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he sits on death row awaiting execu-

have been lured into traffick-  
 trip in exchange for endless  
 to burn. Author **KATHRYN**

viewing inmates in Bali's Kerobokan Prison for her recent book *Snowing in Bali*. Here she recounts their cautionary tales.

SMUGGLER

BALI

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**BONELLA** spent years inter-





MUSTOFA JEKSEN  
PHOTO: CHILDS

**B** **RAZILIAN SURFER RENATO STEERED** his motorcycle through the crowded streets of Canggu. He was on his way to meet a Balinese taxi driver whom he'd paid to collect a couriered package—a backpack loaded with nearly a kilogram of cocaine. It was the type of pickup Renato had performed many times without incident, but at this handoff on that sultry afternoon last June, his freewheeling life in paradise disintegrated. Police, dressed as surfers, burst from behind the gates. He wheeled his bike around, trying to escape, but a cop grabbed his shirt and put a gun to his back. He accelerated. The cop fired a shot into the air. The surfer revved harder. Then it was over. Renato was struck on the back of the head with the butt of a gun.

Renato regained consciousness in his bathroom where the cops had handcuffed him to a shower pipe. They were in the process of ransacking the two-story home he'd recently leased using drug money. His girlfriend, the gardener, and the maid were also locked in the bathroom as the cops searched his phone, his computer, and his photos for details on other dealers. They tore the place apart looking for more drugs.

For the next few days the cops lived in Renato's house, walking around in his floral boardshorts, floating in the swimming pool on his surfboards, drinking beers they'd bought with cash from his safe, and watching sports on his new plasma TV. Renato, his girlfriend, and staff remained captive in the bathroom. Intermittently, he was un-cuffed from the shower pipe for questioning: "Who sent the cocaine?" "Who do you work with?" "Who are you going to sell to?" When he refused to talk, he was beaten. Cops questioned the others too, even hitting the uncooperative gardener in the face and giving him a black eye.

The news spread fast. Another Brazilian expat who lived across the street had watched the bust through his window and quickly made phone calls. Panic set in among the surfers who'd worked with

Renato. The bigger dealers fled the island—it wasn't worth gambling on Renato's silence.

The police flew Renato to Jakarta, but even after he was gone, they continued to question the extensive circle of surfers he'd come to know. While most evaded the police, one of his Singaporean business partners agreed to be interviewed. When he arrived to meet the cops at a Canggu beachfront café, he watched in disbelief as one of the policemen pulled up in Renato's new car, with Renato's stash of surfboards piled up beside him. While Renato used his powerful contacts in Bali to retrieve most of his belongings the cops had taken, they would be useless to him in prison.

**S** **OOON AFTER THE 1971** film *Morning of the Earth* first revealed the transparent-blue perfection of Uluwatu, surfers the world over began venturing to this newly discovered warm-water oasis, returning home with their own tales of long, perfect, empty waves. Word spread fast. In the ensuing decades, hotels, stores, and restaurants popped up to cater to the thousands making the pilgrimage to Bali. A surfer could arrive with surfboards and some cash and stay in the finest hotels, eat decadent meals, enjoy long massages, and surf the best waves on the planet for an entire week on little more than they'd pay for a few bags of groceries back home. Today, Bali is more popular than ever. Conservative estimates put Indonesia's annual surf tourist population at nearly a quarter of a million people each year. And for good reason—there are few places a surfer can enjoy the world's best waves all day, and if they're interested, some of the best nightlife in the world. It's become a tropical paradise where any hedonistic pleasure can be satisfied—legal or otherwise. Although Indonesia is notorious for having some of world's harshest anti-drug laws, it's widely known that the nightclubs are teeming with dealers, ready to make a quick buck on tourists out to have a good time.

Since the 1980s South American surfers have smuggled cocaine to the island, alternating methods depending on which was not being closely scrutinized by authorities. Paying a surfboard shaper \$5,000 to embed coke into a board was the preferred method

until 1994. That year, a surfer named Frank de Castro Diaz was arrested at Bali's Denpasar Airport with 4.3 kilos of cocaine hidden inside two of his surfboards. He'd created suspicion by also carrying a saw to cut open the boards. His publicized arrest exposed and temporarily halted that popular method of carrying drugs to the island.

