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Bali Buy

Real estate on the Indonesian island has weathered the storm with typical grace and aplomb **BY ANNIE KELLY**

Bali. The name alone conjures images of women in brightly colored sarongs carrying piled-high offerings on their heads to the temple, and serene vistas of terraced rice paddies studded with palm trees.

Now deskbound dreams of escape to this celebrated tropical island can become a reality. Property in Bali has become much easier to acquire and maintain, thanks to many new real estate agents and management companies that have sprung up.

The Balinese are Hindu-Buddhists who have created a peaceful culture that was sadly rocked by a terrorist bomb that exploded outside a Kuta Beach nightclub in 2002. But they have rebounded. Hotels are now filled to capacity, especially during the summer vacation season in August. And the island was unscathed by the region's recent tsunami and earthquakes.

Bali has been a holiday destination for nearly 30 years, yet it is still possible to find your own oasis, either by the beach



Opposite: The author looks at the waters of the Jimbaran Bay from the pool of a suite at the Four Seasons resort, landscaped and designed by Made Wijaya.

This page, top: A bathtub in one of the villas at the Four Seasons overlooks a courtyard garden.

or in the cooler mountain regions near Ubud. The second home market draws a wide range of vacationers, including Indonesians from Jakarta, Americans based in Asia as well as Australians.

Working with a real estate agent is essential when negotiating through the home ownership process. The most conventional method of owning land is through a long-term lease for up to 30

This page, bottom: Designed in the style of private compounds, the villa suites at the Four Seasons are incredibly popular with guests and have earned the hotel numerous awards.



Photo: © Four Seasons Resort Bali at Jimbaran Bay



years, as only Indonesians can buy land outright. There are some ways to buy land freehold, but most experts recommend investigating them thoroughly before making a commitment.

Elite Havens was founded in 1998, originally as a property management company. Now it handles many of the island's top property sales and rentals. "There are a variety of avenues to secure the underlying title," explains Ric Shreves, Elite Havens' managing director, who moved to Asia from Texas.

"Bali is the luxury holiday destination for the Asia Pacific region, and is in the early stages of development compared to the Mediterranean or the Caribbean." Elite Havens has a property for sale near the beach at Canggu for \$475,000, on about half an acre.

The most popular beaches are on the south side of the island, near the Ngurah Rai International Airport in Denpasar. Surfers made this corner of the island popular in the 1960s, and now the Kuta Beach area is packed with shops, restaurants and bumper-to-bumper traffic. This has forced higher-quality housing to move further west along the coast to Seminyak and Kerobokan, where there are numerous new developments.

Jimbaran Bay is minutes away from the airport and houses two top resorts: the Ritz-Carlton and the Four Seasons Resort at Jimbaran Bay. The Chedi Villas, also on Jimbaran Bay, is a new development of 23 villas, each approximately 3,600 square feet in size, with interiors styled by internationally known Indonesian decorator Jaya Ibrahim. The

SOURCES

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Opposite, top: A private villa, currently for sale through Elite Havens, is part of the Begawan Giri luxury hotel complex in the hills near Ubud.

Opposite, bottom: A peaceful garden corner of Made Wijaya's home, Villa Babek, in Sanu. The pond, filled with tropical water plants, is lit up at night.

This page: Villa Babek features Wijaya's extensive collection of Indonesian antiques and statuary.

Jewelry designers John and Cynthia Handy built a house on stilts near Ubud, so as not to block the spectacular view. Their small pool overlooks the valley of the River Ayung.

villas can be purchased fully furnished for about \$330,000, and will be run by the well-known Asian hotel management company GHM.

Sanur was the first upscale hotel area in the 1970s, and tucked in between the bypass and the beaches are some fashionable suburban neighborhoods. The first luxury development, Batu Jimbar, was built in the early 1970s by the owner of the Tanjung Sari hotel and is still a hub of activity, especially for long-term visitors to the island.

In the rural hills of Ubud, where Balinese culture thrives, more luxury hotels

dot the landscape. Ubud's backdrop of distant volcanoes and vistas of green rice fields has attracted many smaller spas, hotels and restaurants, along with shops selling textiles, clothing and housewares along its narrow streets.

Built at the bottom of one of the most spectacular valleys is the Four Seasons Resort at Sayan, which—along with the fabled Amanjari hotel and the luxurious Begawan Giri Estate—are among Bali's best-known sites. One of Begawan Giri's seven private villas is currently for sale—a one-bedroom house offered at \$550,000 by Elite Havens.

If you are considering buying property in Bali, do not let its dazzling beauty make you forget to ask the same questions you would if you were buying a home in rural Connecticut.

Access is important, and so is the availability of well water and the condition of the septic tank. You need to know if the local town council welcomes development, and if it is safe to swim at the nearby beach. Also, the real estate agency should make sure you can get a building permit if you need one, and contemplate the zoning for that particular parcel of land.

Unless you have asked the pertinent questions, you might be shocked at the local traffic noise once you have moved in, or even be washed away if you have neglected to ask how the land drains. Finally, if you want to lease the property, remember that summer rentals should be near shops, beaches, swimming pools, restaurants and entertainment. Villas can lease for \$500 to \$600 a night, depending on facilities.

As the tropical climate is mild, the houses have plenty of open areas, and always include a good-size swimming pool. The basic building unit in Bali is the bale, not unlike the Mexican palapa, which is a thatched, open pavilion that can be customized. Most properties, both private houses and hotels, are built around this model, with walls added for privacy and security and at least one air-conditioned room (usually a meditation room or library) to keep equipment and books dry in the humid rainy season. Wireless broadband access is becoming popular, and is a more reliable alternative to phone lines.

Australian author and landscape designer Made Wijaya, author of two books on Bali, *Tropical Garden Design* and *Architecture of Bali*, has been building private houses on Bali since 1977. His company, PT Wijaya, handles all aspects of design and landscaping, from the ground up.

"In the last five years it has changed," says Wijaya. "Good property management is easy to find, and there are many more services available, and

