



Gallivanter's Guide[®]

BALI SPECIAL
12-PAGE REPORT

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IDYLIC PLACES FOR DEDICATED TRAVELLERS

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'The Gallivanter's Guide',
Hill Crest, Malmesbury Rd,
Minety, Malmesbury,
Wiltshire SN16 9QX, UK.
Fax: +44 (0)1666 860063.

EDITOR/PUBLISHER
LYN MIDDLEHURST

MANAGING DIRECTOR
DAVID MASLIN

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Gallivanter's Ratings.

- ✓✓✓✓ Extraordinary
- ✓✓✓ Highly recommended
- ✓✓ Well worth a visit
- ✓✓ Good in parts
- ✓ Go if you must

More miracles from The Island of the Gods.

When we first visited Bali, it was still a quiet, mystical island with a clutch of backpacker hideaways on the beach and just the Hyatt and Bali Oberoi for those of us who required rather more in the way of comfort and plumbing.

Every time we return, Bali seems to have re-invented itself. The little roads grow busier, the hotel chains devour ever more land; tourist enclaves like Nusa Dua re-create the sanitised leisure experiences of Maui, and now, there is even a Planet Bali. Fear not, though, for despite the seemingly continuous construction, Bali is a big island and the tourist scars are subtler than most, only disfiguring a very small portion of this magical Island of the Gods.

What *is* extraordinary is that some of the very best resorts in the world are here; so much so that one is now utterly spoilt for choice. Amanresorts alone offer three glorious properties, and since the success of the now legendary Amandari, tucked away in the hills of Ubud, others have followed the trend and the hills are now alive with little jewels of discernment, from the brand new Four Seasons Resort at Sayan to the Chedi Ubud. Even that grand lady, Oberoi, is creating a new property in the hills, which is, as they say, good corporate strategy, as most visitors wisely split their stay between the coast and the hills, so that the full flavour of Bali may be fully experienced.

Some of you have asked how Indonesia's financial crisis has affected the island, bemoaning the fact that many of the top resorts still quote their prices in US\$ instead of Rupiah. Well, remember that many of the supplies brought in by these deluxe prop-

erties have to be paid for in dollars; such as Amanresorts' complimentary bottle of French champagne, the Angus beef, the foie gras, the French cheese, the wines, and, of course, the senior management's salaries. If they charged in Rupiah, hotels such as Amankila could not afford to provide the service or the cuisine that Aman-guests have come to expect.

You will find huge currency exchange discrepancies across all the hotels, even those in the same chain. Don't forget, though, that the rate for the Rupiah tends to change by the day, so shop around!

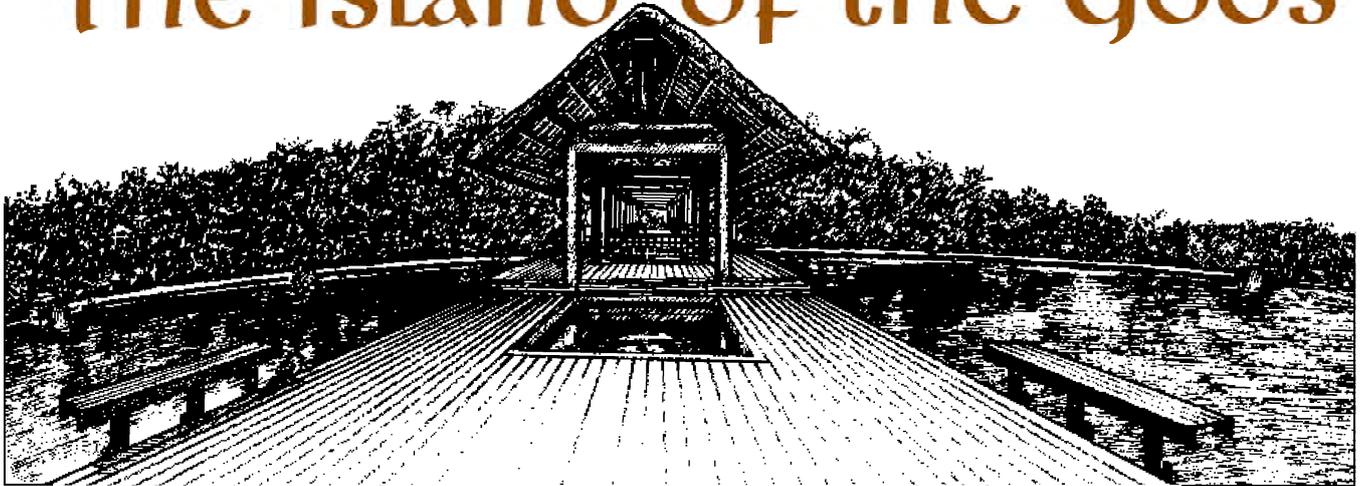
When it comes to hotel shopping, some boutiques, such as at The Oberoi, sell only in US\$. Others offer a mixture of US\$ prices and Rupiah, depending upon where the items are sourced from. Genuine antiques are invariably priced in US\$. However, quality Rupiah-priced artifacts and locally made pure silk fashion items are exceptionally cheap at present and the good hotel boutiques offer an excellent choice.

This special 12-page report will, I hope, offer something for every taste and requirement, from the strikingly glamorous ocean-front Legian, coolly elegant Amanusa and the modern masterpiece that is The Four Seasons Sayan, to the more traditional Chedi Ubud and Bali's great classics, such as Amandari and The Oberoi. Go now, dear readers, and re-discover the magic.



IN THE SECOND OF OUR SPECIAL FAR EAST REPORTS,
WE CHECK OUT THE LATEST RESORTS ON

The Island of the Gods



The Balinese have proved to be the natural stars of hotelkeeping, and in the past decade alone, the island has given birth to more world-class resorts than anywhere else I can think of.

Of course, not every property here is good. If anything, there are now too many big names jostling for a slice of the Bali market, without fully understanding how to maintain the magic. Do not worry, though, for the best resorts are not on the crowded concrete-block strips that lure the Sheratons and Hyatts, but are removed to more peaceful places that still echo the serenity of the old Bali, or more recently, celebrate its ability to interpret the 21st century as The Gods would wish it.

1. The Ritz-Carlton Bali.

The 323-room Ritz would work splendidly in Jakarta, but in Bali, this sprawling 4-storey property, perched on a bluff over Jimbaran Bay, feels more like a city resort and lacks any real sense of place.

This comes as somewhat of a surprise, as all the exotic advertising for the Ritz concentrates solely on the romantic aspects of the resort's 36 thatched villas; the only accommodation that approaches a true Balinese feeling. Even here, though, only a dozen or so actually overlook the ocean. The other surprise is the resort's lack of beach. Do not expect to be able to wander

down to the water's edge as the hotel's private cove is 1 km away by hotel shuttle.

That said, our check-in was handled well and we were shown to the Club Lounge which, although very smart, was better suited to a city location. The same applied to our suite, #1345, which was wonderful, but simply in the wrong destination. This elegant, airy abode of obvious quality, with acres of beige glossy marble and fine Balinese-inspired furnishings would be a star attraction in Jakarta or Hong Kong. A good guest loo with shower led off the entrance, which opened onto a spacious sitting room. I found it strange, though, that the telephone was perched high on the mini-bar armoire, so that one was forced to stand to make a call. Another irritant was the complete lack of full-length mirrors.

