

IN
SEARCH
OF

THE
perfect
BREAK

MITCH BROOK VENTURES TO KERAMAS, BALI, HOME TO ONE OF THE MOST RENOWNED SURF BREAKS ON THE SURFING WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP TOUR, ON A QUEST TO CATCH HIS FIRST BIG WAVE





PARKO IN THE POCKET
Joel "Parko" Parkinson won the WCT event at Keramas in 2013



THE BLACK SANDS OF KERAMAS BEACH ARE WELL KNOWN TO SURFERS.

Here, perfect waves crash over reef and sand. For decades, surfers who came to this spot north-east of Bali's tourist hub kept the place a secret, but many surely dreamed that its challenging break would one day host a championship event.

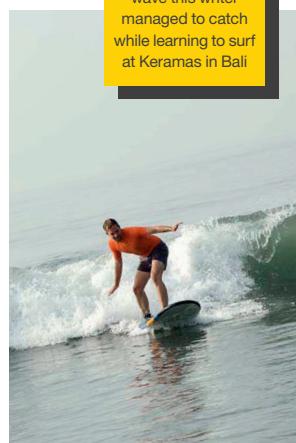
Despite living on Sydney's Northern Beaches and working for years just a street from Manly Beach, I've never surfed in Australia. My only taste of the sport came during a visit to the surf town of Mancora in northern Peru. There I caught 30cm waves, managing to stand briefly before losing my balance and tumbling into the water.

Years later I'm in Bali, staying at a resort right on Keramas beach. Throw a stone from Komune Resort and Beach Club and you'd miss Keramas entirely – it's that close. At night the crash of waves can be heard and during the day they're never out of sight. In the right conditions, surfers can fulfil dreams of night surfing thanks to the towering, stadium-style lights that face the break.

Knowing that a World Championship Tour (WCT) event has been held at Keramas, I can't resist an offer to hire a surfboard from the local surf club and give the waves a go.

"It's not the best wave to learn on, because it's actually pretty powerful and breaks on reef," says Joel "Parko" Parkinson, who won the WCT event at Keramas last year. Well, hindsight is 20/20. Luckily, the main break – the one that breaks over reef – is not the only option. I head to a nearby section where the waves are tamer.

FIRST STEPS
Behold the rad wave this writer managed to catch while learning to surf at Keramas in Bali

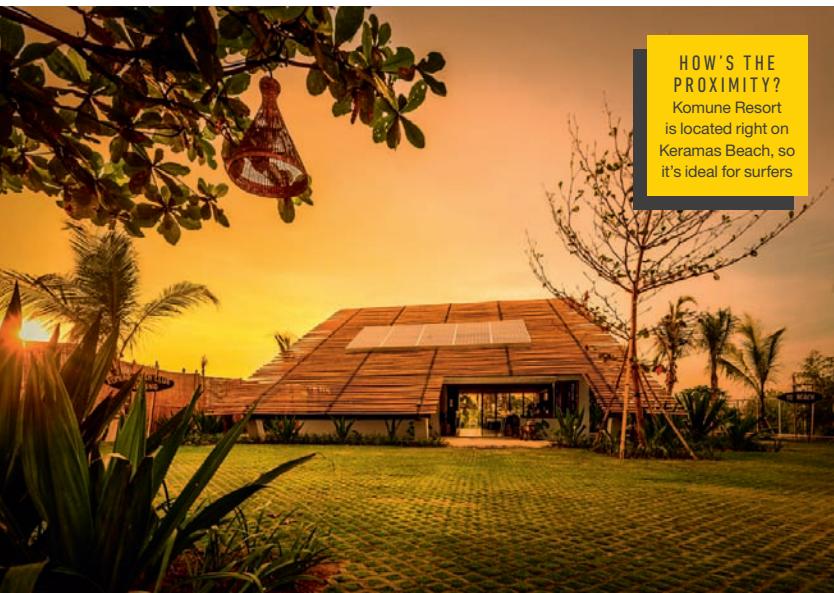


My session starts on the beach, with a friend teaching me the finer points of staying vertical on a board. We trace surfboard shapes in the black sand and practise paddling, standing and staying low. I'm told to stick my arms out to the side, stand side-on and crouch as low as possible. This lowers my centre of gravity, reducing the likelihood that I'll fall off the board. I practise this paddle-stand-crouch movement dozens of times until I'm covered in black sand and judged ready to try the real thing.

