



LIVING SPACE

A tropical ambience with a Moroccan flair awaits you at **Space at Bali Villas**, an exclusive property that brings a little spin to villa vacationing

images COURTESY OF SPACE AT BALI VILLAS text MATT ARMITAGE



WITH ITS FLOWER SWEPT DRIVEWAY and high walls, a North African enclave is probably the last thing on your mind as you swing off the scooter-congested roads of Seminyak, Bali into the quiet back street off Jalan Drupadi where you will find Space at Bali. But as you are escorted through the private entrance to your villa, an ornate North African-styled garden unfolds in front of you and you set your eyes for the first time on the geometrically Spanish and Moorish design of your home for the duration of your stay.

The Maghreb-theme is not as abstract as it sounds. Bali is famed for its family compounds and private gardens, a tradition that is directly mirrored in the architectural traditions of Morocco, so the Space approach is a fresh take on the luxury boutique trend that has swept across Bali and is gaining traction across the rest of South East Asia.

And if Bali is the pioneer, then Space is up there with those who have perfected the model. Privacy is the key here. Like most resorts, Space boasts a handsome reception area, but few guests ever see it, let alone experience it. Everyone, including the resort manager, comes to you.

And if Moorish is not your preferred flavour, there are plenty of other properties in the Serene Villas portfolio to meet your specific requirements. The seven Seminyak-based Serene Villas provide a more European aesthetic and family-friendly feel while Puri Tupai Ubud is truly a private experience consisting of twin traditional Balinese joglo houses complete with a tennis court and a 25 metre pool. What they share with Space at Bali is the same dedication to service, privacy and luxury.

Once you are through the doors, it is up to you to define your own experience. With its emphasis on the pool, outdoor communal living and a well-hidden but powerful garden sound system, Space at Bali lends itself to those weekends and breaks where you really want to cut loose and party.

Each villa comes with its own butler who takes care of the property, makes up the room and prepares your breakfast in your villa's kitchen. The butlers can be as visible or as discreet a presence as you wish. In fact, if you wish, the concierge approach can start the moment you touch down at Ngurah Rai airport,

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as the resort can arrange for VIP processing that whisks you past the queues and through the ground clearance procedures and straight to baggage collection.

In theory, each property sleeps four. An open plan, two-storey living area is flanked on either side by the two comfortably appointed bedrooms. In keeping with their Moorish theme, these are cool and shady with high ceilings that allow the heat to rise and vent. Décor is pleasingly minimal – subdued hues on the walls and bright colours adorn the soft furnishings, the bed is flanked by a desk with a day bed opposite and a large flat screen TV is mounted flush to the wall.

And no private retreat worth its salt in this day and age comes without rain showers and free-standing tubs set in an outdoor bathroom. Here, the lush vegetation of the garden again intrudes and you can hear the sounds of birds singing and frogs croaking as you bathe. Canvas screens provide additional privacy and shelter from any passing rain clouds, and nature gets a further reflection in the shape of the locally sourced organic soaps and gels used in the room.

But who wants to spend time in their room? It is the garden and pool that are the

true stars of Space at Bali. Flanked by a decorative gate that also links one villa to another (for groups who want to form a larger compound), it is the focus of the villa day and night. With a brace of sun loungers and circular Bale day bed tucked in a shady corner of the garden, it is the perfect place to lounge away the afternoon.

On the mezzanine floor of the living area, another round day bed overlooks the deep blue water of the infinity pool below, while on the ground floor, half the floor space is given over to a large mirrored coffee table and a combination of deep sofas and chaise lounges. Shaded throughout the day, it is a nice mix of chilled insouciance and sufficiently structured to be suitable for laidback brain-storming by over-stressed execs.

In truth, with an extensive menu that includes delivery items from some of Seminyak's top restaurants and bistros, there is not too much incentive to leave. Add to those a custom-built list of personal spa, fitness and yoga options from specialists who come to your front door, and you are probably unlikely to explore your wider surroundings.

Which could be a shame since dining options

in Seminyak are aplenty. They include the wonderful Sips, a casual French bistro of the kind that is sorely lacking in KL, and the simply stunning Sardines, whose locally sourced fish and organic vegetables are overshadowed by the stunningly lit padi field landscape that surrounds the restaurant.

Of course, for many of us, Bali is such a regular stop on our shopping and leisure trail that it can be difficult to find something new. If you want to skip the normal tourist activities, Space can arrange something a little more whimsical. For example, most people are well acquainted with the centre of Ubud with its markets, galleries and furniture-making but might not know that greater Ubud is made up of dozens of small villages.

Space's friendly driver and default tour guide, Gdai, is an Ubud native whose knowledge of the area is both diverse and comprehensive. As he drives you from *kampung* to *kampung*, you will find colourful spice and wet markets, fruit orchards, flocks of wading birds and the seemingly endless spectacle of temple life, not to mention 15 metre-wide kites soaring high in the air above you as you glory in a side of Bali that few tourists take the time to see. ■