The bedroom offered a very grandly attired and comfortable kingsize, with excellent lightweight duvet and a spectacular carved and painted bedhead, flanked by intricate gilded lamps and a lovely Balinese cabinet. A small walk-in dressing room, thoughtfully equipped with soft yellow robes, raffia slippers and batik sarongs, led to a fitted double marble vanity with lotus-leaf wall lamps in the shape of torches. To the left was a separate marbled loo and to the right a bathroom with a small tub and step-in shower. The usual Ritz-Carlton European-style toiletries pervaded, which in exotically perfumed Bali was rather a let-down.

Both the bedroom and sitting room had sliding French doors that opened onto a full-length balcony with small table and



City-style comforts in our Club Floor suite, #1345, at The Ritz-Carlton Bali.

chairs from where a splendid sunset could be viewed across the villas to the ocean beyond. Despite its enormity, the Ritz has added some nice local touches, from carved Balinese pens to glazed pottery ashtrays; the usual blue-crested towels replaced by more subtle white versions.

Finding one's way about the resort proved difficult, especially at night when we had to ask several staff for directions to the Sami Sami 'Mediterranean' restaurant. All the restaurants and bars here are open-sided and none are cooled by overhead fans (although there was talk of this being remedied), so dining is a stifling experience.

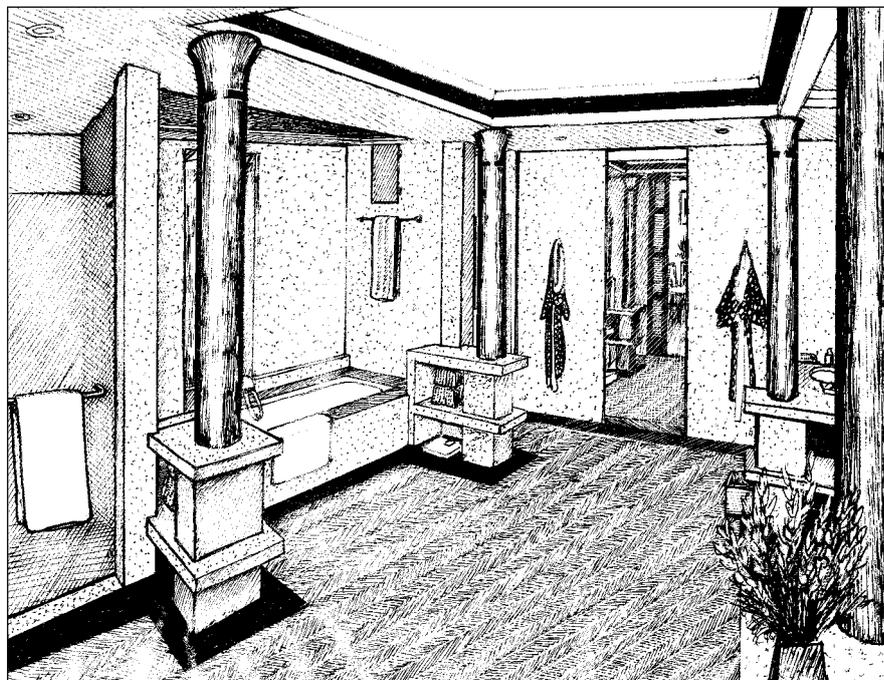
Compared to our other experiences of up-scale Bali, the Ritz lacked sophistication, and this was reflected by the package-tour ambience which provided rather too much 'entertainment' for our liking. In Sami Sami, a strolling guitar duo strained our patience with mediocre renditions of 'My Way' and a smattering of yodelling, which tempted me to donate an atlas to this resort so that they may better understand exactly where the Mediterranean is!

The 'Mediterranean' menu was, apparently, created by a German chef, tweaked by a Malaysian chef and finally executed (and I mean that in its most final sense) by an Indonesian chef; a trio who, between them, have as much knowledge of Mediterranean fare as I have of brain surgery.

My 'Sampling' dish of 5 starters was an enormity of ignorance. Stuffed vine leaves tasted like apple strudel, with cinnamon, nuts and raisins, and the Humous was almost bereft of garlic. David's Rosemary-rubbed oven-roasted Baby Chicken with a Ragout of Leeks and Mushrooms Pommery Spaetzle and Natural jus was as confused as its description. Only a good bottle of Stoneleigh Sauvignon Blanc, excellent espresso and the kind attention of the staff prevented us from weeping.

Sadly, matters did not improve at breakfast, which we took in the Padi restaurant, where a fly-specked outdoor buffet demonstrated a distinct lack of prudence in such a hot destination.

If you are bringing a large convention of salespeople to Bali, then the Ritz is probably the ideal place. There is a small spa, an 18-hole putting green, tennis courts, 3 restaurants, entertainment, fountains, reflecting pools, 173 acres of carefully manicured grounds, a good gift shop, a little



A corner of our stately bathroom at The Legian, an ultra-glamorous all-suite beachside resort.

village of souvenir boutiques, a convention centre, a business centre, a fitness centre, a kid's club, whirlpools and an unrelenting dedication to the big resort concept.

If you are, by necessity, part of such a convention, then insist on one of the prized ocean-front Villas, which are really delightful and offer small infinity edge private plunge pools, stunning views, a large marbled bathroom, indoor and outdoor showers, cathedral bamboo ceilings and lashings of Balinese style.

The Ritz, like the Four Seasons and Inter-Continental, is set on Jimbaran Bay which is just across the water from Denpasar's international airport (The locals have begun calling this big name line-up 'The American Strip'). No matter what anyone tells you, you *do* hear the 'planes. Peace, quiet and intimacy, which is what the brochures and publicity imply, are merely wishful thinking. This is Maui in the making.

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓

2. The Legian.

I wake slowly from a deep, luxurious sleep. The sound of the ocean pervades my senses; the surf crashing rhythmically below as twittering birds greet the morning. David is fast asleep and I slip out of cool white sheets, my feet touching the springy teak parquet as my eyes begin to adjust to the shuttered darkness. Where am I?

A pair of 10 foot high coconut wood

doors, panelled with woven rattan, gape open and I pad towards the light, finding myself in a vast art gallery that stretches ahead for 60 feet and is set with oversized teak chairs; spot-lit pedestals holding precious artifacts. Am I still dreaming?

I touch the surface of a desk and find that it is completely covered in fine mosaic marquetry of dark pearlised shells. A cube of the same exquisite material sits in the centre of the room on a teak pedestal. I push by it and it swivels, and I realise that inside this gleaming sculpture is a television set. I *must* be dreaming.

I go to the big French doors and open the fine slatted wood shutters; the pale morning light spilling across the gleaming parquet, and I see an endless balcony set with a cushion-strewn daybed; the ocean disappearing over the horizon. There is nothing else in sight.

A fine gold-hued coconut mosaic chair catches my eye and I find a dimmer switch that suddenly bathes the room in art-gallery light that edges the cornices and points downward to a bowl of tuberose, or uplifts a heavy glass shelf of antique objects, or glows across towering coconut wood columns.

I sink into a slatted teak sofa with pale celadon and wine striped cushions; a low table holding a woven tray of glistening sea shells; an apothecary chest of drawers with pearlised shells for handles. Yes, I must be dreaming.

