The holiday options in Bali are endless: get the wrong fit and you’ll be disappointed. Over the years we have enjoyed the full range of accommodation, from mass-market budget five-star hotels in Kuta to luxury villas in Cepaka and five-star resorts in Ubud, to the child-friendly resorts of Nusa Dua such as the Conrad and Club Med. Now with the kids a little older and on the lookout for a Bali experience that’s more sophisticated (but still fun for the kids), we ventured to Seminyak and a new standard in luxury hospitality suitable for young and old and everything in between. While it isn’t a cheap holiday, it is a fabulous alternative for those with a healthy budget and a hankering for luxury.

Luxury in Seminyak starts at the W Hotel. Right on the beach and in the heart of Seminyak, the W is uber-cool, but by general manager Craig Seaward’s own admission, it’s not for everyone. If you are looking for traditional Bali-style service and design, this probably isn’t the place for you. With more than 20 years’ experience managing hotels, including five years at the Sheraton Perth, Craig was lucky enough to be involved at the W from its conception through to its construction, and to work with an Indonesian owner willing to invest in a grand vision of W-branded style and awesome interior design.

The result is visually arresting. Each space has been meticulously designed in a variety that’s quite stunning: even the various bathrooms come in a bewildering range of styles and designs. It’s almost worth doing a tour of them – who ever thought a bathroom could be so cool?

Craig and the staff live and breathe the philosophy of Whatever/Whenever®. With a large degree of autonomy, staff are encouraged to actively engage and find creative ways to look after guests’ needs. By Craig’s own admission there were nothing problems with this, but the mixed reports from the early days have since been resolved.

Dino, our dedicated concierge/butler/all-round nice guy, helped us with everything from booking our daughter’s birthday party, ordering the cake, and securing a cabana at Waterbom park, right through to restaurant and taxi reservations. From our check-in information, the staff knew when our little girl’s birthday was, and ensured that she returned from the party to balloons, cake, cards, T-shirt and a La La Loopsy doll (about $80 retail), all courtesy of the hotel. Fabulous stuff.

If you are staying in a hotel room, go for the ocean-view rooms on the fourth or fifth floor: they have cool open showers, not what you would expect in a big hotel. We opted for the privacy of a villa, however, with the convenience of the amenities offered by a luxury hotel. The private pools range from 43sqm in the one-bedroom villa to a huge 92sqm in the three-bedroom villa. The bathrooms are huge, with the two-bedroom villa also having a secluded, outdoor shower. All are stocked with some of the best bathroom amenities we have seen. For us, the two-bedroom villa was the best value. Spacious with a fantastic outdoor area, they are a superb option for families or couples wanting a lot of extra space. The only minor gripe (and a major bugbear for Craig) concerns the cobblestones leading from the main resort to the villas. Although visually appealing, they are a nightmare in heels so, if you can, ask for a villa close to the hotel, or be prepared and pack a pair of flat shoes to change into.

The best time to go is Bali low season, because the pool, though large, can get busy, with day beds at a premium. The restaurants were both excellent and designed to be competitive with outside dining options in quality and value, so while the food was superb, we didn’t feel that we were getting screwed with the prices.

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Luxury in Seminyak

The lobby of the W Hotel.

OPPOSITE

Starfish Bloom restaurant at the W.
OUTSIDE THE HOTEL

With everything we wanted just a short stroll away (or, at most, a 10-minute taxi drive), we found little reason to leave Seminyak, except for the obligatory trip to Waterbom Park in Kuta. But if you do choose to venture beyond the hotel grounds, there are countless dining, entertainment and spa choices available.

Your first booking must be at MAMA San. Owned by the same people as the ever-popular Ku De Ta, it has an ‘old meets new’ charm. Interior designer Caroline Usher has created a space reminiscent of old Shanghai, with wood and steel tables sitting alongside classic 1930s Mahjong tables. There are hansom fittings, vintage railway clocks and long Chesterfields which invite you to take a seat and order a drink. The upstairs area evokes an old speakeasy, with lounge chairs and a dimly lit, creating an ethereal dining backdrop.

At night, the fields are dimly lit, creating an ethereal dining backdrop.

