

The perfect pairing

Mix and match villas in Bali for an enjoyable family holiday

TIM DOUGLAS

A pleasant 20-minute drive from bustling Kuta — the narrow road snaking its way through rice paddies as it hugs Bali's southwest coast — is beautiful Batubelig, a small town boasting a well-known surf break and a new crop of chic stores, cafes and restaurants. Just a few hundred metres from the beach and nestled between a modest smattering of eateries, lie the imposing carved cedar doors to Villa Asta, a charming hideaway with three free-standing buildings that face an enormous pool in landscaped grounds.

We have barely been presented with our frangipani leis and virgin fruit cocktails than our two sons (six and seven) are scaling the pool's adjoining timber 8m-high viewing tower (from which you can glimpse the ocean and neighbouring rice paddies) and freefalling into the



deep water below. It's a sudden performance that takes my breath away, but before I can inhale, they are back at the top ready to jump again.

We settle in for dinner; remarkably, the linen napkins are folded into a shirt and tie, replete with carrot button for the gentlemen and skirt for the ladies. In-house chefs have prepared for us a traditional Balinese curry and our three children (and their dazzled parents) lap it up. Suddenly, the lights go out, and from behind a curtain a butler emerges brandishing a huge caramel mud cake. It's my birthday, and someone in my company has tipped him off. It's a welcome surprise, but there's more in store. My wife and I leave the children to watch a film in the cinema room and retreat to the master bedroom. We open the door to find the bed is covered in rose petals; the arrangement spells, "Happy birthday, Tim". A rose petal arrow points to the outdoor bathroom. What awaits us is like a scene from *American Beauty*: the stone bath is brimming with deep red petals.

Batubelig is also within striking distance of neighbouring Canggu, home to the well-known Canggu Club, an upscale country retreat cum water fun park (mercifully smaller and far more salubrious than Kuta's hypersensory Water Bom). Adults mill about its outdoor dining, sipping Manhattans and martinis, while on the other side of the club children and families make the most of the water park, river float and vertiginous slides. Happily, the Canggu Club daily VIP membership is complimentary with a stay at Villa Asta.

The following day, the children wake early and take to the villa's manicured badminton court. We enjoy a morning Balinese coffee and watch on from the outdoor entertaining area, a huge space above the three bedrooms (Villa Asta sleeps 10) that features another wide-screen TV, table tennis and pool table. A traditional nasi lemak breakfast prepared by the villa chef follows. We take the

Villa Shinta Dewi, Seminyak, top; pool and ensuite bathroom at Villa Asta, above; bedroom at Villa Shinta Dewi, below

kids to the beach, then back to the Canggu Club, but on children's orders return by mid-afternoon. "Can we go 'home', Dad?" the seven-year-old has asked. "I want to jump off the tower again."

Next, on to Seminyak, which over the past few years has enjoyed a growing reputation as the place to go in Bali. It has a booming restaurant trade, thanks in no small part to famous Jalan Laksmana, known colloquially as "Eat Street", and high-end beach clubs (Ku De Ta, Potato Head, Cocoon). This area at the northern end of Kuta's bustling beach precinct has been transformed into a mini-tourist mecca, awash with villas and resorts. Villa Shinta Dewi is one such accommodation choice. The luxury four-bedroom villa is one of a handful of exclusive complexes that comprise the secure Laksmana precinct, just a few hundred metres from Petitenget Beach.

We arrive around midday, and the friendly staff greet us (again with leis and virgin cocktails, of which we could never tire) and help us settle in. The villa is splendidly appointed, with three freestanding residences (two of which are two-storey) built around a pool and bar area. I head to the gym as the kids swim and splash, and we enjoy a Balinese lunch courtesy of the in-house chef before venturing to the beach for a quick surf lesson, followed by dinner at a small eatery on Jalan Laksmana.

The staff organise a driver to take us the following day north to Ubud, the uplands of the island and its cultural heart. We visit the Sacred Monkey Forest Sanctuary in Padangtegal, home to about 600 crab-eating and tourist-pestering macaques, and the rice terraces at Tegallalang before stopping for lunch by the beautiful Tegenungan Waterfall, devouring our nasi goreng as a gaggle of backpackers bathe beneath tonnes of flowing water.

On dropping us safely back to the villa, having negotiated without incident the moped-madness of Kuta in peak hour, the driver mentions he is a keen surfer. One of his sons is a professional, who hires out boards on the beach. We are leaving Bali tomorrow, but we resolve to see him and give the kids one final surf before our return to Sydney. The doors to Shinta Dewi open and we are welcomed "home" again. Tomorrow, we will face the ordeal of the red-eye overnight flight. But for now this is still our holiday home and we have not a care in the world.

Tim Douglas was a guest of Elite Havens.

Checklist

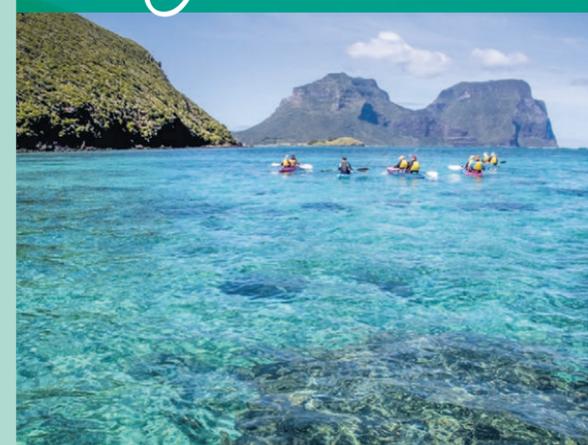
Villa Asta and Villa Shinta Dewi are members of the Elite Havens portfolio of fully staffed villa rentals in Bali. Extras across the villa range include airport transfers, concierge and private chef; sightseeing services can be arranged. Elite Havens also manages properties in Lombok, the south coast of Sri Lanka and Phuket, Thailand. More: elitehavens.com.





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