But Bali remains an ideal tourist gateway from South America to Asia, where drug traffickers can carry surfboard bags or sports equipment and blend in among the ever-increasing number of real tourists—2.9 million last year. But the expat and tourist markets in Bali are only part of the equation; the real cash comes as the cocaine makes its way further to Japan or Australia, where it maintains the highest price tags on the planet.

The cocaine trafficked to Bali by the western dealers like Renato is usually pure, coming directly from South America. Every border it crosses, it jumps in price. In the cocaine-producing countries of Peru, Colombia, and Bolivia it costs about \$1,000 to \$2,000 per kilogram. Across the border in Brazil it costs around \$5,000, and by the time it reaches Bali it fetches anything from \$20,000 to \$90,000, depending on how much it is "snowing"—that is, how much coke is on the island. Recently, after a couple of big busts, the price briefly shot to around \$300,000 per kilogram.

Part of the reason there are so many surfers incarcerated in Indonesia's prisons is because surfers are ideal candidates to run drugs to the islands. The Bali bosses mostly use runners who are well traveled, good-looking, multi-lingual, and sporty. Details are everything, and the slightest oversight can result in dire consequences. Brazilian mule Luis Alberto Faria Cafiero, 27, departed São Paulo for Bali in 2003, carrying a large surfboard bag. Cafiero's pale complexion immediately caused Customs officials to be suspicious—no surfer would possess such pallor. They did a full search, and found 7 kilos of cocaine hidden between his two surfboards. "He did not look like a person who's always out on the beach," Federal police officer Isaias Santos Vilela told the media.

Despite the huge risks, there's no shortage of drug bosses and willing runners. After all, it's a business that seemingly puts the dream within reach: surf all day and party all night—often in plush villas or five-star hotel suites—while dealing drugs to pay for it all. Surfers are regularly propositioned with the seemingly simple task of taking one round-trip flight in exchange for \$10,000—a stipend

that would easily allow them to maintain the dream of surfing perfect barrels and never returning to "reality" back home.

Such was the experience of South American Alberto Lopez, who'd come to Bali chasing waves, then over-stayed his visa by months, racking up huge debts. When a Peruvian coke boss he met at a nightclub offered to pay his bills and give him cash to burn if he did a run, he jumped at the chance.

"It meant going to Peru, picking up a bag of cocaine, and returning to Bali," he recalls. "I did it because I realized there were a lot of people doing this, and I needed the money, so I took my chance. I crossed the globe, picked up this bag with 2 and a half kilos, put it on my back, and headed back."

Anxiety-riddled, he sat on the edge of his seat for the entire 48 hours. Every lingering stare or minor hiccup was amplified into a potential death sentence. When his name was called over the loudspeakers during a transit stop at Buenos Aires Airport, he was sure that life as he knew it was over.

"I thought, 'This is it. I'm gone. Oh fuck, they've found it for sure,'" he says. "My heart was pounding. I was looking everywhere for somewhere to run. Then I thought, 'I'm going to just play dumb.' I made up a quick story in my head: 'I exchanged my surfboard for this bag with a guy, Pablo, and I didn't know the shit was there.' I would stick with the story to the end."

As he flashed his boarding pass to re-board the plane, he expected the police to pounce. "I was getting mentally ready to be tortured," he recalls. "I'd heard that's what they do. I was just waiting for the Federal Police to come. Then the stewardess came and said, 'Oh, excuse me, are you Mr. Lopez? We have a little problem, we overbooked the plane, and sold your seat to a family traveling together, so would you mind if we moved you to business class?' I was thinking, 'Thank you, God, I'm never ever going to do this again.'"

