

Bali's wedding presence

Affordable luxury with a tropical island backdrop — marrying in Bali can be magic, writes IAN NEUBAUER

Maybe it's the amazing value for money — decadent resorts and restaurants charging a fraction of what you'd pay at home.

Maybe it's the tropical landscape — beaches, mountains, seaside villages and coconut trees.

Or maybe it's the famous hospitality of the people, or the rich, colourful culture they love sharing with visitors.

Either way, Bali is the number-one destination for Australians marrying overseas. An added bonus: you're already at one of the world's great honeymoon destinations.

The most daunting thing about getting married in Bali is the incredible diversity of venues to choose from. From glass-enclosed villas with 360-degree ocean views, to botanical gardens edged by rainforest, to ancient Hindu temples that look like movie sets, Bali is a wedding planner's dream.

To help you plan yours, we list five very different venues at very different price points at five different parts of the island.

SPACE VILLAS AT SEMINYAK

North of the airport on Bali's west coast, Seminyak is the most upmarket and exciting part of the island.

Home to legendary beach club Ku De Ta, high-end boutiques like Horn Emporium, bargain-priced spas like Bodyworks and world-class restaurants like Metis,

Seminyak is "the" place to be in Bali.

Seminyak has dozens of top-tier hotels: the W, the Legian and Sea Sentosa Resort among others. But for a more intimate wedding or honeymoon experience, try a private villa with butler service and private pool.

"The villa business is extremely popular in Bali and there are now hundreds of them here. But it's a difficult business to run well," says Stephen Michie, manager of Space at Bali Villas, a series of one and two-bedroom villas behind Seminyak Beach.

"You need a back-up generator in case the power goes out, fast and reliable internet, staff who are fluent in English and hundreds of other little things to make sure every stay is a perfect one.

"At Space we match the hardware — design and construction — with great software — the staff. And they work especially hard when the guests happen to be a bride and groom," Mr Michie says.

Space offers three and five-day wedding packages that as a minimum include a celebrant, civil registrar, all the paperwork and VIP wedding staff. Ceremonies can be private and low-key or outrageous and loud with all the bells and whistles included: flower girls, Balinese dancers and a band and even a whole roasted pig with an apple in its mouth if you fancy.

SEA SENTOSA AT CANGGU

Half an hour's drive from Seminyak but a million metaphorical miles away, the village on Bali's mid-west coast is the neighbourhood of choice for expats living in Bali. Think velvet-green paddies interspersed with Hindu temples, traditional Balinese homes and an ever-growing number of luxury villas, restaurants, bars, yoga studios and boutiques.

Throw in Echo Beach — one of the world's most famous surfing spots — and you've got a wedding and holiday destination writ large. Scheduled to open in Canggu in time for the high season in December, Sea Sentosa's new fully integrated resort was named World's Best Apartment at London's International Property Awards in December.



Legal stuff

Religious and civil weddings between Australian nationals aged 18 and over in Bali are recognised in Australia. To make it official, you'll have to visit the Australian Consulate in Bali in Denpasar, present ID, fill out forms and pay \$110 in Indonesian rupiah. For more information, visit bali.indonesia.embassy.gov.au and click on "services for Australians". The Department of Foreign Affairs recommends Australians wishing to marry in Bali engage an agent to liaise with bureaucrats, ministers, florists and photographers in Bali. The author uncovered glowing reviews for Bali Tie D'Knot (bali-weddingplanner.com), Bali Mystical Weddings (balimystical.com) and Bali Wedding Butler (baliweddingbutler.com).

The brainchild of former Virgin Asia Pacific chief executive Ian Duffell, it will, on completion, have 150 apartments and penthouses come with private infinity-edged pools, private sunbaths and "vertical gardens" — gardens that grow on walls. Guests will also have three Olympic-size swimming pools, a cabana-lined lagoon pool, a beach club, restaurants, cafes, bars, a retail precinct and even a medical centre.

"We received our first bookings for weddings months before we opened," Ian Duffell says.

"From what I understand, it's hard to find a venue in Bali that can cater to a large number of guests. Our beach club can seat 500 guests in a seafont setting and we can cater to wedding parties of just about any size. We've also got a hairdressing salon, a beauty salon and spa — pastry chefs to make your dream wedding cake and our own photographers. It's a one-stop for getting married in Bali," he says.

ALAM ASMARA AT CANDI DASA

Looking onto the blue waters off Bali's southeast coast, Candi Dasa is the Bali of yesteryear — a tranquil fishing village reminiscent of Seminyak in the 80s.

Diving and snorkelling are the main attractions but it's also great for honeymoons and small weddings. A luxury dive resort and romantic hideaway, Alam Asmara Dive Resort has 12 luxe bungalows wrapped in fishponds, a spa, dive shop, infinity-edged seafont pool and a seafood restaurant.

Alam Asmara's packages are well priced, and include three nights in a three-bedroom bungalow, airport transfers, breakfast, a blessing ceremony, spa treatment and make-up for the bride, flower arrangements, fruit baskets, a wedding cake, photography, a celebrant and all the legal stuff.

"We do secular weddings but it's much more fun to do a Balinese one," manager Ida Bagus Widana says.



Weddings can be secular, religious or traditional Balinese in style.



An exotic culture is one of the many attractions Bali offers couples planning to wed.

