

# DISCOVERY

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CATHAY PACIFIC

JULY 2008  
2008年7月號



## BALI BLISS

By Tamsin Bradsaw  
Discovery - Cathay Pacific In flight Magazine, July 2008

**Villas are becoming the holiday accommodations of choice on island, offering the benefits of hotels plus a touch of home from home.**

Bali is booming and the rental villas popping up all over the island this year – such as Villa Bugis, Pantai Selatan Estate, LIV Bali and WABI Umalas – are giving its five-star hotels a run for their money.

They offer all the benefits of the traditional hotel experience and more. At a 500-room hotel, you may find your laps of the pool interrupted by fellow guest or the noise from the next table cutting into your romantic sunset tête-à-tête. By contrast, a villa has a private pool, garden and dining area. The space is yours to entertain, play with your children or just laze around.

Villas also offer a superior level of safety compared with many hotels. Value for money helps make the villa an attractive option. Two - to five-bedroom villas average between US\$250 and US\$600 a night, while a single five-star hotel room costs about US\$450.

Most Bali villas come with staff to cater to your needs – from meals and maid service to massage and islands tours. The downside is that the level of service may not be the same as a hotel. At a villa, you won't find yourself surrounded by 400 hotel-trained staff at your beck and call around the clock.

"If you want ice-cream at 4am, it's just not going to happen," says Ian Macaulay, president director of property agency Elite Havens. And at a private villa, says Peter Rieger, chief executive of Bali.com: "You have to order your meals a few hours in advance as the staff will have to buy fresh ingredients for your requested dishes.

Lewis Norman, owner of the Alu Bali Villas in Seminyak, encourages first-timers to Bali take a staffed villa to get a feel for the island. Anita Lococo, owner of Bali Tropical Villas, an up market villa rental agency, suggests newcomers might wish to stay at a hotel on their first visit to get a feel for the island.

Hotel-run villas may be the ideal compromise and plenty of resort groups are catching on to the idea, including Four Seasons, Oberoi Hotels and Resorts and Ritz-Carlton. Even Singapore's Raffles Hotels and Resorts is following the trend, with its villas set to open in 2010.

These hotel villas have access to 24-hour room service and restaurants and bars are on hand. Their concierge can advise on tours of the island at the drop of a hat.

An alternative is an agent to organize a speedy run through the VIP lane at customs and arrange babysitters and an experienced chauffeur. Rental agencies often include a car and driver in the price of the villa or supply one at a small extra cost.

The internet is useful when it comes to finding a villa, although you may not get the full picture online – a bit of airbrushing can be misleading.

It is helpful to know the area in which you plan to rent so you don't end up miles from anywhere.

Seminyak is ideal for those seeking action as it is home to beaches, bars, boutiques and restaurants. Macaulay says the most popular villas are within 45 minutes' drive of the area. This he describes as "the KU DE TA effect," referring to famous beachside restaurant and lounge KU DE TA in Seminyak.

Remember to book ahead. Peak seasons – Christmas, New Year and August – and high seasons – July, September, Easter and Lunar New Year – fill up quickly. Europeans and North Americans often reserve villas nine months ahead.

Despite the surge in villa bookings, "hotels are still a great part of the holiday mix", says Norman. It depends on your needs. For a family or a group of friends, a villa "brings a lot more fun to the holiday", he says.