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a seaweed farmer walks past as we admire the view to Bali from the mangroves in the north of lembongan island

luxury lembongan

There are a few things that **Nusa Lembongan** is well known for: crystal clear water; relaxing beach-life; stunning sunsets over Bali's volcanoes.

text loutisa lock images james frampton



Ask any surfer and they will cite the great reef breaks of Playgrounds, Lacerations, and Shipwrecks, while divers will rave about sighting the mola-mola (ocean sunfish), the heaviest known bony fish in the world, which can be seen in the waters off the island between August and October. Visitors to the island might talk about the patchwork spectacle of multi-hued seaweed drying in the sun in back yards and by roadsides - evidence of the leading role that seaweed farming plays in the island's industry. It is also a renowned day trip destination; guests primarily from the large Nusa Dua resorts arrive on gaudy vessels that dock at the entertainment-filled pontoons in the bay, although they don't venture as far as the island itself. For all its varied faces though, Lembongan is not acclaimed as a luxury destination... or at least, not yet.

Just a few years ago, visitors to Lembongan would have found a quietly charming place, with a scattering of small guesthouses dotted along a sweeping beach. Having quite basic facilities and infrastructure (think sporadic electricity supply; precarious public boat journeys; a diet of nasi goreng and the ubiquitous jaffles), it attracted mostly backpackers in pursuit of some quiet time after the excesses of Kuta, or surfers keen to take on the world-class waves just off the shoreline, and held little of interest to the discerning luxury tourist. Fast-forward a few years, however, and the appeal is broadening thanks to sensitively executed developments aimed at the higher end of the market.

One place with sights firmly set in this direction is Batu Karang Lembongan Resort and Day Spa. Established by an Australian family three years ago, it is unique on the island as the only Western owned and managed resort, and as such takes pride in being the only one providing the

level of service expected by the top-end luxury market. It is especially popular with honeymooners and surfers, especially those with families in tow, though the flexible room arrangements with lockable internal doors make the accommodation suitable for anyone. While the idyllic views over the bay are shared with neighbouring resorts and villas, the like-thinking attitude of the management team with their customers sets it apart from the competition: despite challenges (arising mainly from the location), they strive to achieve a service as close to perfection as is possible anywhere else in the world.

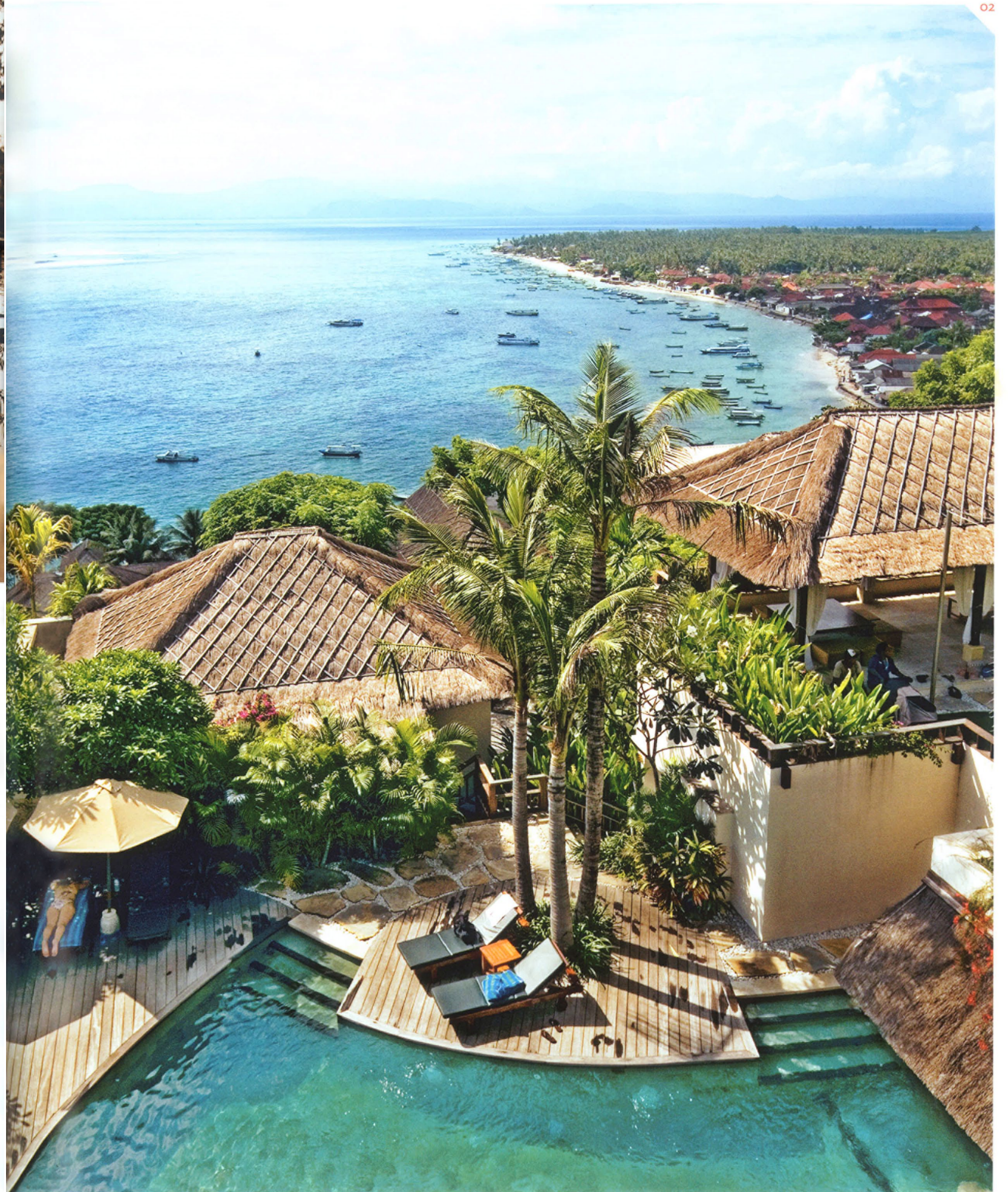
The introduction of a speedboat service (Scoot, ref end of article) means that the island is more accessible than ever before - and the lolling, cramped public boat can be avoided. A mere thirty minutes after leaving Sanur, step into a place that feels a world away: unlike some other luxury desert island destinations, the unmistakable

