a negative perception about us and will respond negatively and as a result everything becomes more difficult for us. All is a little different here. Open your hand and be open towards the differences.

4. Nothing is free. You have to pay.

To win the good relation, there is a price to be paid, just not always related to money. It could be a good will to smile to the local neighbors whenever we meet them, or a 5 minutes visit on your first day to introduce yourself. If we do not want to do this, we'll pay the price later. Do not be surprised if you have banana trees suddenly blocking your million dollar view and you will be forced to lease their property to be able to again enjoy your precious view. In my experience, paying up front is cheaper than paying at the end. Imagine if I would not have regularly sent a small gift every half year, maybe this time I would have to pay hundreds of millions rupiah to rent the rice field "as view only" in order to continue to enjoy my beloved scenery. I am now in Real Estate for over 7 years and I can tell you that the most important value in a house is not the building itself, but it's neighborhood. A nice and peaceful neighborhood will enhance your life quality. Still sometimes a mini drama may be coming up, but as Gandhi says "Whenever you are confronted with an opponent, conquer him with love."

Do try this at home. I think your neighbor will greet you soon, "Hello my sweet neighbor" !!

May this be of some help.