

## STUFF.CO.NZ – Villa Jemma

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### From Kiwi bungalow to Bali villa

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Kiwi-designed Villa Jemma expanded over two levels, with four bedrooms and four bathrooms

This was never going to be an *Eat Pray Love* kind of getaway to Bali. There were two young kids in tow, and my sister's 50th party to host

With little time for soul searching, we went on the hunt for ease and luxury. The way forward was to switch our rumpy Kiwi bungalow for a luxurious villa.

I'd always wondered what it would be like to enjoy a holiday Posh and Becks style – jetting off to a far-flung destination, staying in a private hideaway with beautiful beaches, swimming pools, a personal butler and chef. We were about to find out.

Our villa was based in the heart of busy Seminyak, once a surfing village, now a bustling beach town.

The area offers a good sample of what drives so many people to visit this Indonesian island –there's a great surf beach, temples, shops and hip restaurants and bars.

Seminyak's located in south west Bali, around 10km from Denpasar International Airport. Don't let the distance fool you. Traffic in Bali is unbelievably bad – narrow roads are often choked with cars and this short distance took us an hour and a half. However the journey was worth it.



A spacious open-air living room extended out to a 16-metre pool.

Tucked away down an enclave of private mansions and hidden behind a lush, walled garden was the ultra-luxurious Kiwi-designed Villa Jemma ([villajemma.com](http://villajemma.com)), which expanded over two levels, with four bedrooms and four bathrooms.

The indoor-outdoor master bathroom was so lusciously tropical, my five-year-old asked if this is where *Max* from *Where the Wild Things Are* bathed.



Villa Jemma is tucked away in a secluded enclave off Seminyak's Jalan Laksama.

A spacious open-air living room extended out to a 16-metre pool, and inside a well-equipped kitchen was available to prepare meals.

Many villas come with a team of staff – and we were truly spoilt with ours, which included a 24/7 butler. They helped to host the 50th bash on the day of our arrival and also organised a personalised birthday cake half an hour before the gathering started. They rescued us on scooter after being stuck in traffic for three hours, booked us tours, restaurants and fed us a delicious cooked breakfast at the crack of dawn.

Part of the Elite Havens group, Villa Jemma is next level accommodation costing US\$650 a night, but when sharing with extended family, it is more affordable than a five-star hotel, with some major perks.



The lusciously tropical master bathroom in the villa where, my five year old asked if this is where Max from Where the Wild Things Are bathed.

Our kids couldn't get enough of the huge pool – spending so much time in it they went from sinking like dead weights to baby otters by the time we left. While at resorts you can book children into kids clubs to get some adult time, at a villa it's simple to book a nanny for an extremely tempting NZ\$7 an hour. The Balinese are renowned for their warmth and loving way with children. Our two loved the Balinese nannies who – to be honest – we booked quite often.



The villa's living room had space for a great conga line at my sister's 50th birthday bash.

Although it takes longer to travel there than our favoured Pacific Island getaways, if you can handle the 11-hour flight, Bali is cheaper. We enjoyed a daily \$15 massage, there were \$10 manicures and bargain clothing and gorgeous homewares for sale. The food was phenomenal - fine dining, fresh juices and heavenly smoothies - all at half the price of that in New Zealand.

The famous beach club Ku De Ta was only two minutes' walk away, along with the quirky and very cool La Favella - a bar and restaurant filled with incredible vintage finds, and antiques all set in a exotic overgrown jungle.



Sunbathing at its best. Leo, five, and Alex, three, chill out after a marathon swimming session.

One date night was spent just across the road from the villa at the Samaya resort's Breeze restaurant. We relaxed over a couple of cocktails gazing out to Petitenget Beach enjoying one of Bali's renowned sunsets.

Other must eats included fine dining Asian style at Sarong and Sardine, and some upmarket street food at MamaSan. Bikini had great cocktails and the fun and colourful Motel Mexicola made us feel like we were almost ready to stay up past 11pm.



Samaya resort's Breeze restaurant where we enjoyed a few cocktails as the sun went down over Petitenget Beach.

An invitation to join extended family for dinner at the Indonesian night buffet at the Royal Beach Seminyak Bali had us eating the most delicious babi guling – the island's traditional dish of suckling pig.

We'd often venture out in the mornings with the kids when it was cooler, but footpaths in Bali are few and far between, so be prepared for some challenges. Memorable breakfasts out were spent at Sisterfields, Revolver and Neon Palms – all offering delicious smoothie bowls and great interior décor to enjoy.





One of Bali's best fine dining restaurants is Seminyak's Sarong.

Villa Jemma staff helped us book drivers for day trips away. This is a great way to get around for longer journeys and cost around \$50 for eight hours.

We ventured out on several trips including to the Ubud Monkey Forest. We'd heard the horror stories of vicious monkey attacks – but it seemed they're mainly in pursuit of food.

We stopped at the scenic Tegalang Rice Terrace and the Satri Coffee Plantation, where the valued Luwak coffee is produced. The kids thought it was hilarious to discover the prized coffee beans had to be collected from the manure of the civet – a wild cat that lives in Bali.



By far the best smoothies and mini flat bread tacos were had at Neon Palms.

Bali is renowned for beach clubs and a highlight was a day spent at La Brisa, Canggu (an area also worth exploring), around 20 minutes drive from Seminyak. Located on the shore Echo Beach, it was like spending the day on a rustic shipwreck. At Artotel Beach Club, Sanur, we spent the day dipping in and out of the water at a beautiful white sand beach - perfect for small kids.



The decor at La Brisa beach club, Canggu, was incredible. It was built using reclaimed wood from more than 500 old fishing boats.

As much as we loved exploring, it was always a pleasure to walk through the door to our peaceful oasis and it was tough to say goodbye to the luxuries we'd quickly become used to. We knew we'd be back.

**MORE INFORMATION** Elite Havens manages private villas throughout Bali ([elitehavens.com/bali](http://elitehavens.com/bali))

**GETTING THERE** Air New Zealand and Emirates both offer direct flights to Bali, visit [airnz.co.nz](http://airnz.co.nz) or [emirates.com/nz](http://emirates.com/nz).

### TIPS

- As is often the case with little kids in tow, we had a couple of visits to the emergency services – a split chin and a red ant bite on the eye. The service at Seminyak's Bali Clinic was great but expensive - \$100 plus a visit - so book travel insurance.

- Getting around Bali is cheap, but taxi prices vary wildly and we found it better to head out on foot, rather than face hours sitting in traffic. If you do need to take a cab, hail a Blue Bird, a reputable taxi company.

Locals scooter and a great ride-hailing app is GO-JEK – experienced scooter drivers who take you for a bargain of a price at a fraction of the time and deliver food.

- Stepping off an 11 hour flight with kids and into a long cue for immigration is unpleasant, but the good news is, if you are travelling with children five and under you can fast track your way out of there..

*The writer was hosted by Elite Havens.*



La Brisa had two huge swimming pools great for a days swimming with the kids.

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