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The picturesque Asmara gazebo is a perfect setting for couples exchanging vows.



Space at Bali Villas in Seminyak combines a romantic wedding venue with expert staff.

"We fit the bride and groom in traditional dress and invite a symbolic Hindu priest and, of course, the wedding procession with 11 flower girls and all the

offerings for the ceremony. "The ceremony usually takes place by the pool but we can do it anywhere — on the beach, there are so many to choose from, or in

the Tirtaganga Water Palace if they like; it's very beautiful there. We also take the bride and groom to Denpasar to sign all the papers and make it official. We've only done seven weddings so far, but they all came out perfect. It made all of us very happy here," Mr Widana says.

MURNI'S HOUSES AT UBUD

Set in a velvet-green valley in south-central Bali, Ubud is the island's spiritual capital. The town is overflowing with Hindu temples — thousands, in fact. Don't miss the lotus pond-ensconced Pura Saraswati temple next door to Starbucks or the Gunung Kawi archaeological park half an hour out of town. And while it's a no-brainer destination for Hindu weddings, this

moss-covered fairytale of a place is also a popular destination for Christian weddings.

The best place to have one is Murni's Warung. A four-storey, open-air eatery and bar overlooking a jungle-clad bend of the Campuan River, it was the first restaurant to open in Ubud back in 1974.

A few blocks away is Murni's Houses — a traditional Balinese compound with four temple-like houses and an award-winning day spa set in a pixie's garden.

"Why get married in Ubud? For starters it's more traditional and authentically Balinese. It's also cooler than the coast, which can be very hot, and being hot is difficult in formal dress," says owner

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Murni, who like many Indonesians goes by one name only.

"But the main difference is the scenery — many people like the backdrop of rice terraces.

"I've lost count of how many weddings we've done over the years," Murni goes on. "I enjoyed them all but the most memorable was the first as I wasn't sure that we could do it. I was more nervous than the bride but we set the place up beautifully for the wedding by the pool: lots of tropical flower

arrangements, tall Balinese umbrellas, ritual offerings and an antique table for the wedding book. Then it poured! We quickly had to change everything and have the ceremony in my living room. But it all went well. And it gave us the confidence that we could do weddings well because we could deal with the unexpected," Murni says.

AYANA AT JIMBARAN BAY

You know you've made it when you stroll into the Ayana Resort & Spa's voluminous lobby, where vast sheets of marble tumble down into staccatos of swimming pools and fountain walls.

Set on 31ha of land in a cliff overlooking Jimbaran Bay, this 290-room, 78-villa property is more than luxe — it's over the top.

Ayana's Themes Marins Spa, home to the world's largest aquatronic therapy pool, has won a slew of industry awards.

Its most popular watering hole, the aptly named Rock Bar, is set in a limestone cliff overlooking the ocean and recognised as one of world's best bars with a view. Back on ground level, Ayana's Italian eatery Sami Sami dishes out perfect wood-fired pizzas and melt-in-the-mouth spinach ravioli.

Dava, a French-Asian eatery by celebrated Singaporean chef Jusman So, does a mushroom cappuccino that defies description.



The wedding gazebo is one of six venues where you can tie the knot at the Ayana Resort & Spa.

There's also a fitness centre, tennis court, golf putting course, a perfumery where you can make your own scent, cooking classes, a kid's club and a private beach.

A stay in Ayana doesn't come cheap and neither does a wedding. But for couples looking for a "wow" factor, the property delivers in spades with the kind of fastidious attention to detail brides will appreciate.

"Our point of distinction is the choice we offer in terms of venues," says spokesperson Marian Hinchliffe.

"We have six in total — two glass chapels with uninterrupted ocean views and four garden venues, one that's got a canopy of 2000 white frangipanis. And because the resort is so big, all these venues are very private.

"Can we organise weddings? I should hope so. We have 20 full-time wedding planners, an in-house bridal boutique and even a grand ballroom for large affairs. And if your guests are up for it, the party can continue at Rock Bar until the early hours of the morning," she says.

fact file

- Space at Bali Villas is at Jalan Drupadi, Seminyak. Phone +62 361 731 100 and go to spaceatbali.com. One-bedroom villas are from \$272 and two-bedroom villas are from \$367.
- Ayana Resort is at Jalan Karang Mas Sejahtera, Jimbaran. Phone +62 361 170 2222 and go to ayanaresort.com. Standard rooms are from \$228 and villas are from \$731 a night.
- Murni's Houses are at Jalan Raya Ubud, phone 62 361 975 165 and go to murnis.com. Suites are from \$76 and two bedroom houses are from \$132.
- Alam Asmara Dive Resort is at Jalan Raya, Candi Dasa. Phone +62 361 752 520 and go to alamasmara.com. Suites are from \$79 a night.
- Sea Sentosa is at Jalan Pantai Sentosa, Echo Beach. Phone +62 361 888 1234 and go to seasentosa.com. One-bedroom apartments are from \$225 a night and three-bedroom penthouses with a private pool are from \$1500.

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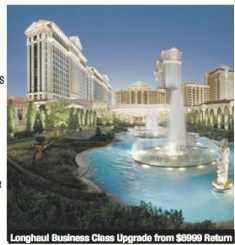
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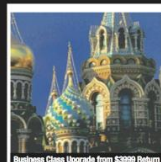
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