

Bali: you're it

Rabies, terrorism, bird flu, foreigners... Indonesia gets a pretty bad rap from the DFAT website. But Bali is, was and always has been different, hasn't it? Which is probably why it's enjoying an against-the-trend resurgence in tourism numbers — Australians are rekindling their love for the Island of the gods.

Garuda has added extra flights while Virgin Blue is the latest carrier to add Bali to its roster. Data from the Bali Tourism Authority shows that in 2008, an average of 6000 foreign tourists arrived in the country daily through Bali's international airport.

Even fresh challenges, like the global financial mess hasn't stopped a swath of glamorous new hotels from opening their doors. Once a destination for the penny-pincher, Bali now boasts five-star resorts and boutique hotels to rival the snobbiest of destinations.

This flurry of investment is good news for Australian hospitality designers and operators whose expertise is being brought to bear. The Bali Tourism Board says the island now hosts 60,000 tourist rooms, compared with 40,000 three years ago and it is predicted that this year there will be more than 2 million visitors for the first time. New resorts include the totally splendid St Regis, the fully revamped Club Med, Uluwatu Villas, Karma Kandara and the Holiday Inn Tuban. New competition has driven existing hotels and resorts such as the Dynasty and the Nikko Bali Resort & Spa into a flurry of refurbishment. Also due to open are several top-notch venues including another Outrigger Resort, Best Western Premier Kuta Kedonganan, an Intercontinental, Banyan Tree resort, Raffles Jimbaran, Jumeirah Bali Resort, a Pullman Hotel and a W Hotel.

Labour of Love: Batu Karang Lembongan Spa & Resort is on the secluded island of Nusa Lembongan, a destination without any excavators — yes, all the terracing was hewn out of the hillside by hand.



St Regis Bali Resort

Bali has its fair share of luxury spas and resorts, so any newcomer has to be impressive to deserve worldwide attention. The St Regis Bali Resort is impressive. Very impressive. The Resort's level of amenity is evident upon arrival at Denpasar airport where guests are greeted by a resort representative who takes care of all the tedious immigration and customs details while they sip and nibble in an air-conditioned lounge. Then it's into a chauffeur-driven black BMW where handmade truffles await. The resort entry is a sight to behold: a massive granite structure reminiscent of the entrance to Jurassic Park, followed by a colonnaded driveway. A phalanx of staff, including Chief Butler Tony Sharp, are on hand to greet guests as they make their way into the vast marble lobby decked with large-scale candelabras.

The rooms are amazing, many with their own private landscaped gardens and pools. The style of the rooms is an Asian-Balinese hybrid, with dark wood furniture and floors contrasting with a colour palette of lime green and burnt orange. Various artefacts and books are scattered throughout the rooms, including a Balinese-inspired carving that looms above the bed. All rooms have a writing desk and spacious private balcony. The deep bathtub has its own LCD screen. On the beachfront there are two majestic 840sqm Strand Residences complete with private butler's quarters with a separate entrance.

The standard St Regis suites start at about US\$425 while a Strand Residence will set you back around \$5000 per night. Who pays this sort of money? Well, according to the barman at the lagoon bar — you can always rely on a barman for the goss — there seems to be an abundance of rich Russians who think nothing of these prices.

The St Regis service is second to none — superb... at any price. <<

» St Regis Bali Resort: Kawasan Pariwisata, Nusa Dua, Bali, Indonesia
+62 361 8478 111 or www.stregis.com/bali

This image gives you an idea of how a 'rich Russian' might kick back, with a private pool and garden. Guests can hire a butler for 12- or 24-hour periods; there's even an adjoining butler's quarters with a separate entrance. Designed by Grounds Kent Architects, St Regis Bali features a stunning landscape scheme by Bangkok's Bensley Design Studios, with interiors by Manila-based Manny Samson and Associates.

St Regis Design Notes

There are two restaurants: Kayuputi, a beachfront restaurant with stylish interiors and Boneka, as well as the delicatessen were all designed by Sydney-based Michael McCann of Dreamtime Australia Design. Kayuputi (which means 'white wood') is a sexy beachside restaurant and bar featuring a relaxed yet elegant whitewashed beach house with soaring white timber ceilings. A dramatic entrance is provided by custom Indonesian capiz shell chandeliers suspended over water ponds on either side of the restaurant's entrance. Inside there's a stunning four-metre oval chandelier over the bar, itself equally stunning with a back-lit, carved teak bar front. An attention-grabbing oval island open kitchen within the dining room and a two-storey bar and wine cellar add excitement to the dining experience inside. Outside there are dining tables on individual islands with 3.5 metre ceilings within a water garden surrounded by fire and dramatic lighting on the poolside and beachfront. Boneka is the all-day dining, specialty restaurant located within a dramatic tented dining room surrounded by Balinese water and fire ponds featuring unique custom designed Balinese puppets, a colourful gold leaf glass mosaic tiled kitchen, custom ruby-red chandeliers suspended over booth seating throughout the room and unique external seating concepts such as swings and rocking chairs on a deck overlooking the hotel's extensive, creative water gardens. In the evenings, images of the colourful puppet clothing are projected on the internal walls of the white tent. A chequerboard two-tone timber flooring, a two-tone stone chequerboard external flooring and white chequerboard ceiling further accentuate the Indonesian puppet theatre ambiance of the restaurant. Dreamtime Australia Design created a new pastry shop and deli incorporating a unique personal bar shop where guests in the luxury hotel's villas select desired items for their in-room personal bar from a teak-clad walk-in wine cellar. The Deli features coffee tables with large oversized lampshades integrated into each table, custom glass mosaic wall cladding in the Pastry Kitchen with the same pattern painted on the ceiling and custom refrigerated Calacatta marble display cabinets. <<

