

# Bali

## BEYOND KUTA

Mushroom Bay (nicknamed  
honeymoon Bay), Nusa  
Lembongan

It's time to give Bali a break and remember it does have a better side. All you need is 90 minutes and a spirit of adventure

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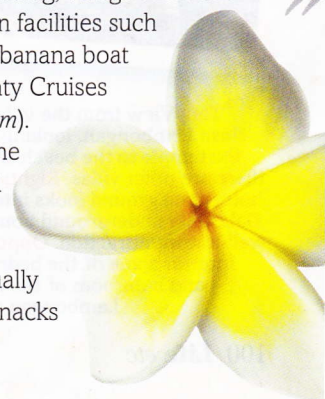
Bali hasn't exactly been the best self-promoter over the past six years. The bomb attacks brought the unthinkable far too close to home and the notorious chaos of Kuta doesn't particularly encourage relaxation. Despite this, more than 4 million foreign tourists visited Bali in 2008 — and I was one of them. With a bit of planning, I discovered ways to avoid the madness of Kuta Beach while not straying too far from its conveniences.

### Run to paradise

Arriving at Nusa Lembongan is like stumbling on a pocket of fresh air after being in a pool of pollution. A 60-minute ferry ride east from the mainland's Sanur (15km northeast of Kuta) and this island will greet you with a blanket of sea shimmering like glass, displaying spectacular coral gardens brimming with ocean life and a selection of resorts and bungalows nestled in beach bays and dotted along the cliff's edge, enticing you to take your pick.

Many of the island's resorts also offer day cruises to Nusa Lembongan aboard their luxury boats, which anchor alongside a huge pontoon. Packages, priced at around \$130, generally include transport to the island, meals, snorkelling, village tours and use of their pontoon facilities such as water slides and banana boat rides. Also try Bounty Cruises ([balibountycruises.com](http://balibountycruises.com)).

Remember that the best time to snorkel on Lembongan is before 10am, when the day trippers usually arrive. Pack some snacks



and ask your resort to drop you off at one of the pontoons for the morning.

It's advisable to pre-book accommodation and don't necessarily limit yourself to what travel agents have to offer. My agent booked me into the four-star, \$150-a-night Waka Nusa ([wakanusa-bali.com](http://wakanusa-bali.com)) — one of Mushroom Bay's lush resorts — complete with a selection of stunning stand-alone thatched-roofed bungalows with enormous canopy beds, a tranquil beauty spa hut and edge-of-the-sand delectable dining.

It was heaven for honeymooners but perhaps not the best choice for a 37-year-old single woman, the serenity somewhat bordering on boring. And on the second night in a row as the only customer eating at the restaurant-made-for-romance, I almost felt compelled to stare into my own eyes and gush about how gorgeous I looked by candlelight.

I later learnt this southwest area of the island is appropriately nicknamed Honeymoon Bay, but if you're a couple or a family looking for a bit of seclusion, this is paradise on a platter.

For other accommodation in this area, visit [nusalembonganresort.com](http://nusalembonganresort.com) (from \$250 a night); [balihaicruises.com](http://balihaicruises.com) for Hai Tide Huts (from \$160 a night); and [tanisvillas.com](http://tanisvillas.com) (from \$70 a night).

For a little more frivolity, try the number of options perched along the cliff: [lembonganbeachvillas.com](http://lembonganbeachvillas.com) (from \$265 a night); [batukaranglembongan.com](http://batukaranglembongan.com) (from \$250 a night); [bali-activities.com/resort](http://bali-activities.com/resort) for Coconuts



**Top:** View from the villas on Nusa Lembongan, looking past the temple to the beach where there are other villas. **Right:** This hole in the ground looks into the Gala Gala underground house, a well-known attraction. **Opposite:** Interior shots of the bedroom and bathroom of the Nusa Lembongan villa.



Beach Resort (from \$90 a night) and [playgroundslembongan.com](http://playgroundslembongan.com) (from \$60 a night).

The island offers exactly what a tropical holiday should be: nothing to do but relax and make use of a smorgasbord of environmental goodness courtesy of Mother Nature. Surfing and snorkelling occupied most of my water-based itinerary, but also available were wakeboarding, scuba diving, paragliding, canoeing, glass-bottom boat rides, island and mangrove boat tours and outer reef snorkel experiences. Most of these adventures are either included as part of your resort's package or available for an extra fee (ranging from \$15 to \$150).