I find a cream terrazzo kitchen, lined



180° of rainforest views, edged with a black pebbled reflecting stream greets one at the Jati Bar, in the new Four Seasons Sayan.

with rattan cupboards. Everything is here; a microwave, a fridge, a coffee percolator. I notice that a guest loo faces the kitchen and as I walk back, I see another pair of towering sliding doors and I slip inside, finding myself in a bathroom that is so large it is the size of most standard hotel rooms. Cool cream-flecked terrazzo islands rise into coconut-wood columns; 10 foot mirrors striping the shining terrazzo walls; etched glass doors leading to a loo; another to a big step-in rainfall shower. A sunken tub sits in the centre of a pair of columns; diffused panels of light casting soft shadows across the rich teak floor. Facing, two more columns hold his and hers vanities; the carved stone wall behind framing subtly-lit mirrors edged with etched glass and chrome; little trays of celadon toiletry bottles perfectly aligned. Everything here is symmetrical; a *yin yang* balance. Two robes hang either side of a mirror; inky blue with ochre tuberoses flowers.

I walk through another set of double doors and find myself back in the four-postered bedroom, where David is just waking up.

“Where are we?” I say. “At The Legian, of course”, and no, this is not the Presidential Suite at thousands of dollars a night, but just one of 30 Deluxe Suites at around \$400. No wonder I thought I was dreaming.

Part of the same GHM Group (chaired by Adrian Zecha) who manage The Datai, The Legian is a complete departure from anything the group has done before. This 3-storey, 70-suite property, with its open air wood-trimmed corridors, dark temple-style reflecting ponds and Oriental watch-tower corners, was originally constructed as a deluxe time-share property, hence the vast apartments. Then it was decided that the building would make a rather splendid hotel, and interior designer, Jaya Ibrahim Pratomo (of Dharmawangsa fame) was brought in, together with GHM, to create one of Bali’s most glamorous beach resorts.

Unlike many Balinese resorts, The Legian is a proper beach property that is right on the ocean, so one can step down from the glorious two-tiered infinity-edge pool straight onto the dark beige sand of Legian beach. There are no airports here to disturb

the calm; no other hotels to mar the view; just fathoms of the Indian Ocean stretching as far as the eye can see.

Below our third-floor Deluxe Suite, #333, are the palm-strewn gardens with lotus ponds, large thatched daybeds affording ample shade and a profusion of teak loungers. The two-tiered pool takes centre stage, with two low symmetrical thatched buildings either side; one housing the elegant pool bar, the other a boutique, full of collectible *objets* and must-have silks.

Arriving here is a delight. Complimentary transfers in a comfy cotton-seated jeep go smoothly, and as one steps across a lotus pond to the elegant marbled lobby, there is no sign of a traditional reception desk; just gracious staff who lead one to a big low table strewn with books and local artifacts; cold towels and a frothy glass of thick, freshly squeezed fruit juice hurried to one’s side.

The lobby and bar are spectacular; every corner a museum-quality experience; beautiful wooden carvings, striking bas-reliefs; and beyond, the gorgeous open-sided restaurant, where talented Singapore



chef, Zainal Hassan creates fantasies of Pacific Rim cuisine. Roasted Purple Aubergine with Basil Cumin Marinade on Avocado and Spiced Tomato Relish; Seafood Ravioli in Coconut Lime and Lemongrass Sauce; Chicken Curry Tiffin Style; Braised Duckling in Honey Ginger and Orange Pepper Sauce with Clove Apple and Spinach; or Hidangan Utama, a traditional Feast of 9 sumptuous dishes. Feel like something Western? Then choose Grilled Bangers of Pork Sausages with Spinach and Mushrooms on Mashed Potatoes with Onion Compote, followed by Death by Chocolate. Scrumptious.

This month, the newly converted Beach house will open as a second restaurant, offering coconut-shell grills and fresh seafood overlooking the ocean.

If that is not enough; private Spa Suites offer hedonistic treatments and massages using freshly made unguents that calm one's soul, whilst everywhere the ocean fills the air with ozone; the sound instantly calming; the slick sand dotted with shells and tiny scuttling crabs. This is a real beach resort.

We have few niggles. Room service is a little unhurried. Order are misinterpreted, forks forgotten. Yet laundry is fast and fabulous and service, under the caring direction of Dutch GM, Ferdinand Wortelboer, is of that gentle, Balinese style that is unparalleled anywhere in the world.

Whichever suite you choose, expect to be amazed, for even the 15 Studios are like big junior suites (especially the garden-set Studios). The only disadvantage is that the Studios have queensize beds rather than kingsize. However, **all** the bathrooms are huge and stunning, and even the most modest suite has a small kitchenette. Personally, we like the garden Studios and the Deluxe Suites; the 2-bed, 2-bath versions being absolutely enormous. We find the two theme suites rather less successful and these need to be rethought in terms of decor and layout.

David sits on our balcony, gazing at the ocean that seems to lap at our very feet. Complimentary afternoon tea arrives with a colourful array of delicious Indonesian sweetmeats. We love this place. It is not for traditionalists, but those of you who like modern classics, such as London's Halkin and Bangkok's Sukhothai, will delight in The Legian. Perfect for couples

or families, there are no steps to negotiate; elevators take the strain out of the stairs and every facility is within easy walking distance. The Legian does not have big advertising budgets to lure the Western dollar. Even its excellent brochure fails to convey just how special it is. Unlike some, however, this resort deserves to be full. Let's make it happen.

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓✓

3. Four Seasons Resort Bali at Sayan.

I now see why the opening of this 46-suite resort was delayed for so long, for the sheer architectural and engineering accomplishment is awe-inspiring.

Designed by John Heah of the British firm, Heah & Co, with continuous support and encouragement from Four Seasons' Chris Wallace, who also oversaw Four Seasons Milan and Istanbul, Sayan is, most decidedly the ultimate Four Seasons resort; innovative, exciting, elegant, accomplished and unashamedly romantic.

Like Amanpuri before it, Sayan is the sort of property that every lesser hotel group will want to copy, for it has succeeded in breaking the mold of hotel design through its ability to interpret the 21st century as The Gods would wish it.

The resort's signature Landcruiser drives us through the endless artisan villages of Ubud, just 50 minutes or so from the airport, until finally we see the Four Seasons sign anchored by the side of the road. Turning left, we negotiate an endless, winding bamboo-lined drive that dips down towards the sacred Ayung River.

One does not arrive at Sayan, one discovers it; like watching a fabulous firework unfold in the night sky, slowly revealing a myriad of sparkling patterns and colours in a constant carnival of endless surprises.

As the Landcruiser stops at what appears to be a small stone gatehouse by a lotus pond, I am puzzled, for the scale seems so small. Ah, but wait. Like a consummate magician, more is soon revealed as a smiling member of staff leads us across a striking painted bridge that spans a steep waterway. I look down and my jaw drops open as I see what appears to be a smaller version of the Aswan dam fanning out on either side, whilst ahead of us, an enormous elliptical lotus pond, that forms the roof of the main complex, seems to float

in mid air like a flying saucer. Just like Alice, we step through the looking glass and find ourselves in a narrow reception. Ushered onwards, our host tries not to grin, for she surely knows what our reaction will be when we see what lies beyond; a stunning fusion of modern architecture and nature's own abundance, creating an unbelievable sense of harmony and seclusion. How can I describe such a vision? Imagine the soaring windows of the Regent Hong Kong that seem to suck in the harbour view, then translate that into a 180° curve of lobby lounge and Jati Bar, open to an endless unspoilt curtain of rainforest. At the edge of this vast circle is a black-pebbled reflecting pool that defines the precarious edge between hotel and jungle; elegant reflecting pools snaking around its gracious curves. The 21st century merges with the raw green energy of the jungle; the property meandering down to the very edge of the roaring rapids of the Ayung River. We are speechless.