Dreamtime Australia Design: (02) 9368 0800 or www.dreamtimeaustraliadesign.com

Step Right Up: Boneka restaurant, sporting a carnival atmosphere, with its traditional puppets, red chandeliers, chequerboard timber floor and striped upholstery on the booth seating. By night, brightly-coloured images of puppet clothing are projected onto the tent-like ceiling.



St Regis: What the Butler saw

St Regis Bali is the first resort on the island to offer an international Chief Butler, Tony Sharp; an Australian who has been butler to the US ambassador in Australia, Kerry Packer, Emir of Kuwait, the Dalai Lama, Crown Prince of Japan (now the Emperor), George Bush Snr, Bill Clinton, the Royal Family... the list goes on. His last assignment was Chief Concierge and Head Butler at the exclusive The Nam Hai Hoi An resort in Vietnam.

The St Regis butlers are a hallmark of the brand, providing ever-present, unobtrusive service while anticipating the every need of guests. The resort offers not only an on-call service but also a 12-hour and 24-hour personalised butler service. Each villa in the resort features butler quarters with a separate entrance to cater for this additional service.

venue: So how do you become a butler?

TS: There are two ways; you can fall into it or you can go to butler school. I fell into it while working at The Regent in Sydney — Whoopi Goldberg asked me to be her butler during her stay. I knew how to make American lemonade and how to make bacon crispy, so she asked me to butle for her.

venue: What does the average day as Chief Butler at St Regis entail?

TS: I walk the property at about 5.30am checking every single area is correct — getting an overall picture of what's going on. I then check my arrivals listing for the day and meet the overnight team of concierges, butlers, bell boys and front office to plan the day. It usually starts out controlled but once the starting gun has gone off its controlled chaos. I meet guests as they arrive at the hotel and build a constant rapport with guests already in the hotel. There are a number of different standards of contact that you have with guests; it can be formal if they're here for a short stay but if they're here for two weeks it's a case of 'how can I keep them entertained?'. Sometimes it's a matter of keeping four generations entertained and happy with each other. It's a challenge but also fun.

venue: What's the greatest skill you've picked up on the way?

TS: Reading body language. I've been a people watcher all my life. You also need to listen and understand what a person wants and then deliver it within your capabilities.

venue: What is one of the most unusual requests you've had as butler?

TS: I've been asked to serve champagne and strawberries in a dog bowl. Then, when you walk into the room and see what the 'great and the good' are getting up to... well, you have to refrain from laughing and resolutely maintain eye contact. That happened 20 years ago and from then on I knew my chosen career wouldn't offer a dull moment.

venue: Will you write a book on your experiences when you retire?

TS: No, it dies with me! When I read the book Hotel Babylon, I knew straightaway who had written it as the events happened at the Dorchester and the Savoy where I used to stay while I was a personal butler.

venue: How do you deal with curly requests for drugs or girls?

TS: I tell them about three different establishments in Bali that may have something on their menu that they desire. They also need to know about policemen posing as drug dealers.

venue: What characteristics are required to be a butler?

TS: Patience, patience and more patience. It's also about being able to give freely which is very challenging for some people in the west. In Asia it's not such a problem, they give of their heart freely. Persistence is also important — helping the guest get their dream.

venue: Since you've been at St Regis is there one particular thing that you've done for a guest that gives you a warm, fuzzy feeling?

TS: I had a lady travelling by herself who had been quite sick. She was lonely and a little bit tetchy but during the week and a half she was here I became her best friend. I entertained her and virtually hosted her through her entire stay ensuring she had a great time. We arranged for a well known healer to see her. She was quite nervous about it but was into eastern medicine. She arrived wearing a brace and left without one, walking tall with a smile on her face.

Ladies travelling by themselves often require a little extra attention, such as a five-minute chat or a coffee together at breakfast. That extra time might be trivial to us but it can make their day and their stay. That's what it's all about: giving freely of yourself.

My life is about seeing someone with a spring in their step when they walk out of the door, that's all I care about. It's the small things that matter.

venue: Finally, just what did the butler see?

