

Premium Space Bali

Plenty of room to just relax

These villas were designed with Australians in mind, writes **Christine McCabe**

THERE'S nothing our driver Gede can't find or fix, whether it be tracking down a reputable fish doctor or packing and wrapping ungainly shopping items for the midnight flight home.

Guests of the Space at Bali villas in stylish Seminyak enjoy not only the services of the unflappable Gede but a large team of housekeepers, chefs and gardeners, all on hand to ensure a do-nothing holiday. The heaviest thing you'll lift all week is a cocktail.

As for the fish doctor, well, along with faux Paul Smith leather bags, this seems to be the latest trend sweeping Bali: schools of tiny fish assembled to nibble the dead skin cells off weary holidaymakers' feet.

Gede (pronounced g'day, thereby resulting in plenty of enjoyment for

Aussie guests) is sceptical about this latest fad, but sticking one's tootsies into a tank of hungry fish is fun providing you're not too ticklish (expect to pay about \$8 to \$10 for 20 minutes).

With sandal-perfect, fish-detailed toes you're then ready to tackle the shops and restaurants of Bali's coolest precinct. The food scene in and around Seminyak is livelier than ever. Indeed, more exciting than Singapore given the region's size, says Will Meyrick, former Sydney-based chef (Longrain and Jimmy Liks), who now runs Sarong on Jalan Petitenget.

This cool bar and restaurant is one of the area's most popular eateries, offering a wonderfully diverse menu inspired by the street food of South-



SOARING CEILINGS: A bedroom in one of the chic Space villas.

East Asia. The kitchen includes a tandoor oven and idiosyncratic team of chefs and cooks, several recruited by Will from street stalls and tiny warungs. (Watch for his new Chinese restaurant Porcelain, opening later this year.)

Savvy Sarong is only one of a handful of great little restaurants to be found in the area, from an authentic French bistro, Sip, owned and run by a Parisian sommelier and serving old-fashioned dishes of the steak frite variety ("at Sip we don't puree vegetables, the vinegar is not balsamic and nothing is on a bed of something", the menu states), to the new Metis, an elegant pavilion cantilevered above a rice field with adjoining patisserie and antique and jewellery stores. The French-Mediterranean food comes courtesy of Nicolas Doudou Tourneville, formerly of Kafe Warisan, an eatery well known to Bali regulars.

Then there are the old favourites such as La Lucciola, a double-storey thatched pavilion set on a refreshingly quiet stretch of beach near the Oberoi. Reserve an upstairs table to enjoy the cooling afternoon sea breezes before tucking into a plate of shredded duck salad tossed with cress, pear and roasted hazelnuts.

Always popular, and invariably jumping, is the beachfront Ku De Ta, celebrating its 10th anniversary this year. There's probably nowhere better for sunset cocktails.

But if you haven't the energy to hang with the cool crowd, why not just relax back at the villa, lounging by the pool in daggy T-shirt and shorts while perusing the extensive dinner menu.



POOLED RESOURCES: With six separate but connecting villas, Space is perfect for travelling with friends.

Is it to be pizzas, an Aussie-style barbecue or traditional Indonesian family dinner?

Villa digs are becoming increasingly popular in Seminyak and across Bali, particularly with Australian travellers.

In fact, Space at Bali's director, Swiss-born, Bangkok-based Roger Haumueller, says his villas have been custom-designed for the Australian

market. While Europeans are focused on the beach, Australians have a greater understanding of Bali, he says, and love exploring the restaurants and shops.

They often travel with family or friends so a villa makes perfect sense.

Space at Bali is tucked away down a narrow laneway a short walk from the beach.

As the name implies the villas place a premium on something Australians also value – space. Each 600sq m, two-bedroom thatched pavilion, with soaring ceiling, opens directly on to a roomy garden and larger-than-usual swimming pool. All six villas are interlinked by handsome Javanese doors, allowing groups or families to book as many rooms as they need.

Two identical double bedrooms lie either side of the living area (both opening on to the pool and garden) and feature airconditioning, wall-mounted flat screen televisions, a roomy walk-through dressing area and large, open-air bathroom with deep tub.

The garden, however, forms the hub of villa life, with lawn-lapped pool and a bank of four sun beds, augmented by a large thatched bale with day bed.

Days unwind in a pleasantly soporific manner punctuated by bouts of swimming, eating and the more than occasional shopping excursion.

In the early morning a team of gardeners arrives to primp and tidy (tea and coffee provisions are left in the kitchen for early risers) before housekeeper Daw tiptoes in to rustle up breakfast.

Later you might fancy an in-villa facial or massage – ask for Niti whose fingers of steel can sort out the most entrenched neck and shoulder tension.

Room service meals, cocktails, restaurant bookings, babysitting, incredibly cheap laundry and day touring are all available at the drop of a hat thanks to the expert organisational skills of villa manager Wayam Tana.

Each morning he checks in to see what you might need for the day, whether it be organising lunch at nearby La Lucciola or a day tour to Ubud.

But for my money you need not wander far for the perfect day out. Spend a few hours exploring the shops of Seminyak and nearby Legian (try Disini for jewellery; Lucy's Batik for quality fabrics; Vivacqua for funky

Wish you were here

Space at Bali villas (20 minutes from the airport; 10 minutes from the beach) are priced from \$US300 (\$A340) a night for four people and include American breakfasts.

www.spaceatbali.com



beaded baskets, bags and jewellery; and Tas Maniac for quality faux bags) before relaxing over high tea at the thoroughly charming Biku tea lounge and restaurant, occupying a handsome, teak Javanese house on Jalan Petitenget.

Tuck in to scones and dainty cucumber sandwiches while your tea-leaves are read – promising, one hopes, a swift return to Bali where there's room to spare at Space.