



Checklist

Rates include return airport transfers and breakfast; complimentary shuttle services and bikes available. Look for seasonal specials of stay four nights and pay for three; the 10 interconnecting villas are perfect for families or houseparties. The one-bedroom villa number nine costs from \$US325 (\$426) a night for a minimum two-night stay; 20 per cent discount for bookings made at least 60 days in advance. More: villakubu.com. Villa Kubu is also marketed by Elite Havens, which includes comprehensive photo galleries on its site of all accommodation styles. More: elitehavens.com.

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Villas with benefits

Drop out at a small hotel in Bali's Seminyak

SUSAN KUROSAWA

Frangipani and bougainvillea, skittering squirrels, gem-coloured butterflies and tiny, darting finches — welcome to Villa Kubu, set down a series of lanes in Bali's fashionable Seminyak.

Despite its singular name, this is a compound of 17 spacious pool villas with one, two or three bedrooms (some can interconnect to provide four bedrooms) and a true hideaway feel. Over a three-day holiday break, I venture out just once. It is easy to stay happily tethered when you have all the facilities of a small hotel to hand and a barman with the unlikely name of Romeo is on duty mixing banana daiquiris with sorbet toppings.

There are many luxury Bali villa options and this is not the fanciest I've tried but it feels earthed, authentic and organic and a recent refresh of interiors with pastel soft furnishings and new artwork has added a lighter and more contemporary look. Mine is number nine, a one-bedroom option and one of the least expensive, with a curved 10m pool in a flowering garden and a semi-outdoor bathroom that includes a tub set beside a fish pond.

It is almost a case of swimming with the koi and idly reaching out to prune a palm. Within this rock-walled ensuite are high-hopping frogs and geckoes announcing their presence with that signature uh-oh call (and hopefully eating the mosquitoes). If the geckoes are off-duty, management has provided a mossie-zapping racquet, which is quite the novelty toy, an enveloping swath of netting over the king-sized bed, and a citronella and peppermint insect spray that smells like a spa.

The expat owner, Dee Mytton, is a long-time Bali resident and all the small details have been thoughtfully attended to, including guests' privacy. You just signal your needs by hanging the appropriate flag outside the villa's



garden gate — red for do not disturb, green for housekeeping and yellow for in residence. Breakfast is included in the tariff and villas have equipped kitchens; staff pop in and prepare your order, which could include eggs any whichway or vine tomatoes on well-toasted sourdough with basil leaves, feta and cracked pepper. Then it's time to sit in the grass-roofed and amply cushioned bale by the pool and read between swims. Frangipani petals drop and float, scenting the water. The Venus Spa is calling. This small facility has oddly plain decor but the treatments are terrific, with a pantry of healing ingredients, including

Clockwise from top: inviting pool villa; semi-outdoor bathroom; spa staff on their way to do some pampering; Oasis Bar; alfresco restaurant

clay, black rice, finely ground pandanus leaves, turmeric and bloodroot. A one-hour massage costs the equivalent of about \$22; then perhaps something from the wellness section of the room-service menu plus an aloe vera energiser or enzyme energy juice featuring a zesty blend of young green papaya, pineapple and green apple.

When he's not performing tricks with sorbet toppings, Romeo shakes the likes of mangosteen or white chocolate martinis and strawberry mint crushes in the tiny Oasis Bar, ably assisted by his colleague Putu. Off the air-conditioned bar is a charming alfresco restaurant in a decked pavilion bordered by stands of bamboo where local specialties are served (the beef rendang is recommended) as well as good pastas and pizzas, a smashing pavlova on the puds menu and Toby's Estate coffee imported from Australia.

You could also order a meat or seafood barbecue pack for DIY cooking or to be prepared by staff in your villa and a "jug of happiness" (sangria, perhaps, or minty mojito) or a "bucket of beer".

There is caring service by Made and the front-office team, free shuttles twice-daily into Seminyak Beach via the boutique hub of Seminyak Square, and a 24-hour concierge service to book tours to, say, the hill town of Ubud, or for treks and sightseeing and shopping excursions. A DVD collection is available (popcorn provided) and nanny service is less than the equivalent of \$10 an hour. Expect fully loaded iPods, Bluetooth speakers, fast and free Wi-Fi, satellite television and, in the larger, premium categories, air-conditioned media rooms.

All up, Villa Kubu is a small hotel with the intimate feel of a village. I would like to keep that red flag flying outside villa number nine on permanent alert.