Cold towels and herb-infused cocktails arrive as we check in; but we cannot concentrate, so miraculous is the sight before us. I walk to the edge and look down, seeing snaking pathways and a jungle-green infinity edge pool, suspended, it seems, right on the river bank in a swirling freeform line.

Our host leads us to a polished stairway and we descend to cavernous angled hallways; the walls 10 feet thick, as though some ancient people had stopped here to build this place after completing the pyramids. The hallways run with underground rivers; endless, dark glassy pools that curve around the temple-like walls. From here, one accesses the resort's so-called standard accommodation, the Terrace Suites; massive bi-level habitats that most resorts would sell as premier suites, replete with guest loos, vast bathrooms, outdoor terraces and dining areas, separate sitting rooms and elegant kingsize bedrooms; every wall featuring collectible local artifacts beautifully lit in white-walled niches. The larger Sayan Suites are less inspired, though nonetheless stunning. Still, there is more. Much more.

Descending, we reach the airy Ayung Terrace restaurant, elegant beyond belief,



Our tranquil Villa, #16, at the Four Seasons Sayan, is right on the edge of the Ayung River, where the river rafters never come.

its 180° balcony open to the mystical views beyond. Then, we descend past the Spa, a great curve of exercise machines facing the jungle; infinity edge hot tubs steaming like suspended turquoise lakes, and thence to the rice paddy terraces, cut with meandering pathways that twist through the verdant grounds where the Villas sit in splendid isolation; utter privacy ensured.

We walk past thatched villas, some set back in the jungle, others overlooking the rice paddies, and ours, #16, spilling down to the roaring rapids of the Ayung River.

A stone pathway leads to the Villa's flat roof, which is set with a series of lotus ponds stocked with fish and shaded by thatch; stepping stones leading to a teak seating area. White stone steps snake down past a trickling water feature to double teak doors. We enter and find ourselves in a huge outdoor living area, framed by the cicada-filled jungle. Stone floors and teak decking hold a big beige daybed, coffee table, chair and glorious carved cabinet containing minibar and glassware. An Indonesian painted panel sits above the daybed and a marble-topped dining table with calico sun shade nestles on the edge of the river. In the rice paddies beyond,

tiny Pied Bushchats peck at the grains. Two teak parasoled loungers sit by an infinity-edge plunge pool, its white steps leading down to the jungle-green depths; and beyond, the Ayung River roars across big rounded boulders, as powerful and majestic as the Sayan itself.

From the deck, an outdoor shower is concealed behind bamboo screens, an interior glass door leading directly to the bathroom. We, however, enter through the main door and find ourselves in the air-conditioned, teak-floored cool of the bedroom, with its antiqued wall niches, split-bamboo armoire and immensely comfortable kingsize; a square of concealed lighting set around a carved canopy that defines the bed's contours, whilst also holding a curtain track for the filmy cream cheese-cloth netting that is drawn at night. An antique wine-hued batik hangs, museum-lit on the wall; every light controlled by a dimmer; every object perfectly illuminated; the big louver-screened windows opening onto a view that is so beautiful it hurts.

From here, we move into the cream terrazzo-floored bathroom, flecked with tiny pieces of gold and mother-of-pearl; the deep tub of solid carved terrazzo; the

twin vanities gloriously framed by teak fitted niches and mirrors, subtly lit and accessorised by Four Seasons' toiletries and soaps (something more exotic, please!). A large walk-in dressing room, with prussian blue frond-strewn robes and slippers, offers acres of space, and a spacious glass step-in shower glints in turquoise mosaic, echoing Nature's rich hues beyond. Even the separate loo is elegant, with a striking curve of black granite behind it.

One is tempted to just order room service and stay forever, picking at the exotic fruit plate or just breathing the clean river air.

It is lunchtime and after a cursory browse in the small but attractive boutique and elegant Library, we wander back along the river pathway to the Riverside Café and pool. Once more, we find ourselves bereft of words. The green-hued infinity-edge pool meanders around the café terrace; two levels of freeform fantasy and lounge-laid teak decking; the café itself a cool retreat with a wonderful menu and gentle, caring service. The white wine is crisp and cool; the Fetuccini is excellent and David's Club Sandwich is pronounced one of the

Continued on Page 10

The Classic Bali

AN UP-DATE ON THE TOP RESORTS THAT MADE BALI GREAT

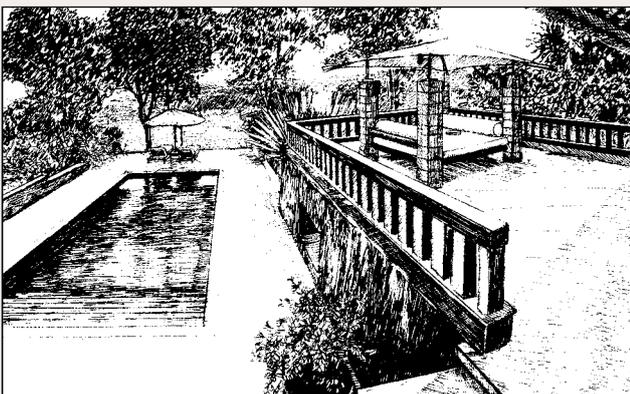
It is infinitely more difficult for an established resort to maintain its grip upon the sophisticated traveller, when all around it the world is changing and introducing ever more magical lures. Success is the toughest thing that any resort has to cope with, because it demands that everything should live up to or surpass the publicised promise of perfection. In this section, we see how the stars are fairing.

5. Amanusa.

Of Amanresorts' 3 Bali properties, the temple-like Amanusa is of the highest decorative quality; the sheer finish of its 35 Villa suites unparalleled. Amazingly, after a six year history, it looks just as new as it did when we first stayed, and is now even better than ever.

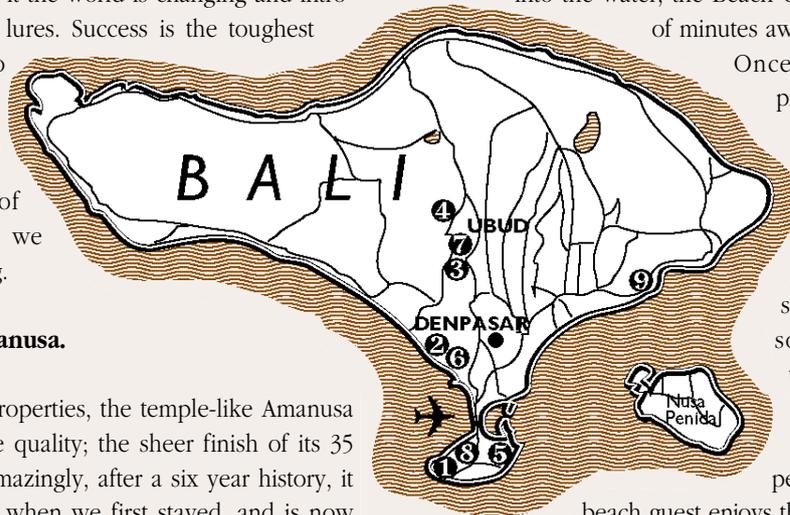
New American Resident Manager, Krista Ferner, has made some inspired changes, adding a softer, more female aspect to what was, upon occasion, a somewhat masculine abode. The outdoor area of each suite has a much improved over-sized **bale** with a shady tented canopy and big white bolsters. Outdoor dining tables have been moved to the front walled gardens, and inside, the desk has been replaced by a more practical and elegant round dining table. The four-poster beds are now romantically draped in pure white mosquito netting, and in the bathing area, new pale coral-hued robes and a pillow by the bath recognise the hedonist in all of us, together with a sumptuous new range of custom-made toiletries that reflect the keynote coral of the resort.

