

Honeymoons



Private Paradise in Bali

by Laura Venuto



It seems the humble honeymoon is changing. With more and more couples living together before they are married, many are using their honeymoon not just as an opportunity to relax and unwind by the hotel pool with a good novel and a tropical cocktail, but also as an opportunity to soak up the culture with some seriously intrepid travel, embark on that working holiday overseas together, or even use it as an excuse to take a fun-filled holiday with a group of friends.

As Laura Venuto discovered, The Bali Luxury Villa Collection is one such unique alternative to the usual honeymoon. Comprising two separate luxury villa retreats (Villa Kembali and Villa Sungai), they offer newlyweds the opportunity to enjoy the decadent indulgence of an entire private villa complex all to themselves, while also being uniquely situated within a bustling, colourful and spiritual Balinese village – a magical microcosm seemingly untouched by time and progress, offering a wonderful insight into the inherent spirit of Bali.

As we enter Cepaka, the small village on the south west coast of Bali where the retreats are situated, rural scenes of times gone by flash past the window: harvesters bobbing up and down in the emerald green rice fields, dusty children with beaming white smiles looking on curiously, processions of women in colourful silks carrying offerings on their heads, local stone temples virtually hidden amongst creeping greenery, and a group of lithe Balinese teenagers playing a friendly game of volleyball in the middle of the street. This is the real Bali.

The Bali before fake Fendi, Fouxex and feral tourists. The Bali I feared no longer existed, and the reason I had been reluctant to visit until now. This incredible location is certainly one of the major attractions of the villas, as it offers the best of both worlds – the ability to relax in five star comfort while also giving you the opportunity to immerse yourself within a traditional Balinese lifestyle right on your doorstep.

Hidden amongst this thriving village are the two luxury retreats, both of which are accessed from the street by an ornately detailed wooden door, beyond which snakes a steep set of stairs inviting us deep down to the sunken jungle hideaways below. Both are set in a breathtaking location on the banks of a trickling tributary, and are almost enveloped by a lush green jungle of trees, palm fronds and vines.

Our accommodation was based at Villa Kembali, the larger of the two retreats. Five king size villas are scattered throughout the gardens, each a masterful melding of traditional Balinese architecture and modern luxuries. The main "honeymoon" suite is positioned to overlook the retreat, and as such is well separated from the other villas, even featuring its own private plunge pool. We are thoroughly indulged by our seven amazing staff including chefs, gardeners, manager and personal driver, and spend our days lazing in the pool (with a cocktail), lazing in the spas (with a cocktail), lazing in the massage hut by the river (followed by a cocktail), or lazing in the retreat pavilion which even features a CD and DVD player if you so desire. But the place I found most difficult to stay away from was the open air dining pavilion. Each time I sat down, I would drift off as I visually absorbed my exotic jungle surrounds, only to be brought back to reality by yet another east-meets-west delicacy from the talented chefs. And if you need a break from all that relaxing, you literally only need to walk up the stairs to take a stroll to the left or to the right and you will be experiencing the true soul of Bali. Mingle with the kids, talk with the locals, discover hidden temples and soak up the famed warmth and generosity of these beautiful people. While this leaves very little incentive to leave our haven, both villas offer a private driver who is at our beck and call, day and night, so the action of Kuta, Ubud, Seminyak and beyond is always within easy reach.

We only had the opportunity to briefly visit Villa Sungai, sharing another incredible meal in the gorgeous dining pavilion overlooking the infinity edge lap pool, surrounded by flickering tea light candles – talk about romantic! Villa Sungai envelops one with a beautifully intimate feel, with just three luxurious king-size villas which are dotted around the lap pool, overlooking the river and jungle beyond. Villa Sungai also boasts seven staff, personal driver, masseuses on call, and an identical level of luxury and indulgence as Villa Kembali.

While the architecture, design, food and facilities of the Collection are first class, it is the service and uncompromising attention to detail which really sets these properties apart. Brisbane-based managers of the Collection, Pamela and Alan Hayes, simply wanted to create a supreme getaway destination, a place where they themselves would love to retreat. As Pamela says, "We wanted to make it a five star experience from start to end. For us, it was all about the service. Getting that right was paramount". Their uniquely personal approach to the design, management and overall function of the resorts ensures that each guest comes away from their stay with a completely individual experience. Ultimately there are no rules set in stone for what can and can't be done for guests – if it is possible, they will try to arrange it for you.

As a result the staff could not possibly have treated us with any more grace, charm or generosity. Most are locals from Cepaka village and as such are working amongst friends which lends a wonderful sense of community to the group. The level of service was something I have never experienced before. We were treated like royalty and family at the same time.

While hiring out an entire resort might be a little too indulgent for some, it also makes a fabulous alternative for couples who would like to surround themselves with their closest family and friends in the lead up to an intimate wedding in Bali, as well as making for a great place to celebrate in the days afterwards. Where else would you have the opportunity to swan around your very own private villa complex with nothing but a pool, spa, masseuses, and seven staff to keep you occupied and satisfied? You are in a world of your own. A five-star haven all to yourself with no other random honeymooners, holiday makers, children or touring football teams to disturb you. After all, while it is not traditional to invite friends and family on your honeymoon, at least you are able to choose exactly who you will share it with. And let's face it, who wouldn't want an excuse to keep their wedding celebrations kicking on for longer than just one day? It would make for a fantastically fun, soul enriching experience which could only be a great start to any marriage!

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Web: www.baliluxuryvillacollection.com Email: info@baliluxuryvillacollection.com.
Getting There: Bali's own airline Air Paradise International has commenced direct flights from Brisbane to Bali twice a week at competitive rates. For further details visit: www.airparadise.com.au.

