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↓ Newly renovated Batu Karang Lembongan Resort & Day Spa has ocean views from most rooms.

↙ The alfresco Thai Pantry, has a small but excellent menu and a Kombi-turned-bar for cocktails.

Cheat Sheet

THE NUSAS, BALI

Unspoilt Bali islands exist – here's how to choose the right one

Paul Ewart

DREAMING OF A BALI GETAWAY? Years of development and ever-increasing visitors have seen the once sleepy paradise lose some of its lustre, but you can find deserted beaches and solitude. Introducing the Nusas (islands): Nusa Lembongan, Nusa Ceningan, and Nusa Penida. This trio of idyllic isles offers unspoilt beaches, crystal-clear seas, lagoons, cliffs and, best of all, minimal crowds. Here's what to see, eat and do.

WHERE TO START

A gateway for all three islands, Lembongan's beautiful bays, beaches and limestone cliffs are reached from the Bali port of Sanur. The cheaper (and uncomfortable) slow boat takes more than an hour. The fast boat services (rockyfastcruise.com) take half that time, and only cost about \$12 more.

Devil's Tears is the most popular attraction. This natural rock plateau is breathtaking. The best sunset spot (thanks to reflective tidal pools), it's busy during the golden hour. Another top attraction is the mangrove forest. You can rent a kayak or stand-up paddleboard to explore, or join a guided boat tour.

WHERE TO NEXT

Connected by the small, yellow "love bridge", Ceningan, the smallest island, is a stone's throw from Lembongan. Nestled between Penida and Lembongan, and crossable by foot or scooter, you can cover its main sights in a day. One must-visit is the Blue Lagoon – a rocky cove of bright blue water. There's nearby cliff jumping for the foolhardy.

WHEN TO GO

Bali is balmy year-round. The rainy season runs October to March with heaviest falls December to February. Tourism peaks around Christmas holidays. The dry season is April to October and is cooler and more pleasant.

GETTING AROUND

There are virtually no cars on Lembongan, but it is only 4km end to end, and there are coastal paths that link waterfront accommodation. Most restaurants offer free pick-up and drop-off services. If you plan to explore, especially around Ceningan, hire a motorbike or scooter. The roads have potholes and many are steep, so always wear a helmet and check your travel insurance. Similarly in Penida, scooters and



VISITORS WILL NEED TO DON A SARONG AND SQUEEZE THROUGH A TINY ENTRANCE TO DESCEND INTO THE SUBTERRANEAN TEMPLE

bikes are the only practical way to get around, unless you hire a car and driver.

WHERE TO STAY

It makes sense to use Lembongan as a base. The tiered hillside resort of Batu Karang Lembongan Resort & Day Spa is fresh from a makeover and expansion. It offers ocean views from most rooms. There are three pools (one adults only), day beds, deep in-room bathtubs or private plunge pools and on-site Lulus Spa. batukaranglembongan.com

BEST BEACHES

Secret Beach, Ceningan, is more of a rocky cove, but still beautiful. Bordered by cliffs and jungle, it has white sand, turquoise waters and picturesque views. There's a resort for snacks.

Dream Beach, Lembongan, is the island's most popular – a stretch of sand enclosed by cliffs, with bars and hotels on hand. Getting to the gorgeous white sand of Kelingking Secret Point, Penida, requires a scramble down a rocky cliff, so perhaps just enjoy the Insta-worthy view from the top.

Broken Beach, also at Penida, has a natural cliff arch opening to the ocean. There's no way down for a dip, but it's breathtaking just to see.

SNORKELLING AND DIVING

A 10-minute boat ride from Lembongan, the largest of the Nusas, Penida, is one of the world's best places to see sunfish (they reach more than 2m in length) and manta rays. Blue Corner Dive has diving and snorkelling trips in the Penida Marine Protection Area. Another essential is Angel's Billabong, a clear tidal pool that cascades into the ocean. Check tides first. bluecornerdive.com

TEMPLE TIME

Penida is the least developed island, and local life here remains largely unaltered. See this in the underground Goa Giri Putri temple. This limestone cave temple is used daily for religious ceremonies. Visitors will need to don a sarong and squeeze through a tiny entrance to descend into the mammoth subterranean temple. Visit independently or on a package with Lembongan Holiday Tour. thelembonganholiday.com

FOOD AND DRINK

For healthy organic meals and dazzling water views, you can't go past The Deck Cafe & Bar, perched above the shore on Nusa Lembongan. It's the only place on the island with beer on tap. Just across from The Deck is the alfresco Thai Pantry, with a small, excellent menu and elaborate cocktails from an Instagrammable Kombi-van-cum-bar by the water. thedecklembongan.com, thaipantrybali.com

IF YOU SURF

While there's a left-hand point break at Ceningan's Secret Point, the best breaks (but the most crowded) are on Lembongan. Lacerations and Shipwreck on the west coast are as nerve-racking as their names so, if not a pro, try the more friendly Playgrounds. There are plenty of surf schools in Jungut Batu.



Read our review of Batu Karang Lembongan Resort at escape.com.au/bali