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THE BUILDING OF A NEW MASTERWORK TO TOWER OVER THE ISLAND OF THE GODS IS A PASSION PROJECT TWO DECADES IN THE MAKING



Every so often, a building or artwork comes along which is so extraordinary in its ambition that it becomes an instant icon. For more than 20 years, plans have been hatched, thwarted, then fired up anew to create a Hindu monolith, inspired by the Indian epic *Mahabharata*, that will become synonymous with Bali — a giant statue of the god Vishnu riding the mythological bird Garuda, the national symbol of Indonesia.

Just another deity, you say? Well, at 121m tall and 64m wide, Garuda Wisnu Kencana — situated in the eponymous, 240ha GWK park — is about to become not just the largest statue in Southeast Asia, but the second-largest in the world. (Indonesia's current tallest statue, the Virgin



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Mary in Semarang, stands a mere 42m high.) It was originally intended to be 146m tall, but religious authorities successfully lobbied for its reduction on the grounds that it would disturb the island's spiritual balance.

With the statue due to be completed in August, there is no better time to take in this awe-inspiring spectacle — it is reportedly so large that it will be visible from Tanah Lot, the ancient temple 30km away. To give some human perspective: a grown man could fit inside Garuda's eye socket.