TS: Everything and nothing! I know nothing, I see nothing, I hear nothing but I know everything. <<

Extensive Range: Kayuputi restaurant features this stunning island kitchen design with a range hood from hell. Meanwhile, the pastry kitchen and deli is a sweet tooth's delight. The oversized 'lampshades' work a treat.



Batu Karang

Lembongan Resort & Day Spa

Sometimes you don't want to share a venue with every man and (his suspiciously frothing) dog. Batu Karang Lembongan Spa & Resort (quite a mouthful especially after a few Bintangis) is one of those venues. After the frenetic hustle and bustle that much of Bali offers, this island (located off Bali's east coast) is a tranquil, magical find — no hawkers, no traffic, magnificent scenery... the perfect place to put your feet up and relax. It's also popular with those weary of travel warnings, as this island is a safe from all but the longest-range ballistic missile.

Several years ago a young Australian surfer dude named Troy Sinclair stopped off in Nusa Lembongan while on a surfing safari. Upon his return home to Noosa, he couldn't get the place out of his mind and recommended that his father, a property developer, go and visit. Like many people, his father could see no reason to go — after all, Queensland's tropical getaway credentials were unsurpassed. However, a couple of years later Mr Sinclair Snr embarked on a trip to Bali and Nusa Lembongan. He immediately saw the magic of the island and wanted a slice of the action.

The Sinclair family purchased the land and set about building a resort that offers a five-star service coupled with a laid-back atmosphere. Today Troy manages the resort.

venue: What was your vision for this place?

Troy Sinclair: Initially it was just a couple of villas for the family to use but after purchasing the land with our Indonesian partner we discovered we could build a resort. Construction of the resort started in 2005.

venue: Did you have any prior experience in hospitality?

TS: Yes, I've worked in hospitality venues such as bars and restaurants since the age of 16. I've washed dishes, been a waiter and even a duty manager, often while travelling overseas.

venue: What were the main hurdles in constructing the resort?

TS: The main difficulty is where to start! The location made it very difficult. There's no machinery on the island, so everything has to be done manually. All the terracing was dug out by hand and in Stage One 300 cubic metres of limestone was dug out, followed by 200 cubic metres during Stage Two.

A lack of labour skills was also a problem and we had to project manage the build ourselves. Trying to build to Australian standards in Indonesia is not easy!

Other difficulties involved providing our own infrastructure: there's no running water on the island and when we arrived there was only electricity on the island between 3pm and 8am. We had to install our own water treatment plant — a reverse osmosis desalination unit sewerage treatment plant — which requires a lot of pumps and clean power. Fortunately, the power is getting better on the island but we have our own generator — you can imagine getting a machine the size of a small bus over here was no mean feat.

venue: How have you marketed the resort?

TS: Creating a product for a new market hasn't been easy. It's taken us some time. Travel agents service the middle market quite well but they haven't necessarily been the right avenue for us. The internet has been a great marketing tool and a lot of our bookings come directly online. We advertise in some magazines and word of mouth has been good for us.

venue: What are your day-to-day challenges running this resort?

TS: Maintenance mainly; being so close to the ocean, things deteriorate quickly. The water and sewerage plant take a lot of looking after, especially when things break down — getting someone onto the job the next day isn't easy.

» **Batu Karang Lembongan Resort & Day Spa:**
Lembongan Island, Bali, Indonesia
+62 366 24880 or www.batukaranglembongan.com

Resort Design — Island Life

Alan Sinclair, the owner of Batu Karang, and long-term client of Noosa-based In Design International, first mentioned his concept of the 'small family resort' to designer Penny Del Castillo back in early 2003. During a trip to Bali in 1999 she spent three happy days at Lembongan Island, so she was delighted to be involved. 'Island life, island style and island time' was the catch phrase Alan and Penny coined, in fact, it became the design criteria and design brief for the entire project.

"The first design ground rule was that nothing should even remotely represent a contemporary penthouse apartment," said Penny. "Unpolished and flat finishes ruled the entire interior fitout — no polished stainless or chrome, no powder-coated steel, no glossy porcelain tiles or crystal chandeliers. In fact, the only glass you will find in the villas are the mirrors above the bathroom vanities."

Elsewhere you'll find rough-cut and honed yellow stone floor and wall tiles, solid timber decking for the verandahs and hand-carved teak for the traditional double entry doors. Authentic brass fittings were used wherever possible while the bathrooms feature Java cream marble basins and neutral-coloured terrazzo bath tubs.

In effect, the super-sized bathing areas (see pictured) are another living space. The indoor/outdoor effect is marvellous with all showers carefully positioned to allow views across the bay to the magnificent Mount Agung. Meanwhile, from the bath tub, you can catch glimpses of the ocean and the gardens. The terrazzo egg shaped tubs were framed, poured and polished in situ. <<

» **In design international:** (07) 54 55 5593 or www.indesigninternational.com.au



“when we arrived there was only electricity on the island between 3pm and 8am”

— Troy Sinclair
Manager