When he finally arrived in Bali and walked out into the blazing sun, he was ecstatic. But for him, even that rush and the promise of

SOUTH AMERICAN SURFER RODRIGO GULARTE WAS CAUGHT IN JAKARTA AIRPORT WITH SIX KILOS OF COCAINE EMBEDDED INTO SIX SURFBOARDS. HE CURRENTLY AWAITS EXECUTION IN MAXIMUM-SECURITY PRISON.  
PHOTOS: AP PHOTO/DITA ALANGKARA

quick cash wasn't worth the risk of trafficking through airports. Instead, he used his new contacts to begin a shiny new career as a freelance agent for anyone with drugs to sell—from random surfers with a bag of coke to Indonesia's biggest players. He quickly got a name, and got busy.

Being in Bali allowed him to use the thousands of hotel rooms on the island as dispensaries. He'd often rent one to stash the drugs and another to do the deal, a tactic used by most Western dealers. Sometimes they'd even ask hotel receptionists to unwittingly hold a bag of drugs in storage for a few days. Sometimes, the night before a job, he'd hire two cars and park one in a shopping center parking lot. The next day he'd drive the other car into the lot with the cocaine in his car door, then switch cars and change his sunglasses, clothes, and hat before driving out. If cops had been watching, they'd be still waiting for him to drive out, long after he'd done the deal.

"There was a glamorous side to this business," he says. "You'd feel very important;

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there was all this fantasy surrounding it. There was a time I could say, 'If you snorted coke here in Bali, there was a 50 percent chance it would have come through my hands. We had that much here, and we had the best quality. A lot of people made millions through my hands. Whenever I was going to do business, I would become a completely different person,

like James Bond or whatever. I would do that secret-agent thing until the deal was done, then go back to my normal life as a surfer, just cruise and surf. I had parallel lives."

**R**ELATIVELY SPEAKING, the smarter guys don't work as runners; they become bosses, organizing the runs, effectively minimizing risk and maximizing profits. And the good bosses are always ready to take advantage of trafficking opportunities. Some have even been known to use sporting professionals to do their dirty work—knowing that their star power will assure ease through security, and their extra sporting equipment will provide ample space to smuggle the goods.

Charismatic hang-gliding champ Marco Archer Moreira was just 16 when he flew to Bogotá, Colombia—Pablo Escobar's turf—to



compete, and returned with a gold trophy in his hand and white powder in his underwear. When he flew to California to compete, his drug-trafficking career took off.

"There is [a man like] Pablo Escobar—a boss, selling drugs around Brazil, around the world. He came to me and said, 'Marco, now listen to me. You go to America. I have many friends in America, international, so you can make more money,'" recalls Marco. "I took 3 kilos the first time, came through easy."

He quickly started running cocaine on every trip he did, and being a sportsman made it easy to slip through customs.

"I compete everywhere in the world and always I bring *narcoba* [drugs]," he says. "I take cocaine to America, to Italy, to Spain, to Portugal, Switzerland, Germany, Australia, everywhere. I'm a Brazilian champion, so when I come, they check but they don't really check."

Marco had a sense of invincibility, and always had a penchant for tempting fate. Once, on his way out of Sydney loaded up with drug money, he risked a kamikaze-style joke, crazily baiting an immigration officer. He waved \$10,000 in the official's face, taunting that they should have granted him a longer visa because he still had plenty of cash to splash. He was taken away and questioned, but released after 45 minutes.

"I was joking with the guy. I'm always joking you know, that's my biggest problem. Always joking," says Marco.

His inflated sense of invincibility was perhaps why he tried to traffic an audacious 13.7 kilos of cocaine to Bali. He flew to Peru to pick it up, then took a boat along the Amazon to Brazil, where he went to his grandmother's house, saw her for the last time, and then flew out to Bali, via Jakarta.

