

## RESORT BATU KARANG LEMBONGAN RESORT &amp; SPA, BALI

BY JANE RICHARDS



## UP HIGH WITH THE SPIRITS

## THE PLACE

Batu Karang Lembongan Resort & Spa sits on Nusa Lembongan, the eight-square-kilometre island south-east of Bali known for its paddle-to-surf reefs, swirling currents and turquoise waters that are reminiscent of Tahiti.

The resort was built on a steep and apparently spirit-laden hillside in 2006 by the Sinclairs, an Australian family whose members are firmly embedded in the island community.

The third and final stage of the building and renovation works was completed last year, which included extra suites with plunge pools, a wedding lawn and hydroponic garden. Yet this eco-conscious resort retains a low-key feel, aided by abundant frangipani and sympathetic building materials.

## THE LOCATION

Nusa Lembongan is one of three islands – the others are Nusa Penida and tiny Nusa Ceningan – that make up the Nusa Penida district, part of the Lesser Sunda Islands. To get here from Bali, take a 30-minute fast boat from Sanur. No matter where you are on this pretty and elevated resort you have two amazing views: that of Bali's mysterious Mount Agung, which sits majestically directly across from the island, and the surf break that pokes out of the boat-dotted waters opposite the resort.

## THE SPACE

Batu Karang's tiered villas tumble down the steep hillside so if you are on the top level expect a solid workout each time you head back to your room. Luckily, cheery staff with golf carts are at the ready if you'd rather be

hill-hoisted. Sculpted gardens with white frangipani, palms, hibiscus and ginger plants surround the villas and the retaining walls which are hand-hewn from coral stone bricks. This is a peaceful space.

Fragrant Hindu offerings fill the air, as do the greetings from the just as ubiquitous staff, many of whom are hospitality trainees. There are three communal pools: a 25-metre lap pool at the top level, lined by mosquito-netted day beds and deck chairs; a swim-up bar pool in the mid-level, and a family pool on the lower level next to Muntigs Bar and Restaurant. This is close to the island boardwalk that will take you down to the beaches and boats. There's a gym and the dark-panelled Lulur Spa which you step up into, it's said, so those spirits on the hill won't follow you.

## THE ROOM

A wide, covered deck with a lounge at one end runs the full length of our massive suite which is modern in style with Balinese touches. Sliding doors open to a light-walled living room with carved wood panels. There's a lounge, wall TV, dining table and a fully equipped kitchen, with oven, microwave and marble island.

The bedroom is a showstopper. The king bed with mosquito netting is flanked by full-length cupboards containing robes, a safe, a beach bag. There's another TV above a long desk. The adjoining bathroom has an egg-shaped bath, separate shower, his and hers vanities and a separate toilet. But back to that deck again. From early morning, when Mount Agung plays peekaboo behind a misty curtain above those turquoise waters, to sunset, when shadowed paddleboarders carve a watery path into a red sky, the view is breathtaking.

## THE FOOD

Once you get over the discombobulating sight of a suit of armour and a Balinese barman in a kilt, a visit to the resort's Howff Whisky Gin & Wine Bar sort of makes sense. While the decor does hint at a freezing Scotland, the blue curacao water view is still there. Tapas, such as tuna tartar and butter roasted slipper lobster, is on tap, and the surfing Italian barman offers good stories, solid tips, and entertaining mixology classes. Plus, the gin cocktails are just the thing on a hot night. (Try the Flora McDonald's Fancy). Or there are other places to imbibe. Muntigs is Batu Karang's go-to restaurant bar and restaurant, offering European and Indonesian dishes and that view again. The fish and steak are excellent. Next to it is the more casual Deck Cafe and Bar, which offers coffee and pastries plus lighter lunches such as poke bowls, salads and fish tacos. A new gelato bar is hard to walk by. The boardwalk will take you to other restaurants outside the resort. See [thehowfflembongan.com/](http://thehowfflembongan.com/)

## STEPPING OUT

There are seven of us in the choppy water, including five – yes five – manta rays, their vacuum-like mouths startling us every few seconds through our snorkel masks. We left before 8am for the short walk to meet our boat captain and we are glad we did because we have 30 minutes on our own with the rays before more small boats arrive. We also see plenty of fish. Many snorkelling boats are available off Lembongan but the currents here can be strong so day trips are subject to conditions.

If you prefer more solid ground, hire a motorbike and a driver to tour Lembongan and Jungutbatu villages. Or cross the yellow

bridge into Nusa Ceningan to explore Secret Beach, gasp at Blue Lagoon and watch daredevils jump from Mahana Point.

But there is also plenty to do closer to home. The boardwalk out the front of Batu Karang weaves around the coastline so you can swim or pop in to hire a surfboard if you wish to brave Shipwrecks, the aptly named Lacerations or Playgrounds surf breaks at medium or high tide. Or hire a stand-up paddleboard at nearby Mushroom Beach to paddle into the sunset. The boardwalk also gives you access to non-resort restaurants and the local village, which you can explore more fully with a guided cultural tour organised by the resort.

## ESSENTIALS

Rooms from \$300, special packages available. See [batukaranglembongan.com/](http://batukaranglembongan.com/)

## THE VERDICT

This is luxury with Balinese heart. Whether it's Mount Agung's looming presence or its heavenly hillside location, Bali's spiritual side makes its presence felt here.

## OUR RATING OUT OF FIVE



*Jane Richards stayed as a guest of Batu Karang Lembongan Resort & Spa.*

Clockwise from main: Batu Karang Lembongan Resort & Spa has views for miles over turquoise waters; guestrooms are impressive; enjoy a cocktail while soaking up the views; one of the three pools.

✿ HIGHLIGHT THOSE HYPNOTIC VIEWS OF MOUNT AGUNG AND THE TURQUOISE WATER. AND, THE STAFF: SO FRIENDLY, SO EFFICIENT. ✿

✿ LOWLIGHT INDONESIAN DISHES AT THE RESORT WERE A BIT ON THE BLAND SIDE COMPARED WITH LOCAL STREET OFFERINGS. ✿