A seriously large Pool Suite here really does provide every comfort one could wish for. The big outdoor shower is powerful and refreshing. The sunken bath, with its glassy view of tropical fronds, is a sybaritic delight, and there is so much glorious marbled space and fabulous views from the suites' spacious terraces that one is tempted never to leave one's Villa.



The Pool Villas at Amanusa are oases of sybaritic delight.

Not many people know that Amanusa has, perhaps, the best beach in Bali, and although one cannot just walk from the resort into the water, the Beach Club is literally a couple of minutes away by buggy or bicycle.



Once there, an intimate private beach, thick with white icing-sugar sand caters to just a dozen priv-ileged guests. Clear waters with gentle waves are shrouded by a coral reef, some 100 metres from the shore, which means that one can swim all year round and enjoy perfect con-ditions. Each

beach guest enjoys the seclusion of a private oversized thatched **bale** with comfortable daybeds and raised trays for beverages and meals. A thatched dining pavilion with just four tables and an excellent light menu, freshly prepared by the beach bar's own kitchens, makes this a heavenly retreat.

Of course, we must not forget Amanusa's extraordinary lake of a pool, fed by trickling amphoras and ringed by bougain-villaea-draped pergolas, or its two splendid restaurants; one a chic Italian venue of polished black granite and delectable fare, and the other an airy view-laden terrace with sumptuous Thai cuisine and delightful, caring staff.

There is also, of course, the usual Aman boutique and gallery, filled with must-have artifacts and antiques, and latterly, a really splendid boardroom for those high level corporate meetings, sensibly reserved for oneself and a few deserving colleagues.

Finally, Amanusa is, of course, right on the doorstep of the Bali Golf and Country Club, which stretches in manicured splendour towards the ocean. There are no buildings to be seen, apart from the lights of a distant resort at night, and although the property must be reached via the planned tourism enclave of Nusa Dua, once there, the world of tourism appears a million miles away.

Gallivanter's Rating: ★★★★★

6. The Oberoi Bali.

Created in 1978 by architect Peter Muller, who then went on to design Amandari, The Oberoi has recently undergone a major refurbishment, and when we visited, just about everything was perfect, apart from the consistently dull Frangipani Café, which really needs a re-think. The Kura Kura restaurant, however, is utterly transformed and now has an air of super

sophistication in line with Bali's newer properties.

The one thing that really defines The Oberoi's age is its bright blue swimming pools, which leap out at one from the glorious mature grounds that enfold the property. The main pool has not changed since I first stayed, and even the pool villas, of which there are now eight, offer that unrealistic splash of turquoise that screams the 1970's. They are, however, very large private swimming pools indeed, and these Villas have to be the accommodation of choice. That said, all the tiny Lanai Cottages and Villas now have brand new marbled bath-rooms, which are a great improvement on the originals.

Each Villa ranges from 200 to 600 square metres, with a thickly planted garden courtyard and rock pool and a raised thatched dining pavilion. Inside, the bedrooms seem a little cramped compared to some of the newer resorts; the kingsize four-poster Balinese beds dominating the space.

The Oberoi is, however, an accomplished resort and if it were not for the fierce local competition, even the most dis-criminating traveller would be impressed by its polish and panache. There is even a rather nice Health Club now, replete with gym, sauna and open-air massage pavilions, adding to the existing Beauty salon; and the boutique is a very appealing, well-stocked haven of good taste.

Sited just up the beach from The Legian, The Oberoi spills down to the unspoilt sands and, unlike some of the newer, large resorts, one does not have to walk miles to wet one's toes.

Still a good beach resort for traditionalists, The Oberoi has a long list of repeat guests who love it exactly as it is.

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓

7. Amandari.

Henry and Char Gray have been managing Amandari for around six years, and this authentic, 30-villa Balinese haven on the edge of the Ayung River gorge is constantly striving to better itself, having won just about every award there is.

The latest addition is the new, very private 2-villa Amandari Suite, which is of an even higher calibre and finish than the older Ayung Suite. Architect, Peter Muller, who designed and built Amandari nine years ago, has personally supervised the creation of the new suite, and, almost next door to it, a small but exquisite health facility with an excellent gym, changing rooms and treatment salons, including an outdoor massage room overlooking a lotus pond.

The number of Villas with pools has also increased, and these are, in my view, the very best option. Now there are 11 private pool Villas; all of which, like Amanusa, offer proper swimming pools rather than the little plunge pools that some other resorts have.

We were curious to see what Amandari's new chef was like as the cuisine here has always been wonderful. Amazingly, young Barnaby Jones has managed to take it onto an even higher plane. Dinner consisted of Ravioli of Goats Cheese and Sundried Tomato Sage Beurre Noisette; Gargouillou of Young Vegetables with Sprouting Grains and Fresh Herbs; Pan Seared Fresh Foie Gras on Apple and Parsnip Purée with Black Truffle Reduction;



The pool villas at Amandari are havens of privacy.

Chargrilled Tasmanian Salmon with Baby New Potatoes, Green Asparagus and a Herb and Egg Vinaigrette, and Hot Chocolate Coulant with Mint Syrup and Milk reduced Ice Cream; all of which made us think that Alain Ducasse had come to Bali!

Despite its gourmet cuisine, Amandari is not a showy resort. Indeed, it is hardly noticeable, even when you arrive at the seriously understated reception. It is only the warmth of the welcome and the impeccable staff that hint at the greatness within.

The soft volcanic stone walls that privatise every Villa look as though they have been here forever; the lush jungle en-folding everything in a glossy green swathe. Apart from is gorgeous sybaritic bathrooms and striking infinity-edge green-hued pool, Amandari is authentically Balinese, yet it manages to combine this with the sort of sophistication and elegance that one finds in the south of France.

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓✓✓

8. Four Seasons Bali at Jimbaran Bay.

We had such a bad time on our last visit to this 5-year old resort that I swore I would never return. However, as there is now a third restaurant together with other improvements, we decided to take another look.

Upon arrival, cold towels were brought together with a frothy pink cocktail. Eventually our bags were loaded onto a buggy and we were driven down to our Villa, #241; four rows back from the ones that are always featured in the resort's advertising. Like our last visit, when we stayed on the eighth row in #157, the views were of endless thatched rooftops; a tightly packed Balinese condominium that we find claustrophobic. Charming GM, Chris Norton, told us that guests love the feel of being in the midst of a Balinese village. In that case, I wonder why they do not show this in their brochure and advertising, for out of 147 Villas, only 28 can claim an uninterrupted ocean view; the best being Villas #100-#110, which are just a step away from the beach.

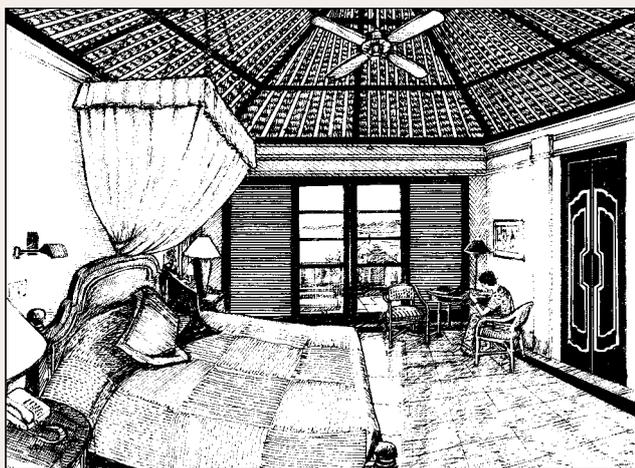
The Villa itself smelled musty and the same uninspired dull brown furniture and earth-tone fabrics seemed tired against the marble interior; a mosquito-netted kingsize facing a spartan desk and teak TV armoire and a good, if not exceptional bathroom, with outdoor shower, indoor shower and free-standing tub.