The toughest thing for a beginner is paddling out past breaking waves. I paddle and paddle, my arms growing more tired with each stroke. Whitewash rushes at me over and over, pushing me back two metres for every three I paddle. Finally, I'm in the break zone.

I have a Balinese surfer with me to tell me which waves to take. We watch swells approach several times. "This one?" I ask. "Nooo, no no," seems to be his default reply. Soon, I get a "Yep! Yep!" and I'm paddling like mad ahead of the approaching mound of water. I feel the wave's movement pick up my board, pulling me forward with it, and try my paddle-stand-crouch move. My feet hit the board... and I flail sideways as it zips out from under me.

Though it's a clear fail, that split second of momentum atop the wave is more than enough to convince me to try again. And again... and again. I don't manage to stand up for more than a second until my fifth wave. On that attempt, I paddle hard and feel the wave



"KERAMAS DOESN'T TEND TO GET AS BUSY AS IN TOWN AROUND KUTA"

catch the board, yanking me along. I succeed in getting to my feet and I'm away. I look straight ahead, towards the beach, and the wave carries me for what feels like minutes (really only seconds) until I fall off in the shallows. I spring up laughing and ready for another go, despite the hot ache in my shoulders and the crick in my neck from craning it in search of rideable waves. I catch another few waves before calling it a day and heading back to Komune for a breakfast of nasi goreng.

"Bali generally is a really busy, bustling place these days," Parko says. "So you're always on the lookout for somewhere that's a bit of a sanctuary, somewhere a bit quieter and a bit more relaxing where there are good waves and good food. Because Keramas is on the east side of the island it doesn't tend to get as busy as in town around Kuta and out on the Bukit Peninsula."

This part of Bali certainly is laidback. Located about 45 minutes from Denpasar airport, Keramas beach shares its name with the local town. Balinese surfers frequent Keramas year-round, and some look likely to end up as professional surfers in their own right. "Keramas was a bit of a secret spot originally because it's on the 'wet-season' side of the island, but Bali is a pretty small place and nothing stays secret there for too long," says Parko. "I couldn't believe it when I first paddled out and surfed it on a good day. This wave was so much fun and so rippable, and to think it had been breaking like this for

TOP
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"**THERE ARE**
so many waves
around the
world I love to
surf," Parko says.
"But I'd have to
say Jeffreys Bay
in South Africa,
Cloudbreak in
Fiji and my home
break at Snapper
Rocks on the
Gold Coast are
my favourites."

years with only a handful of local guys surfing it was pretty rad."

Bali has long been a magnet for visitors, particularly Indonesians, Australians and Kiwis, so Keramas couldn't stay a secret forever. While Komune is the most established of the beach's resorts, development has begun on other properties nearby. For surfers like Parko, Keramas' rising profile isn't necessarily a bad thing: without it, the contest he won last year may never have been held here. "As far as WCT locations go, it's got to be the most high-performance wave on tour," he says. "You can do pretty much whatever you want on it – get barrelled, lean into a big cutback or launch a huge air."

For those in Bali to learn the sport, Parko recommends the smoother-riding, smoother-bottomed breaks on the south side: "Back over towards Kuta and Padma the waves are sand-bottom and tend to be more forgiving, so they're better places to learn."

I surf twice more at Keramas (major lesson: wear a rash vest or suffer a nasty chest rash from lost layers of skin), again chalking up a few failed attempts to go with some exciting rides. Suitably encouraged, I vow to give surfing another go once I'm back in Australia. *

Travel info ↓

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