01_pool at batu karang lembongan resort

02_overlooking the coast of lembongan island



01



02

natural beauty and traditional culture of the island prevails, making it the perfect place to come for some downtime. It is the sensitivity towards environmental and socio-cultural issues that propels Batu Karang Lembongan Resort into the leading position it occupies on the island.

The resort itself was carefully designed by an Australian architect to make the most of the views and space available, and as such there is barely an inch of the property without an incredible vantage point over the bay. The management's efforts to provide a luxurious but eco-friendly resort include a range of energy and resource saving tips, solar panels and even the installation of a costly sewage filtration and treatment unit - the only one on the island - which keeps the garden sprinklers flowing with recycled water. As such, the resort tries to be as low-impact as possible upon the environment, while remaining steadfast in the level of luxury service they provide. Around ninety-eight percent

‘...the resort tries to be as low-impact as possible upon the environment, while remaining steadfast in the level of luxury service they provide.’ –

of the helpful staff members are originally from Lembongan – testament to the proprietors’ dedication to creating local opportunities.

Within the resort there is certainly plenty to do: enjoy the swimming pools, sample an original Batu Karang cocktail, or simply enjoy the views. Right at the top of the luxury list though is a trip to Lulus Spa for a traditional style massage, facial, or hair and scalp treatment. The Lembongan Seaweed Body Scrub uses some of the island’s famous crop to exfoliate and smooth the skin, and is followed by a massage to soothe tense muscles. For beautification, there are aromatherapy and acupressure facials to choose from, as well as the No Fuss Facial For Real Men – a thirty-minute treatment that delivers exactly what is promised. In addition to the Spa, there is a steam room above the lap pool, and day lounge furnished with comfy sofas and equipped with DVDs and books. For film lovers, there is soon to be an evening movie theatre open to in-house guests twice a week during high season.

For those who prefer more action, there is also a well-equipped gym, and water aerobics

classes are soon to start. Outside the resort, water sports feature heavily, with surfing, snorkelling and diving all within easy reach. Diving excursions can be arranged through one of the local operators, while Batu Karang provide occasional opportunities for surf tours to Lombok and elsewhere. Guided cycling and walking tours of the island can be arranged by hotel staff, although guests are also encouraged to rent a scooter so they can explore the island independently.

After a full day’s activity, there is surely no better way to relax than with dinner and a drink, and Muntigs Bar at Batu Karang is the perfect place to do so. Wines from Australia, France, New Zealand, Italy and Spain adorn the well-stocked bar, which produces a variety of classic cocktails, fruity mocktails and international beers and spirits. On the menu is an interesting selection of Asian and Western dishes, all given star treatment by the resort’s Japan-trained chef. The coconut-crusting calamari with hot and sour sauce has the perfect combination of textures and flavours, a quality it shares with the perfectly mouth-watering rib-eye steak. From the specials menu, the river prawns, skewered on lemongrass stalks and served with salad and garlic mash, are a must-try – if you’re lucky enough to be there before they sell out. Finally, for the perfect ending to a meal, try the velvety texture and rich taste of the chocolate mousse.

With its growing popularity as a luxury destination, Lembongan is also attracting more wedding parties, and Batu Karang is well set up to accommodate ceremonies, receptions and honeymoons. The wedding pavilion can be hired along with the top half of the resort to give bride, groom and guests total privacy for their special day. Afterwards, the happy couple can enjoy their honeymoon in the special suite, with private pool, garden and relaxation bale, and furnished with a round bed and a huge bathtub, filled by means of a bamboo pipe in the ceiling above in a delightful twist on the traditional style.

Lembongan is changing, although its quiet charm and natural assets remain omnipresent. Alongside the natural attractions of the island, visitors can experience the very best in luxury in a place that is still protected from mass tourism. •

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03_leaving lembongan, looking back at batu karang resort