

Beautiful Bali

Take a trip to paradise, indulge your senses and recharge the batteries



PICTURE: MAX KERTHYASA

Top: Warwick Ibah Luxury Villas & Spa provides an oasis from the bustle of life and the busy village of Bali's Ubud is only steps away. **Above:** Prince Tjokorda Raka Kerthayasa and his Australian wife Asri live at Warwick Ibah.

There's nothing like an exotic destination to help you unwind and recharge. So when I needed to get away, Bali seemed the perfect place.

Around three hours' flying time from Australia's west coast and a little over five from the east, this island paradise is a holidaymaker's dream.

Island safari

There are many ways to explore Bali, but if you're after pure indulgence, book yourself on an organised tour.

Gorgeous Safaris, run by fabulous foodie Maeve O'Meara, is designed for women of all ages who are looking for an escape filled with pampering and five-star luxury.

Bali is a recent addition to Maeve's Gorgeous Safaris tours, which also includes Vietnam and Thailand.

Maeve takes the hard work out of planning – she's already researched the best places for you to eat, sleep and shop. But she's also happy to amend the itinerary to suit your preferences.

A royal dinner party

The moment we drove up the driveway of the splendid Warwick Ibah Luxury Villas & Spa in Ubud, I knew I was in for a magical and breathtaking experience.

Fortunately, I didn't have to wait long – our first dinner was a delicious traditional Balinese meal and we also had the pleasure of royal company.

Long before Mary Donaldson of Tasmania married Prince Frederik of Denmark, Sydneysider Jane Gillespie, who's now known as Asri (meaning 'perfect' in Indonesian), married Prince Tjokorda Raka, a member of the Ubud royal family, and became a princess. Tjokorda Raka and Asri started the Ibah Resort together 30 years ago, and they have a rich and amazing knowledge of the area.

Over dinner, the royal couple told us the wonderful story of how they met and fell in love and shared stories about living in Ibah. Tjokorda Raka also spoke about Balinese values, customs and spiritual beliefs. I was



Above: The sanctuary of Ibah's gardens are so peaceful and relaxing that Lauren (right) found it nearly impossible to leave.



impressed, and all I kept thinking was: 'Who would have thought I'd get to dine with a prince!'

At one with nature

Ibah is set in a tropical paradise full of natural lush green gardens reminiscent of *The Secret Garden*. Stone Buddhas and carvings decorate the pathways while frangipanis are perfectly placed, creating a rich aroma.

Ibah is a peaceful and tranquil spot that's positioned above the Campuhan River and has views overlooking rice paddy fields.

The luxurious rooms in Ibah feature a divine four-poster bed, beautiful Balinese furniture and ceramic ornaments. But the highlight is the verandah with a comfy day bed, which is perfect for kicking back with a good book or to simply close your eyes and listen to the river below.

I explored the gorgeous grounds and stumbled across a stunning salt-water pool, a sanctuary where you can also enjoy pampering spa treatments.

Caves are carved out of the stone walls, acting as a shield from the warm Balinese sun. When you're in the pool, it's hard to believe this resort is only steps away from the busy main streets of Ubud's marketplace – it's amazing that it's so peaceful.

My days started with a one-hour yoga session, which helped relax

aching muscles, before we enjoyed rejuvenating spa treatments.

Although we could have easily spent a week relaxing in the resort, we did manage to drag ourselves away and head out on some wonderful Balinese adventures with Asri playing tour guide.

She took us to all her favourite spots in Bali. Not only was Asri friendly and extremely helpful, she also became a dear companion to our small group. Asri translated for us and also taught us to barter like the locals do, which was a real treat.

Full of flavour

Don't leave Bali without taking a herb walk led by local Made Westie. This easy four-hour nature walk will take you through rice fields where you'll see wild passionfruit, raspberries, ylang ylang and lemongrass, sleeping hibiscus and wild ginger.

Made will also teach you about the fascinating world of plants – those that help cure illnesses and injuries and the essential ingredients in Indonesian fare.

Waka Land Cruise is another highly recommended tour to do in Ubud – it immerses you right into the heart and soul of the Balinese lifestyle. The adventure begins in a four-wheel drive exploring the sights of villages, rice paddocks and the rainforest. You'll

have lunch at the bamboo Rainforest Restaurant located high in the mountains, where your meal is prepared from local ingredients. This experience encapsulates the truly inspiring Balinese culture.

Cultural enlightenment

Another experience I'll treasure forever is our visit to a temple ceremony under a full moon. The Balinese hold temple ceremonies every 210 days, but the bigger ceremonies, like the one we attended, only occur every 30 years and require months of preparation by the local village people. The tremendous amount of detail in everything they do, including the offerings they make, left me awestruck. These ceremonies are held to rejuvenate their environment and the people.

A fantastic way to experience Bali's splendid culture firsthand is to visit a temple ceremony.

Make sure you dress appropriately to enter the temple though, or you may find yourself being politely told not to enter. Tie a long sarong around your waist and cover your arms with a long-sleeved top.

It's time to shop

You can't visit Bali and not go shopping! It's simply a must-do in this spectacular destination, which offers everything you need. The markets are a good place to start and if you know how to barter, you can pick up many great bargains. Shopping in Sanur, Legian and Seminyak offers beautiful boutique clothing shops, jewellery, homewares and gifts.

Remember to bring an empty suitcase with you because with all the treats you buy for yourself and the gifts you take home for family and friends, you'll definitely need it.

When you're all shopped out, rest your tired feet at La Lucciola's in Seminyak. It's the perfect place to relax and sip a cocktail while you watch the sun go down.

Our week was drawing to a close and we gathered for our final meal with Asri and Tjokorda Raka. None of us knew how we could return home and slip back into reality – if only we had a few more days in paradise.

By Lauren Yule

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Tom's postcard

Bali is one of my favourite places

I absolutely love visiting Indonesia; the people, the culture and the surf are just awesome. I have managed to learn the basics of the language over the years. Here's my guide to get you through:
Good morning – Selamat pagi (se-lah-maht par-ghee).
Good afternoon – Selamat siang (se-la-maht see-ahng).
Good evening – Selamat sore (se-la-mutt sore-ray).
Thank you – Terima kasih (ter-ree mar car-see).
No, thank you – Tidak, terima kasih (ti-duck ter-ree mar car-see).
Please (when asking for help) – Tolong (toh-long).
How much/many – Berapa (ber-ra-pa).
Good luck!



Tom