



The Deck Bar hugs the coastline and is known as the spot for sundowners.

Rowena Ryan in Indonesia

Fall for Bali all over again

Quiet and unspoilt, Nusa Lembongan has all that you love about island holidays, without the crowds



Rowena Ryan has spent her life avoiding a holiday in Bali, but it turns out she's totally down with nasi goreng for breakfast and now rates hotels on a scale of outdoor showers.

WHITE VILLAS TUMBLE DOWN THE HILL and turquoise water sparkles under the sun, but it's the pink bougainvillea climbing up the walls that makes me check my passport. No, this isn't a scene from *Mamma Mia!*, and I haven't just arrived in the Greek islands. This is Nusa Lembongan, a tiny island with a following of loyal visitors, just off the coast of mainland Bali. Here, visitors can exchange peak tourism for laid-back vibes and legendary sunsets, and fall in love with Indonesia all over again.

Just a 30-minute ferry ride from Bali proper, Nusa Lembongan was originally a whispered tale among surfers and backpackers, but word has spread and dotted among local villages you'll now find resorts, beach bars and restaurants.

I'm staying at Batu Karang Lembongan Resort & Spa, where those Greek island-style villas have Balinese thatched roofs. The luxury property is owned by an Australian family who first came to the island chasing waves, but found themselves swept up by island magic.

The resort's beginnings could be the opening of a joke. What happens when an Australian, a perfect surf break and a few cold Bintangos meet?

And what about when that idea is based on a remote Indonesian island, on a piece of land the locals thought to be occupied by spirits, where modern machinery is non-existent and an unreliable grid provides just five hours of electricity a day. Darryl Kerrigan from *The Castle* might have said "tell 'em they're dreaming".

But dream they did and the Sinclair family built the first luxury hotel on an island once considered only worthy of backpackers. Fifteen years on, and Batu Karang has just finished its third stage of building, adding more villas, a wedding lawn and hydroponic garden growing herbs and vegies used in its restaurants. With direct views over to the smouldering Mount Agung and fishing boats dotting the bluest of oceans below, you can't help but fall under its spell.

Done Bali? Not if you haven't done Lembongan. Here's what you need to know.

YOU'LL ARRIVE BY BOAT

Rocky Fast Cruise will get you from Sanur in Bali to Nusa Lembongan in 30 minutes. Hot tip: Sit by the window with caution. The ride is fast and those sitting up the front are welcomed with a sea shower.

From the beach it's an unassuming coastal pathway walk to Batu Karang, but step inside the resort doors and one thing becomes very clear – an Australian dream in Indonesia was a very good idea.

A welcome drink topped with pink hibiscus greets you on arrival, where you'll take a seat at the open-air bar for check-in. From here on in the staff remember your name, and most importantly, your coffee order.



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ESCAPE

The Sunday Telegraph

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← When darkness falls, head to The Howff, a speakeasy that takes cocktails seriously.

← A one-bedroom villa shows modern rooms with a Balinese twist, and a huge bed with a mosquito net.

NUSA LEMBONGAN WAS ORIGINALLY A WHISPERED TALE AMONG SURFERS AND BACKPACKERS, BUT WORD HAS SPREAD AND DOTTED AMONG THE LOCAL VILLAGES YOU'LL NOW FIND RESORTS, BEACH BARS AND RESTAURANTS

VILLA LIFE

Each of the 32 villas and suites is built into the hillside where you'll catch yourself constantly staring out to that view.

I check into one of the newer one-bedroom villas with a generous deck overlooking the ocean, a plunge pool to escape the tropical heat and a day lounge that becomes my go-to afternoon reading spot. Get used to baring all, the bathroom is outdoors, but completely private. If you're on the rest and relax program, step into the oval-shaped stone bath under the open sky.

Rooms are modern with a Balinese twist. There is a television you'll never use and a huge bed with a mosquito net should you prefer the doors open to the sounds of the waves to send you off.

A steep winding driveway takes guests to their rooms. Take the stairs and you can skip feeling guilty about the gym, or embrace full holiday mode and the staff will deliver you to your door in one of the resort's golf buggies.

SO YOU WANT POOL TIME

There are three pools to dip your toes in. The top lap pool becomes my early morning workout. The middle pool is where the cool kids hang thanks to the swim-up bar serving

holiday-mode cocktails. And the pool on ground level is family friendly (and close to the restaurant should you need some snacks by your daybed).

YOU WANT SUNDOWNERS (AND SWEET TUNES)

Picture this. Lanterns hang from trees above you, there are white lounges to kick back on, overhead ceiling fans to cool you, a DJ playing chill beats, a happy hour cocktail list, Mount Agung in the distance, the jaw-dropping colours of Jungut Batu Beach below and one of the best golden sunsets to end the day with.

The Deck Bar at Batu Karang hugs the coastline and has earned a reputation on the island as the spot for sundowners. Feel the Ibiza vibes at its Sunday Sounds session with international DJs playing cocktail drinking tunes. Or head there for the Wednesday Acoustic Sunset Series, The Deck Unplugged, with live music from Bali locals.

As darkness falls, move downstairs to The Howff, a hipster whiskey bar that would be at home in Sydney or Melbourne. Dark and moody, with relics of Scottish history gone by, you'll find brown leather couches, and candles dripping with wax in the corners. This island speakeasy takes cocktails seriously.

YOU'RE HUNGRY

The five-star views are complimentary at each of the dining spots at the resort. The main show-stealer is Muntigs Bar & Restaurant, set beside the lower pool and on the water's edge.

On a menu that reads part Australia, part Indonesia, you'll find nasi goreng alongside the hipster breakfast bowls of Bondi (think acai bowls where dragon fruit replaces strawberries). And the best bit (thanks to its Aussie roots), the coffee is excellent.

Dinner at Muntigs takes it up a notch with Australian beef carpaccio, Indonesian satays, laksa and beef tenderloin. For lighter options, The Balcony and The Deck Bar & Cafe below have poke bowls, salads and pizzas.

YOU'RE KEEN TO EXPLORE

Surfing was always the original lure of Lembongan and out the front of Batu Karang Resort are the popular surf breaks named Playgrounds, Shipwrecks and Lacerations.

However Nusa Lembongan is one of three islands in the area and tiny Nusa Ceningan next door needs to be on your itinerary. Hire a scooter and zip over the famous yellow bridge to Ceningan. Head straight to the Blue Lagoon for Indonesia's version of Iceland's famous coloured waters, watch the surfers and cliff

jumpers at Mahana Point from the day bar perched on the rocky edge (Bintang's mandatory) and stop for lunch at Hai Bar & Grill on the white sands of Mushroom Bay – woodfired pizzas will sort your carb cravings.

YOU'LL FORGIVE MOUNT AGUNG

Back at Batu Karang, the daily scene-stealer is the view over the ocean towards the often troublesome Mount Agung. Like a naughty child, it can cause havoc, but you can't help but be enamoured with its spirit.

THE WRITER WAS A GUEST OF BATU KARANG RESORT & SPA

GETTING THERE

Qantas flies to Denpasar. Rocky Fast Cruise departs from Sanur.
qantas.com.au, rockyfastcruise.com

STAYING THERE

Rates at Batu Karang Resort & Spa start from \$250 a night.

MORE

batukaranglembongan.com

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