

THE YAK

The lighter and darker sides of Seminyak,
Bali's fashionable playground.

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four resorts

BY M. TIAHJONO

A mere 30 minutes on the fastest boat, you'll find a much slower pace of life on Bali's Nusa Lembongan Island – one of three islands just south-east off her coast

Above: The sunset reflects on the Bali's peeking Mount Agung from Sanghiang Bay

Below far left, left and middle and right: Waka Nusa Resort. Below right: Nusa Lembongan Resort.

I packed two packets of Antimo, two bikinis, two sarongs, two pairs of Havaianas and two children, then set off with Ed to Nusa Lembongan Island, or "Lembongan" for short, for a four night stay at four quite different resorts. No cosmetics, no hair products, no watch, no jewellery and no worries.

We boarded the Bali Hai II, probably the best vessel to take children on – a kind of floating multi-level, executive departure lounge complete with complimentary pastries and coffee and a live band outside on the second deck, which helps to take your mind off the motion of the ocean. (Some boats to Lembongan don't take children under twelve, as it's unsafe – or uncool).

We arrived at Sanghiang Bay after about 60 minutes and were greeted by the staff of Waka Nusa Resort. Cleverly, we had decided to stay at Waka Nusa on the first night, as it's the perfect place to relax in order to begin our brief journey.

Because of the eco-friendly ambience, my blood pressure felt like it dropped instantly, sort of like taking a Zanex but without the prescription. Doctor's orders: no-frills, friends, freedom. In fact, on the times I returned to Waka during our stay on Lembongan I felt an instant calmness once I stepped into the resort – "ahhhhh" was all I could think.

In 1986, visionary architect Frederic Tafin 'washed up' on the shores of Sanghiang Bay and spied what he thought was the perfect part of the beach. He sat under the coconut trees with local villager Ketut Suarta and by 1992 Lembongan had its first resort built. The resort has stayed true to the ecology of the island, without one tree being felled from the original coconut grove whilst building the free-form swimming pool.

Waka Experience, the company which offers six eco-resorts on Bali, attests to offering guests the true soul of Bali. And until this day they have purposely not introduced the

banana boat rides or other levels of noise pollution to their make-up, instead visitors can enjoy eco-explorations of the island's villages and Waka encourages the use of mountain bikes for travel. (Vehicles on the island are mostly motor bikes and the bemo-type transport, although there is rumoured to be one sedan somewhere.)

We have to admit we were given the full treatment by Operations Manager, Thomas Colbert, and Waka associate "early-to-bed" Bill Quinlan with his first and last wife, the fabulous Jan. Knowing *The Yak* was arriving, they brought over a special shipment of Chardonnay, but promptly found a case of Sauvignon Blanc which is more to our liking.

Accommodation is in the style of rotundas with a thatched roof including ensuite bathroom, I don't believe I saw a straight line in the whole place except the line to the beach. Landscaping is flat, sand covered and very beachcomber. The pool, had the children been taller and

and an island hop

Above: Mount Agung from Jungut Batu Bay – courtesy Alexandria Sinclair, Batu Karang Resort

Below far left and left: Nusa Lembongan Resort. Below right and far right: Batu Karang Resort.

noticed, was "hidden Mickey" shaped and the boutique has a sand floor, for once a time when you don't have to appologise for your children! Even the spa has a sand floor, which requires a refreshingly icy-cold footbath before your treatment.

We consulted Thomas on what exciting things we could do on Lembongan. He told us about the world-renown surf breaks: Shipwrecks, Playgrounds and Lacerations. Apparently, quite advantageous for left-handers (if you're a surfer you'll understand). Neither of us were prepared to learn to surf a shipwreck or be lacerated in a playground so Thomas suggested diving or a motorbike/trek of Penida Island. No need to flip a coin on that one, as Ed won't dive and I won't trek. So I decided I'd try to remember how to SCUBA dive and Ed would spend some time exploring sister islands Nusa Ceningan and Nusa Penida at some stage during our stay.

On day two we checked in next door at Nusa

Lembongan Resort (NLR), a twelve-bungalow retreat built on the headland at the west end of Sanghiang Bay. The bay's most upmarket resort, NLR was carefully designed so that the restaurant, pool and most rooms engulf views of Badung Strait and Bali. As the property was built on a headland both sunset and sunrise can be enjoyed, in particular from the eight individual decks perched around the cliff's perimeter. One can fish, dine, sunbathe or enjoy a massage on any of the private decks. My favourite place was lazing by the infinity swimming pool watching the comings and goings of Sanghiang Bay.

The resort is designed Mediterranean-style and is "in harmony with nature and the gods", designed by Balinese I Ketut Siandana who uses natural materials combined with traditional architecture. Rooms are spacious and all feature a front terrace to relax on and take in the sea or garden scenery. And after a whole night without television the kids

wanted to be in a villa near the guests' TV room, and their prayers were answered by the staff!

Dining on one of the decks is a definite must, the waves crashing below, the candlelight reflecting off white table cloths giving just enough light to see the food – which was delicious. NLR manager Gareth Warne, along with Waka's Thomas entertained us with stories of the island and the challenges of water and electricity supply on such a destination with little rainfall. Gareth has a background in engineering – a beneficial pre-requisite for managing a resort on Lembongan.

