

DENIZEN – EAST RESIDENCE & SPA

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TRAVEL: BALI BY INA BAJAJ

THE LUXURY SPA DIRECTOR TAKES US THROUGH HER ADOPTED SECOND HOME

Story by Louisa Penney



East Day Spa owner Ina Bajaj leads something of a jet-setter's life travelling the globe in search of new spa treatments and overseeing the management of her luxury spas in Wellington, Auckland, Melbourne and Bali. Ina lives in Auckland but considers Bali to be her second home after falling in love with the Indonesian island while recruiting massage therapists for her Auckland spa. In 2008, Ina bought land amongst the emerald rice fields of Canggu and set about building her dream home. The labour of love resulted in the luxurious private retreat East Residence and Spa. Here the resident spa guru Ina takes us on a tour of her favourite spots in her adopted home, Bali.

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rice fields of Canggu and set about building her dream home. The labour of love resulted in the luxurious private retreat East Residence and Spa. Here the resident spa guru, Ina, takes us on a tour of her favourite spots in her adopted home, Bali.

Maya Ubud Spa, Ubud

Bali is heaven for spa junkies - the Balinese have perfected the art of pampering and relaxation. Because our in-house spa at East Residence is available exclusively to house guests, I usually visit the Maya Ubud Spa. This hidden gem is set in 10 hectares of hillside garden, stretching along a peninsula high above two river valleys. To get to the riverside spa, you have to travel on an outdoor lift, 30 metres down through the jungle. You are literally submerged in nature with waterfalls and thick green forests completely enveloping you, it's like having a massage in Jurassic Park. (Jl. Gunung Sari, Peliatan, Ubud.)

www.mayaubud.com

Ibu Oka, Ubud

I first went to this humble Ubud restaurant before Rick Stein gave it his seal of approval and I must admit I did wonder what I'd got myself into. The surroundings are far from salubrious – you sit on a mat on the floor - but don't let the décor deter you. Ibu Oka's suckling pig is exquisite. It's stuffed with exotic spices and herbs, which give it a wonderfully unique flavour and the crackling is roasted to perfection. It's one of the best meals you'll find in Bali and it costs less than \$4 a plate. Open between 11-3pm, Ibu Oka is the perfect spot for a low-key lunch. (Jl. Suweta/Tegal Sari No. 2, Ubud.)

Echo Beach

Our local beach is one of the world's most famous surfing beaches. I love visiting at sunrise to watch the surfies riding the waves. Echo Beach's fresh seafood barbecues are legendary. You buy your fish or seafood by the kilo and they cook it for you. On Sundays up to 500 surfies and locals gather at sunset to listen to a band and indulge in fresh fish and mouth-watering ribs. Enjoy the beach now because the cranes have arrived and the skyscrapers are coming. That's one of the heartbreaking things about Bali; the developers have a knack of finding your secret spots...

Desa Seni, Canggu

Desa Seni means 'art village' and this yoga retreat nestled in Canggu's rice fields is renowned for 'celebrating the artistry of living'. I was introduced to Desa Seni by my lovely friend April, who'd moved from the States to Bali sight unseen with her husband and two kids. When April told me she was taking me to a yoga retreat for lunch I was terrified it was only going to serve mung beans and spirulina – but I was pleasantly surprised to find they serve a wide menu, including meat dishes, along with their delicious home-grown organic veges. Desa Seni offers everything from yoga retreats and Indonesian cooking lessons to art exhibitions. It's a magical haven for those wanting to explore the culture, religion and food of Indonesia. (Jl. Subak Sari #13 Pantai Berawa, Canggu.)

www.desaseni.com

Kupu Kupu Barong, Ubud

I stumbled upon Kupu Kupu Barong while searching for a cold drink on a searing hot day. It ended up being the best iced coffee I've ever had in the most romantic setting I've ever seen. Cocooned in lush tropical gardens overlooking the mighty Ayung River, this idyllic retreat is where Mick Jagger and Jerry Hall got married. When I told the staff I was a bit of a Stones' fan, they showed me the suite where Mick and Jerry honeymooned! Kupu Kupu Barong also has one of the most unique spas I've seen, nestled in the topmost branches of an enormous old mango tree. Divine. (Jl. Raya Kedewatan, Ubud.)

www.kupubarongubud.com

Alila Hotel, Uluwatu

The hugely popular Rock Bar, perched on the rocks at the base of towering cliffs, is always swamped by crowds of tourists but there's a secret gem nearby that has equally impressive views and none of the cues of tourists. The Alila Hotel has an outdoor restaurant cantilevered over a cliff with spectacular views over the Indian Ocean. It's not for those who are scared of heights, as there is a ten storey drop down to the sea. Sit back with a cocktail and savour the power of nature. Simply breathtaking. (Jl. Belimbing Sari Banjar Tambiyak, Desa Pecatu.)

<http://www.alilahotels.com/uluwatu>

Naughty Nuri's, Ubud

Bali has a lively ex-pat community and one of their favourite after-dark haunts is Naughty Nuri's in Ubud. The bar serves sensational margaritas and martinis. It's the perfect place to celebrate the Balinese New Year's Eve, where locals chase away the island's ghosts and then party 'til dawn. (Jl. Raya, Sanggingan, Ubud)

www.naughtynuribali.com

Tanah Lot, Beraban

One of my favourite places to soak up the soul of Bali is the stunning Tanah Lot Temple. It is perched in the ocean on a rocky outcrop that has been shaped by the waves over the years. The temple's resident priests bless you with holy water from a fresh water stream that runs past the temple. If you can, visit at sunset when the golden red skies frame the temple. It evokes the mysticism and serenity that makes Bali truly unique. (Beraban Village, Kediri, Tabanan).

www.tanahlot.net/home