And there, his luck almost ran out. Customs officers were thoroughly searching every bag after a bomb alert. Marco's hang-glider was usually X-ray proof, but the customs boss saw shadows at the ends—where the glider frame wasn't completely filled. The boss took out his Swiss army knife and started tapping along the bars. They sounded tinnier in the empty spots. He told Marco to wait while he went to get something to cut it open. Marco knew it was the end, unless he did something quick. The split second the other customs officer glanced away he took his chance. In the blink of an eye he was off, running, outside the terminal. He jumped on the back of a motorbike, went to the domestic terminal,

## RODRIGO IS FAILING TO COPE, ONCE EVEN SETTING HIMSELF ON FIRE TO TRY TO END THE TORTUOUS WAIT FOR EXECUTION BY A 12-SNIPER FIRING SQUAD.

took a taxi and then vanished into Jakarta. The next day he took a bus to Bali and went to his favorite beachfront restaurant, La Luciola, for lunch, asking some of the guys to meet him there—despite being front-page news that very day in the *Jakarta Post*.

With help from his drug partners, he escaped Bali and spent two weeks on the run, island hopping. But instead of being low-key, with the Indonesian army and police force chasing him, he surfed, partied, barbecued on the beach, used hookers, and chatted to locals. Then, he got busted.

Marco is now on death row, has lost all his teeth, but somehow, miraculously, keeps his spirits up and still has his crazy sense of humor. "I'm a troublemaker. I've been moved 56 times in here. I've been in every cell. They even put me in the kitchen," he laughs.

But the reality of his desperate situation swarms him, with most of his fellow inmates in maximum security prison on Nusakambangan Island—dubbed Indonesia's Alcatraz—on either life or death sentences. His compatriot's include Rodrigo Gularte, busted at Jakarta airport en route to Bali with 6 kilos of cocaine embedded into six surfboards, the old method that Frank De Castro Dias was busted using 10 years earlier. Rodrigo is failing to cope, once even dousing himself in gasoline and setting himself on fire to try to end the drawn-out tortuous wait for execution by a 12-sniper firing squad. But the draconian penalties seem little deterrent—indeed, Rodrigo was busted only eight weeks after Marco was sentenced to death.

The lure of quick and easy cash ensures that it continues to snow in Bali, with runners continuing to risk it all. In late January, a British grandmother, Lindsay Sandiford, 56, was

sentenced to death for trafficking 4.7 kilos of cocaine to Bali in the lining of her suitcase. Sandiford will now spend many long years in Bali's notorious Kerobokan Prison while appealing her death sentence. She joins three other foreigners on death row there and a revolving door of westerners from across the globe serving time for drugs. Dubbed Hotel K, the prison resembles a cheap resort on first impression—with its palm trees, tennis court, and Hindu temple—but it is a hellhole, three times over capacity.

Built for 320 prisoners, it now constantly holds more than 1,000. At least 100 women are crushed into 10 small, hot concrete cells in a walled-in section inside the men's jail, banned from using the tennis courts or going out of their section except for visits or church. The 900 men who are locked up there live in cells they share with up to 30 men. There's insufficient space to even lie down, and all of them share a single squat toilet.

Rats, feral cats, and snakes are common. Prisoners get skin rashes from decomposing animals in the water system, drugs are rife, gangs rule, and violence erupts often—with frequent suspicious deaths of prisoners. A few months ago, 13 prisoners were convicted of torturing and killing a cellmate; in February last year prisoners rioted, hijacking the jail, locking out all guards, climbing into the watch towers, and hurling Molotov cocktails over the walls. It took two days and nights for the army and police to regain control. But there is no segregation between any prisoners; serial killers and a tourist caught with one ecstasy pill mix freely and share cells.

And the rate of Westerners checking in isn't slowing. Official stats, which don't include the many busts that never get reported thanks to quick payoffs to the police, show a continuing trend of foreigner busts—22 foreigners last year, and 23 the year before. Although the bosses say that the odds are still very good, with only about 10 percent of traffickers to Bali getting busted, in years of dealing, they watch many of their friends fall.

And despite their clever methods, the high-end dealers also bust: When Alberto was finally caught, he was tortured for two days by police, before being sent to Hotel K. "Bali can be heaven one minute and hell in the next," he says. "You live the fantasy, you live the dream, but one day you wake up." 🐞