Eschewing traditional Asian fare, classically trained French chef Nicolas Tourneville offers a French Mediterranean menu. His escargots (buttery, perfectly cooked with just the right amount of garlic) are recommended, while wild mushroom agnolotti with white truffle (Lasagne) shows an attention to detail not seen in too many kitchens. The Trio of Fish (salmon, coral trout and yellow fin tuna) is simple and very good.

If your appetite demands it, you can enjoy a very generous beef taster, bone marrow and grilled artichokes, or crispy pork belly, cooked for 14 hours. Finish with salted butter cake with cinnamon and Nutella, or deep-fried ice cream with Nutella.

Desserts are not usually our family’s thing in Asian restaurants, but here, things are a little different. Think home-made banana cake with cinnamon and cardamom, or deep-fried ice cream with Nutella. MAMA San is unique experience not to be missed.

For sophistication and exceptional service, Metis offers elegant dining with creative food. The 390-seat restaurant, bar, lounge and private dining area is located on the paddy fields, right in the heart of Seminyak. At night, the fields are dimly lit, creating an ethereal dining backdrop.

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LUXURY VILLA RENTALS - BALI
The Shampoo Lounge is a one-stop shop for beauty treatments of all kinds. It’s located directly below Waterbom Park in Seminyak, Bali. The salon is open 24-hours-a-day, and it’s very busy throughout the night with those wanting to chill and get drunk and the facial begins. Treatment rooms are very modern, with freestanding baths so that you don’t need to leave the room at all, and the salt scrub with a yoghurt body mask is highly recommended. The Shampoo Lounge is a must for young and old alike.

Top tips

► If you’re at Waterbom Park, grab a cabana. It’s a good place to leave your gear, and handy to have a base for the kids to come back to. Also make sure you try the park’s newest ride, The Climax. Step into a glass box, the countdown begins, a trap door opens, and you drop into a water slide filled with nothingness. It’s truly terrifying, and not to be missed (although you should note that you need to weigh a minimum of 48kg to try it).

► Avoid the long immigration queues: the Bali Concierge service makes arriving in Bali infinitely more enjoyable. You are met before immigration and escorted through the lines are avoided, and help is even at hand with your luggage. thebaliconcierge.com/airport-service.html

► If you’ve got a child with a birthday coming up, then Bali is the place to get any sort of cake you can imagine. Princess castles, Barbie cars, superheroes, sofas, handbags, Lego buildings… the only limit is your imagination. ixoracakes.com/gallery

► Staying in a villa with little ones? You may be a bit nervous about the open pool, but fear not: there is now a company providing pool fence hire, installing the pool, but fear not: there is now a company.

► There’s nothing quite like coming home with suitcases full of perfectly washed and ironed clothes. Get your laundry sorted out with your luggage. balipoolfencehire.com/

► The W in Seminyak has become an icon of Bali. Another trip is definitely in order. The W’s AWAY spa includes a new addition to the Seminyak spa scene. Under the watchful eye of the ever-stylish Jari Menari, it’s a one-stop shop for massages and treatments, hair and nails. We opted for the signature facial: expertly massaged while feeling the soft breeze on your skin. Why not try the four-hand massage harmony where two practitioners work together.

► If you’re more of a purist when it comes to hair styling, then you can’t go past the renowned Bali Hair Lounge, very close to MAMA Waterbom Park in Seminyak. W’s AWAY spa, like Whatever/Whenever®, is open 24-hours-a-day, and it’s very busy throughout the night with those wanting to chill out, drink and relax after a big night. We decided to go at 3am, and it was an amazing experience. Pure oxygen is rehaled to assure circulation, bottled tea drunk and the facial begun. Treatment rooms are spacious and luxurious and, as you would expect in a two-star hotel, the therapists were excellent. Laos on, book it at 3am, just because you can!

► While we managed to eat, relax, work and play quite solidly for 17-days, there was still so much to see and do in this tremendously dynamic corner of Bali. Another trip is definitely in order.

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► Butler service, meals, beverages, gratuities & entertainment onboard
► Return private transfers throughout

*Conditions Apply. NHM Licence Number: 9TA18PR016.