In the morning, Ed set off to Penida Island to investigate the Bali Minah bird sanctuary, and I took the kids to Lembongan's underground house in the main village, or the "hobbit house" as they referred to it. Priest Made Biyasa began digging his home under the earth in 1961 whilst hiding his family from the threats of his gambling debtors;





Above: Batu Karang Resort. Below left: Feeling like a bully in the school, Bali Hai Diving (Tim Rock Doubleblue Images). Below right: Bali Hai Pontoon.

he finished it in 1976 complete with living room, bedrooms, kitchen, a well and various chimneys up to surface level. On the way there I tried to psych myself into walking down into a confined, cold and dark chamber, my neck tightening the more I considered it. Standing on the edge of the entrance hole, sweating a little, my kids pulling at my sarong, the guide asked if I would like him to take the kids in. I nodded a smile of relief. On the way back we visited the base camp of a seaweed farm where villagers were drying out fresh seaweed in square plots of red and green ready for export.

After lunch it was difficult to drag me away from the pool and I had to extend check-out time because of an inability to move my butt. NLR's boat took us around a couple of coves to the beach-side village of Jungut Batu, across seaweed farms at low tide, where we were greeted by staff from Batu Karang Resort. Not knowing what to expect of a resort that opened just the day before for The Yak's arrival, I was blissfully surprised, as were the kids. Yasmin's initial response was, "It's just like Ku De Ta and they have Nickelodeon!"

The contemporary-style rooms are non-smoking, with soft furnishings by Gill Wilson, so who can blame them. Wooden balconies stretch the length of the room with 180° views of Bali's southeast coast—a panorama of beach and seaweed farms sunken along the shore, so picturesque it looks more like a gargantuan canvas with moving parts. Definitely inspiration for an artist, or anyone with the slightest bit of creative ability. Outdoor bathrooms feature

over-sized shower roses and the famous 'egg shell' bath – so heavy they had to be carved on site rather than boated out from Bali. And don't be too concerned with the word 'cliff' as there's a golf buggy for those of us who cannot walk up hill. All 10 villas are complete with air-conditioning, internet access, mini bar, satellite TV, state electricity and telephones making this a resort for 5-star surfers and 5-star nobodies like us. Where else can you sit on the toilet and spy Lacerations Surf Break?

Owner Troy Sinclair, coming from an Australian family in hotel construction, proudly told me about the prelude to this brand new resort. All the coral foundations were excavated from the site and hand-carved, hence being named Batu Karang from 'stone coral'. As the site is a steep slope they built seven rain-water absorption wells, six to nine metres deep, which collect run-off water and redirect it back into the water table so overflow doesn't affect the seaweed farms below. Mark Campbell of Bio-systems constructed a reverse osmosis pump that purifies 'grey water' to be recycled for landscaping. He also constructed the fresh-water swimming pool. Original trees remain on the property as much as was possible, which kept the local men, who had sat under their shade since childhood, very happy.

Tours are currently being developed with local villagers to give them empowerment over the emerging tourism industry. Stage two of the development promises a day spa, wedding facilities and family villas on the upper level of the site, due for completion next year.

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AT A GLANCE

Resort Name: Waka Nusa Resort (Waka)

Location: Sanghiang Bay, Nusa Lembongan

Rooms: 10 one bedroom "lanai"s

Resort style: Natural beach-comber

Day trip facilities: Waka Nusa Resort

Exclusive sea transfer: Waka Sailing

Facilities: Adults/children's swimming pools, snorkelling, in-room hi-fi, day spa, restaurant/bar, boutique.

Tours: Trolling and coral fishing (catch can be cooked for you), Penida Island tour, Dream Beach tour, island tour, snorkelling, surfing, SCUBA diving (open water, emergency and rescue divers certificates), mountain bikes.

Kids' comments: "We've always got sand in our toes, it's great to play hide and seek"

Tel: 484085

Web: www.wakaexperience.com

Resort Name: Nusa Lembongan Resort

Location: Sanghiang Bay, Nusa Lembongan.

Rooms: 16 one bedroom huts

Resort style: Mediterranean cliffside

Day trip facilities: The Anchorage

Exclusive sea transfer: Sail Sensations

Facilities: Adults/children's swimming pools, water slide, mountain bikes, day spa, banana boat, restaurant/bar, parasailing, TV room.

Tours: Diving, Island tours, snorkelling, glass bottom boat, kayaking, picnics.

Kids' comments: "Wow a big pool... can I get my nails painted... can we explore the decks?"

Tel: 725864

Web: www.nusa-lembongan.com

Resort Name: Batu Karang Resort

Location: Jungut Batu village, Nusa Lembongan.

Rooms: 10 one bedroom villas

Resort style: Contemporary Asian cliffside

Day trip facilities: Restaurant guests only, day spa and wedding facility in stage two.

Exclusive sea transfer: Not as yet

Facilities: Swimming pools, large yoga/dining pavillion, 2 individual bale pavillions, golf buggy, large flatscreen TV room, gymnasium, satellite TV in rooms, broadband internet in rooms, restaurant and bar with a wide screen TV

Tours: Yet to be developed, check website in future

Kids' comments: "This is my favourite hotel, it's like Ku De Ta!"

Tel: +6236624880

Web: www.batukaranglembongan.com

Resort Name: Hai Tide Huts (Bali Hai Cruises)

Location: Sanghiang Bay, Nusa Lembongan

Rooms: 16 one bedroom huts

Resort style: Activities and beach fun

Day trip facilities: Beach Club Cruise, Reef Cruise, Castaway

Exclusive sea transfer: Bali Hai II, Aristocat, Ocean Raft

Facilities: Adults/children's swimming pools, children's playground, volley ball court, day spa, banana boat, parasailing, boutique.

Tours: Bali Hai Diving (recreation, open water certificates), Village Tour, Semi-submersible submarine, Snorkelling, Pearl farm onsite, restaurant

Kids' comments: "It's like staying in a cubby house but a little bit more bigger"

Tel: 720331

Web: www.balihaicruises.com