As you probably know, the living and dining areas here are housed outside in an open-sided **bale**. A tiny overly chlorinated plunge pool overlooks one's neighbours and a couple of loungers do not really overlook anything. Having just arrived from

Amanusa, we could not understand why anyone would prefer to stay here. We thought that the public areas were looking a little tired since our last visit, although the service had definitely improved. Tea in the Terrace Bar was served with great professionalism and grace; leaf tea with cold milk, beautifully presented with tea napkins and chocolate petits fours.

We were not tempted by the main tiered pool as the loungers set around it are rather too close together and the Pool Terrace Café is right on top of things, making the experience somewhat boisterous. This, coupled with the regular roar of airplanes belies the 'Paradise' label that many travel magazines award this resort.

For dinner, we decided to have a starter in the new Warung Me noodle restaurant; which in our view is the best thing on the entire property. Set amongst lotus ponds and designed in the style of a Colonial café, this informal venue draws its inspiration from Japan, China, Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia and is a must, even if you are not staying here. Vietnamese Prawn Summer Rolls; Hiyashi-Chuka Chilled Egg Noodle Salad, and my favourite Japanese dish of Gyoza Wok-Seared and Steamed Pork and Prawn Potstickers left us dizzy with superlatives. We then moved to the Taman Wantilan Restaurant; the resort's fine dining venue,



Our bedroom at Four Seasons Jimbaran Bay.

which is much improved since our last visit; the bamboo ceilings draped with wine-hued flags, and the new lighting banishing the punishment block ambience of the smoker's section. The cuisine, however, was, in some cases, positively nasty, apart from the splendid Thin and Crispy Apple Tart with Ice Cream.

If you prefer large traditional American-style resorts, with pizzas at PJ's by the beach, Peter Burwash Tennis Clubs; fitness and exercise studios, beach activities, and a rather good Spa; big, well-stocked boutiques and staff in white resort wear, then you will like Jimbaran Bay; but for us, Bali deserves rather more magic and intimacy, which Four Seasons' new property at Sayan grasps perfectly.

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓

9. Amankila.

We did not manage to visit Amankila on this trip, but did bump into charming GM, Guy Heywood, who told us that they are adding two on-site tennis courts (at present the courts are 5 minutes away). They have also created a massage grove under

the coconut trees in the Beach Club, which is a lovely idea, and are now offering the 2 or 3-hour Mandi Lulur massage, traditionally reserved for Indonesian ladies of royal birth.

6 year old Amankila is one of our favourite beach resorts in all the world and is a gloriously hedonistic and glamorous 35-Pavilion escape in the unspoilt Karangasem region on Bali's east coast, overlooking the Lombok Strait.

A sensation of lotus ponds and swimming pools awaits; from a 3-tiered infinity-edge, *bale*-strewn miracle of chic to the Beach Club's own elegant lap-pool and the seven private pavilion villas. The cuisine is equally versatile, with three excellent restaurants to tempt the taste buds.

For the ultimate water experience, the resort now offers a private BBQ Cruise on Aman X11 to the white beach of Pasir Putih. As the boat anchors, you swim through crystal waters to be met by Aman staff with towels and an idyllic seafood barbecue, miraculously presented with china, glass and silverware; one's chosen Champagne chilling on ice. Will this resort ever fail to amaze?

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓✓✓

AT A GLANCE

AMANUSA

Address: PO Box 33, Nusa Dua, Bali. **Tel:** +62 361 772 333. **Fax:** +62 361 772 335. **Affiliation:** Amanresorts, Prima Hotels. **Rooms:** 35 Villas. **Approx Rates:** *Superior:* \$460. *Deluxe:* \$525. *Pool Superior:* \$650. *Pool Deluxe:* \$750. *Amanusa Suite:* \$850, inc. transfers, + 21% service & tax.

THE OBEROI BALI

Address: Legian Beach, Jalan Laksmana, PO Box 3351 Denpasar 80033, Bali. **Tel:** +62 361 730 361. **Fax:** +62 361 730 791. **Affiliation:** Oberoi Hotels, Leading Hotels of the World, Small Luxury Hotels of the World. **Rooms:** 60 Lanai cottages & 15 Villas. **Approx Rates:** *Lanai Cottages:* \$225-\$275. *Villas:* \$325-\$400. *Pool Villas:* \$475-\$550. *Royal Villas (2-bath):* \$650-\$750, + 21% service & tax. 10% Peak Season surcharge.

AMANDARI

Address: PO Box 33, Ubud, Bali 80571. **Tel:** +62 361 975 333. **Fax:** +62 361 975 335. **Affiliation:** Amanresorts, Prima Hotels. **Rooms:** 30 Villas. **Approx Rates:** *Villas* \$460-\$1,600, inc. transfers, + 21% service & tax.

FOUR SEASONS BALI AT JIMBARAN BAY

Address: Jimbaran, Denpasar 80361, Bali. **Tel:** +62 361 701 010. **Fax:** +62 361 701 020. **Affiliation:** Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts. **Rooms:** 147 Villas. **Approx Rates:** *1-bed Villa:* \$525. *2-bed Villa:* \$1,200. *Royal Villa:* \$2,400, + 21% service & tax.

AMANKILA

Address: PO Box 133 Klungkung 80701, Manggis, Bali. **Tel:** +62 363 41 333. **Fax:** +62 363 41 555. **Affiliation:** Amanresorts, Prima Hotels. **Rooms:** 35 Pavilion Suites. **Approx Rates:** *1-bed Suites:* \$460-\$650. *2-bed Suite:* \$1,300, inc. transfers, + 21% service & tax.

All rates expressed in US\$.

Dollar rates are converted to Rupiah at the prevailing exchange rate.

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the Spa; a curve of low-lit hedonism with womb-like saunas fragrant with eucalyptus and cloves, the walls flecked with mosaic. Here, gentle girls renew the body and spirit; 60 minutes of Rice and Spice Body Scrub leaving me smiling foolishly as I sniff the fresh root ginger that lingers on my skin.

At dusk, we stroll along spot-lit pathways to the Ayung Terrace Restaurant, which perches 98 feet above the river. Extraordinarily, this new resort, opened just 3 weeks before our visit, offers some of the best cuisine in Bali. English chef, Simon Purvis, together with his talented local team, have performed miracles. Crispy Fish Cakes with sweet Thai Chilli Sauce for David and Crisp Thai Crab rolls in Bean Curd wrappers for me bring smiles of pleasure to both our faces. Gianyar style Roast Suckling Pig with traditional garnish is perfection as is my South Indian Potato and Vegetable Curry. I sniff the aroma from the next table; Cinnamon and Nutmeg scented Grilled Lamb Chops, and I vow to eat here every night. Passionfruit Cheese Cake, Island Fruits and perfect espresso. I am in heaven.

Housekeeping is immaculate; room service is surprisingly swift and accom-

plished; dry cleaning and laundry, first class. One word of warning, though. Given the number of steps, lack of elevators and sometimes rather precarious water features, this resort is not suitable for children or those with limited mobility. It is, however, absolute perfection for couples, and if you are feeling less than energetic, resort buggies with drivers are available to transport you from one place to the next.