At just four-by-three kilometres, the island can be explored in its entirety in just one day. Your choice of transport includes booking into one of the many tours available; going green and walking or renting a bicycle



### Live luxuriously

The Bukit peninsula is a little sigh of relief from its rowdy neighbours, Kuta and Denpasar, and just 20km away. This southern coastal region of Bali is not particularly marketed as a tourist destination (the reason why is beyond me) but has been well known to surfers for decades with its long beaches, bays, rock-pools, wild monkeys playing on the sand, a few restaurants and steep cliffs that offer you the most spectacular ocean views. Recent developments of stunning accommodation at Bingin and Uluwatu mean you can pick what suits, cuddle up in the lap of luxury and relax. Villas cater from singles to families (or even more) and for varying budgets. Try [baliretreats.com](http://baliretreats.com), [baliluxuryvilla.com](http://baliluxuryvilla.com), [uluwatuwillasonline.com](http://uluwatuwillasonline.com); [baliluxuryprivatevillas.com](http://baliluxuryprivatevillas.com) or [bluepointbayvillas.com](http://bluepointbayvillas.com).



(although pack your stamina as there are a few hills and rough roads to tackle); or doing as I did and renting a moped (but don't do as I did and nearly run it off a ramp into the ocean). Thankfully, no limbs were lost; just a little dignity due to my audience of gobsmacked locals.

I began my day excursion with a sunrise snorkel along the rock ridges of Mushroom Bay, exploring my own aquatic amusement park, then rode south, past the local school to hoots from a field of students, down to Dream Beach. A lonesome Mexicana-style

resort sat snug in the southern corner of the beach with one-step access to the sand. While I'm told its accommodation is quite simple, a seaside sip of something at the bar/cafe is a must for its five-star ocean view. If you're tempted to take a dip on this side of the island, do so with extreme caution as the rips are particularly dangerous.

I negotiated the narrow streets of Lembongan Village, past local dwellings and market stalls, while blasts of traditional Balinese music echoed from the surrounding temples. It seemed the villagers were

preparing for a religious ceremony, as women carried croque en bouche-style pyramids of fruit on their heads. I chortled to myself that it gave "I'll bring a plate of something" a whole new meaning.

In the town's centre I went deep — literally — into Nusa Lembongan history. *Gala gala* is an underground house, the result of one man's desire for a bit of peace and quiet taken to the extreme. In 1961, Made Bayasa felt it was time to take his meditation to new spiritual heights (or lows, as it were), so he took a hammer, a chisel and a big swig of determination and began digging downwards.

Basing his mission on one of his favourite Hindu epics — the *Mahabharata* episode *Vana Parva* — he resurfaced 15 years later, now the proud owner of a 500-square-metre meditation labyrinth, where he lived for 10 years before passing away.

**NUSA LEMBONGAN WILL GREET YOU WITH A BLANKET OF SEA SHIMMERING LIKE GLASS, DISPLAYING SPECTACULAR CORAL GARDENS BRIMMING WITH OCEAN LIFE.**

As I descended via one of the seven entrances, the temperature dropped and a damp dirtiness tickled my nostrils. I got lost in a clay-covered maze of burrows leading to two bedrooms, two kitchens, a sitting room, meditation room, toilet (best not to think about it) and bathroom. It was like a Playboy Mansion for bunnies — the fluffy cute kind, not the blonde double-D kind. Ask your resort for tour information or directions to meander around on your own time.

Resurfacing to higher ground, I ventured northeast along the coastal road. A smell permeated, like a concoction of ocean life and salty air bottled up as the island's signature scent and on closer inspection it seemed seaweed was the culprit:

paddocks of brown, worm-like weeds spread out on the side of the road, drying in the sun.

A local boy, nicknamed Robot, whose parents were seaweed farmers, explained this was the community's main source of income. The waters of Nusa Lembongan provide the essential elements — clean ocean that's protected by the reef from too much movement — for successful seaweed growth. Plantations are farmed on the northwest side of the island with produce sold primarily to other parts of Asia for cosmetic and food-processing purposes.

Robot quipped that there's concern among the elders regarding the industry's future because the next generation is not particularly keen on following in their parents' labour-intensive footsteps. Let's hope for sushi's sake he's wrong.

It closed in on dinner time, so I made my way to the northwest stretch of the island

where I discovered a variety of restaurants. I settled on a beachside hot spot (and Robot's favourite), Scooby Doos (shocking name, spectacular seafood), and slipped into culinary bliss as I devoured my two \$10 chargrilled lobsters, looked over the ocean and sucked into my lungs my new favourite fragrance: seaweed.