This priceless resort is one of the most exciting developments in hotel history; an absolute must for all dedicated travellers. If we could award six ticks, we would.

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓✓✓+

4. The Chedi Ubud.

Housekeeping are ironing the sheets on our bed as they turn them down. Our soft batik robes are laid out and ironed into place at the edge of the kingsize, as a white-clad boy lowers fine white netting from a suspended square of wooden rods.

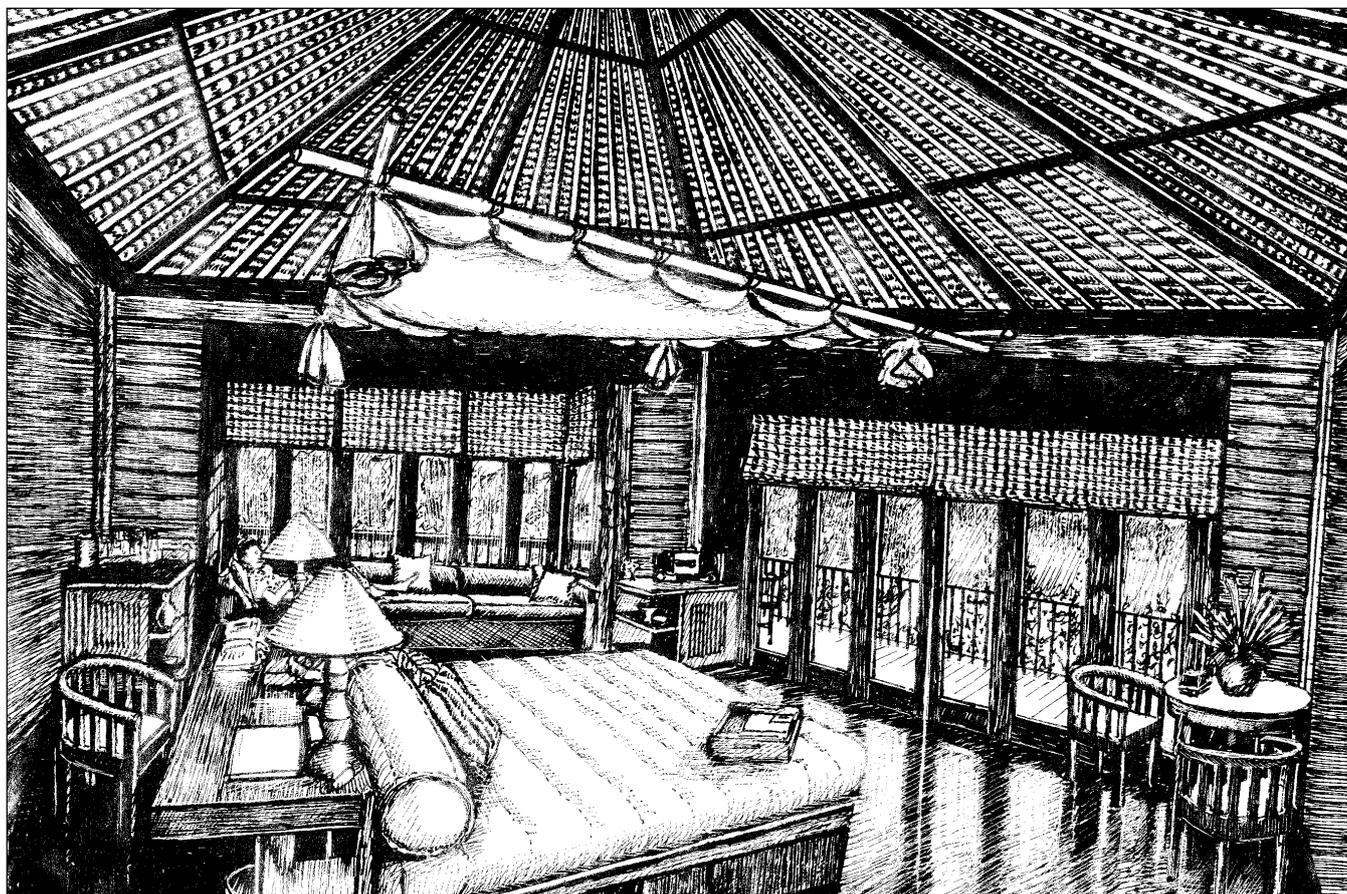
I have just returned from the Spa to our Villa Suite, #302; one of just four peaceful retreats set on the edge of a thickly forested hill; the distant sound of the Ayung River reaching me from hundreds of feet below.

On the breakfast table, set with a big

bowl of white tube-rose, is a pair of binoculars and a book of Balinese birds. A spotted dove, or Kukur, has already perched in the coconut tree that rises up to our big balconied terrace, and as the sun sets, room service clear away the sweetmeats and the big hand-thrown ceramic cups that arrive on command every tea-time, complimentary for every guest.

Chedi Ubud is a simple, honest resort of 54 rooms and four Villa Suites, that combines the gentle artistry of Bali with the architectural talents of Kerry Hill, who also designed The Datai. Rustic island materials are merged with navy and white chequered fabrics, celadon green cushions, bowls of tightly packed cream frangipani and a thoughtfulness that belies this property's surprisingly modest rates.

The tiny standard rooms are set in long two-storey rows that meander along the ridge between stone cobbled walls and walkways, dripping with foliage and flowers. All the rooms are the same price, but the ground floor units are the best, in my view, as they have little front gardens



Our Villa Suite, #302, at the peaceful, unpretentious Chedi Ubud, big up in Bali's lush green hills

with breakfast tables and chairs, and a much larger bathroom which leads to a garden-set outdoor shower.

However, for you, dear reader, the choice must be a Villa Suite, for these are supremely comfortable, dark coconut-wood and bamboo retreats; very private within one's own walled enclave and with high mountain views of utterly peaceful, unspoilt rainforest; three majestic mountains edging the horizon.

The main room, with its polished wood floor, is centrepieced by a celadon-covered bed; backed by a long desk console with lamps, flowers, dimmer switch and carefully crafted boxes of stationery; a striking carved coconut shell containing Balinese sweetmeats.

Two teak open-shelved units contain a minibar and fruit presentation, mini sound system and safe; dressed with local wood and metal artifacts. Between these, a 10 foot bolstered daybed is tucked in a windowed bay, plumped with cushions. Double doors lead out into an exterior floating walkway flanked by reflecting ponds with bright goldfish, bamboo and sunken plants. Set in the midst of the pond is a sunken terrazzo bathtub, glistening with inset mother-of-pearl; little ceramic celadon bottles of toiletries ranged in wooden trays around its edge; carved wooden dishes holding soft white towels sprinkled with frangipani flowers. A candle awaits for romantic baths; white columns lit from below.

A second set of double doors leads inside to the airconditioned dressing room with separate black marble vanities, coconut fibre slippers, soft robes and cool polished stone floors. A huge bowl of tuberose sits on a plinth against a full-length mirror that rises upwards to the bamboo cathedral ceiling. Either side of this is a separate loo and big white-tiled step-in rainfall shower; concealed behind etched glass and teak doors. This is traditional outdoor/indoor Balinese living at its best.

The modest Spa, which is, nevertheless, one of the best in Bali, consists of two private Spa Villas for each luxurious, authentically Balinese treatment. Today, I have a Traditional Facial with rice scrub, fresh carrot juice, seaweed and fresh cucumber mask, whilst in between, a foot, hand, head and facial massage, combined with acupressure, relaxes me completely.

The experience is idyllic; a real ritual of pampering that even includes iced herbal tea and fragrant mint-infused towels. Outdoor showers and sunken baths, private changing rooms, batik sarongs and robes help make the experience utter bliss.

After browsing through the boutique, stopping off to admire the TV room with its big Balinese cushions, and leafing through the glossy volumes in the Library, I float back to our Villa and find a message from David. He is swimming in the pool, so I trace my way down the stone steps, past the Restaurant and The Cabana pool café and there it is; a huge dark green 2001 obelisk of water that seems suspended on the edge of the hillside; the jungle rising up behind it. David is relaxing in a cool thatched *bale* that teeters on the sheer edge of the green swathed bluff. Tiny stone steps plummet down the mountain-side; the balmy air cooler here than on the rest of the island. Indeed, Chedi reminds me of some Indian hill station, far from the madding crowd of commercialised Bali; a truly peaceful place.

Later, we dine in The Restaurant; a soaring open-sided pavilion filled with the fragrance of tuberose and frangipani, where charming Korean-American Executive Chef, Ji Hyun Park creates miracles of sophistication. They even have a good bottle of Gavi and their own basil and garlic or chilli dipping oils, made by sister resort, The Serai. We are treated to a Chef's Table dinner which begins, delectably, with a Pyramid of Roasted Capiscum, Tomato and Avocado in Coriander jus, then just gets better and better; from light, crispy Tempura of Prawns and Vegetables to moreish Lamb Rack baked in Rosemary Salt Crust with creamy Potato purée and Roasted Vegetables, and finally a splendid Mixed Dessert Plate of Rich Fudge Cake, Lumpia with Rujak, Crème Brûlée and Pineapple Sorbet. The only negative is the rather indifferent coffee, but I gather that a proper espresso machine is on order, which will ensure perfection.

Later, in our Villa, we sit on the candlelit balcony and watch the fireflies compete with the distant lightening; a full moon encouraging the frogs to gather around our reflecting pool, where more candles flicker in the balmy night.

This is the place to write one's novel, to escape the world, to commune, or just to

relax in the pure simplicity of Bali's hills, with 24-hour room-service to sustain you. Not glamorous or chic, but infinitely calming, The Chedi enfolds one with an honesty of spirit that is all too rare in the new Bali.

Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓✓

AT A GLANCE

THE RITZ-CARLTON BALI

Address: Jalan Karang Mas Sejahtera, Jimbaran, Bali 80364. **Tel:** +62 361 702 222. **Fax:** +62 361 701 555. **Affiliation:** Ritz-Carlton Hotel Co, & Leading Hotels of the World. **Rooms:** 323, inc. 36 Villas. **Approx Rates: Doubles:** \$220-\$360. **Suites:** \$450-\$2500. **Villas:** (1-3 bed) \$550-\$2,500, + 21% service & tax. High season supplement: \$40.

THE LEGIAN.

Address: Jl. Laksmana-Seminyak Kuta, Bali 80361. **Tel:** +62 361 730 622. **Fax:** +62 361 730 623. **Affiliation:** GHM, Prima Hotels. **Rooms:** 70 suites. **Approx Rates: Studio:** \$275-\$305. **1-bed Superior:** \$325-\$355. **1-bed Deluxe:** \$390-\$410. **2-bed Deluxe:** \$480-\$510. **The Seminyak:** \$580-\$610. **The Legian:** \$680-\$710, + 21% service & tax.

THE FOUR SEASONS RESORT BALI AT SAYAN.

Address: Sayan, Ubud, Gianyar, Bali 80571. **Tel:** +62 361 977 577. **Fax:** +62 361 977 588. **Affiliation:** Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts. **Rooms:** 46 suites, inc. 28 pool villas. **Approx Rates: Terrace Suite (bi-level):** \$375. **Sayan Suite:** \$425. **1-bed pool Villa:** \$525. **2-bed pool Villa:** \$1,500. **3-bed Royal Villa:** \$3,500, + 21% service & tax.

THE CHEDI UBUD.

Address: Desa Melinggih Kelod Payangan, Gianyar, Bali 80572. **Tel:** +62 361 975 963. **Fax:** +62 361 975 968. **Affiliation:** GHM, Prima Hotels. **Rooms:** 58, inc. 4 Villa Suites. **Approx Rates: Doubles:** \$230-\$260. **Villa Suites:** \$390-\$420, + 21% service & tax.

All rates expressed in US\$. Dollar rates are converted to Rupiah at the prevailing exchange rate.

GALLIVANTER'S Gossip



ALTHOUGH BALI IS MALARIA-FREE, I find that there is invariably an insect or two that decides to dine on my newly-browned skin. Most insect repellents are loaded with chemical nasties that are even more scary than the mosquitoes, so I am happy to report that I have found the perfect natural answer. **Alfresco** is a silky anti-insect moisturiser with pure botanical extracts. It smells wonderful, makes a great after-sun and *really* works. Over a 3-week test period in Indonesia, the only bite suffered was when David forgot to apply Alfresco one evening. For mail-order, write to Alfresco, PO Box No. 7401, London N6 6BQ, UK. Tel: +44 (0)181 348 6704. Fax: +44 (0)181 341 5322. Buy two bottles for a 2-week trip. Price £12.50 each plus p&p.

IHAVE FREQUENTLY BEMOANED THE LACK of any stylish British seaside hideaways, so I was delighted to learn of Olga Polizzi's new 24-room, 2-suite idyll in St. Mawes, Cornwall; a ravishingly minimal, individually decorated seafront property that owes more to Amanresorts than Laura Ashley. Scheduled to open mid-June, **Hotel Tresanton** will offer proper kingsize beds, no trouser presses or kettles and lashings of *savoir faire*. Ms Polizzi is Rocco Forte's sister and knows a thing or two about hotels. The Tresanton, though, is a personal passion, and quality, personal service and good cuisine are high on her list of priorities. Watch out for our review! High season rates: Doubles: £180-£220. Family Suites: £250, including breakfast, service & tax. Tel: +44 (0)1326 270 055. Fax: +44 (0)1326 270 053.

TALKING OF HOTEL DESERTS, Amman in Jordan will have its first deluxe property in 1999 when the new 196-room **Four Seasons Amman** opens. Designed to reflect Jordan's historic architectural style, the hotel will sit between the residential area of As Suwayfiyya and the financial district. Another hotel desert will also blossom next year when the **Four Seasons Sharm El Sheikh** opens beside the diving paradise of the Red Sea. 140 rooms and suites, arranged in one and two-storey villas will rise like an ancient hillside town, becoming the first truly civilised option in the Middle East for avid divers.

SCHEDULED TO OPEN EARLY AUGUST is a new haven catering particularly to those of you in the film and music business. Secreted away in the heart of England's West Country, just 12 miles from Bath, **Babington House** promises to be sans chintz and stiff upper lips and will, instead, court those who want to work and play in equal measure, or just get away from it all. Dating from 1700, the house will offer a handful of eclectic rooms, including spacious loft-style apartments in the Coach and Stable Blocks. A 30 seater cinema will show pre-release, contemporary and classic films and an edit suite will appease the workaholics. A fully equipped Health Club, indoor-outdoor pool, tennis, squash and even a cricket pitch will enhance the 15 acres of parkland and organic gardens that aim to supply the restaurant. For pre-opening details, contact sister property, Soho House London. Tel: +44 (0)171 734 5188. Fax: +44 (0)171 734 1447.

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