### Mountain high

"Ha, Ubud just like Kuta now," a local sneered to me, before explaining how this popular mountain town has fast become crowded and saturated with tourism gimmicks. With a close friend at my disposal who lives in Bali, speaks the language, has a car and is often looking for any plausible excuse to escape the kids for a day, the opportunity to travel to the mountains beyond the brochures was too good to resist. We kissed Kuta goodbye and ventured north.

THE ISLAND OFFERS EXACTLY WHAT A TROPICAL HOLIDAY SHOULD BE: NOTHING TO DO BUT RELAX AND MAKE USE OF THE SMORGASBORD OF ENVIRONMENTAL GOODNESS.



**Above:** Relaxation Bali-style in a mountain rock pool. **Below:** A group of colourful offerings. **Right:** Resort located on the Uluwatu clifftop on Bali's Bukit Peninsula. **Opposite page:** Seminyak is a homewares shopper's paradise.



## Bypass the bartering

If the spruiking and crowds surrounding the market stall mayhem of Kuta turn you off shopping, retreat 5km north to Seminyak. Boutiques beckon from every direction, tempting you with designer clothes, art and sculptures, craft and homewares. And after your hectic day of retail therapy, head beachside where it's Seminyak tradition to reward yourself with a cocktail at sunset. Then wander to the main street to treat your tastebuds to fine dining at the plethora of high-class restaurants on offer in the area.

Land Villas, take the first left, which will lead you through Angseri, a traditional Balinese village with narrow streets, self-made homes and a real sense of the community's free spirit and contented, simple lifestyle. About 15km along that road, take another left at the Air Panas Alam (hot water spring) sign and drive with caution down the narrow road into the carpark. Don't be surprised if you see naked villagers behind the bushes making use of the hot water run-off as their bathing area; after all, everyone deserves a little luxury.

Pay the 20,000 rupiah (\$2.50) entry fee then proceed up the stairs, along the ridge and down the hill to your right, where you'll stroll past yet another rice paddy, and enter the hot springs area. Now, if you prepare yourself — it's not a Westernised tourist hot spot — and keep your expectations fairly low as far as facilities go, you won't risk bitter disappointment. While I found the change rooms whiffy and in need of a good scrub, the outside area was well worth a few seconds of breath holding.

The main pool sat at the base of the cliff, brought to life by flashes of greens and reds of the surrounding gardens, and overlooked a waterfall toppling down the rocks. I suggest packing a picnic and making a day of mingling with the locals at this tranquil, family-friendly jewel in the crown of Bali's countryside.

If you don't have a local as a friend, you can book a tour or go it your own way and hire "transport" for the day (\$60-\$100). Ask your hotel for assistance, as they may have a regular driver.

*Life etc* suggests checking [dfat.gov.au](http://dfat.gov.au) before travelling to Bali. ♦



There was barely enough time to catch up on the past year before rice fields and hills hugged both sides of the road and around each bend our breath was whipped away by views of multiple shades of green clashing in a montage of tropical foliage and fields.

We journeyed through Tabanan and Penebel, then decided to end our road trip 90 minutes later in Jatiluwih (30 minutes northwest of Ubud). Roughly translating to "truly marvellous", Jatiluwih village is perched on the ledge of Bali's highlands with a spectacular view of rice crops and their neatly descending steps cradling pools of muddy water. This lavish landscape, plus the production of Bali's most useful grain, has put this area on UNESCO's World Heritage Site tentative list. It's the truest testament to how Bali used to be: untouched, raw and simply stunning.

On the main road taking you to Jatiluwih,

you will eventually see a row of cream-coloured, thatched-roofed villas lining the ridge on the right (Bali Nature Land Villas and Spa). This was the only accommodation we came across in the area. The best way to secure a booking is through Bali Nature Land Tours ([balinatureland.com](http://balinatureland.com)), plus you can upgrade to relaxation and beauty spa or yoga and meditation pamper packages (from \$150 a night).

Other adventures they offer include river rafting, rice paddy treks, ATV mountain excursions, horse riding, hikes and village tours. A few touring companies provide similar activities, including [balidiscovery.com](http://balidiscovery.com) and [tours-bali.com](http://tours-bali.com). For more hotel options head 35 minutes south to the larger town of Tabanan.

A local had whispered of a natural hot water spring located conveniently on our way home. Down the hill from Bali Nature

