

ACTIVE TRAVEL

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THE MEANING OF **LIFE** *& luxury*

*Find time, space
and freedom in Bali*



For a long time it has been clear that the idea of luxury would have to change. The bling, the shine – it's gone. In particular, the luxury travel industry, as we thought we knew it, has exhaled. Offering what was once considered a luxurious experience has turned into an overreaching, overpromising folly. A famous designer, some ancient handmade crystal chandeliers, seemingly new décor items from exotic places listed in the *Hot Spots List* for the year, and a Michelin star were entitlements to applause, awe and even reverie.

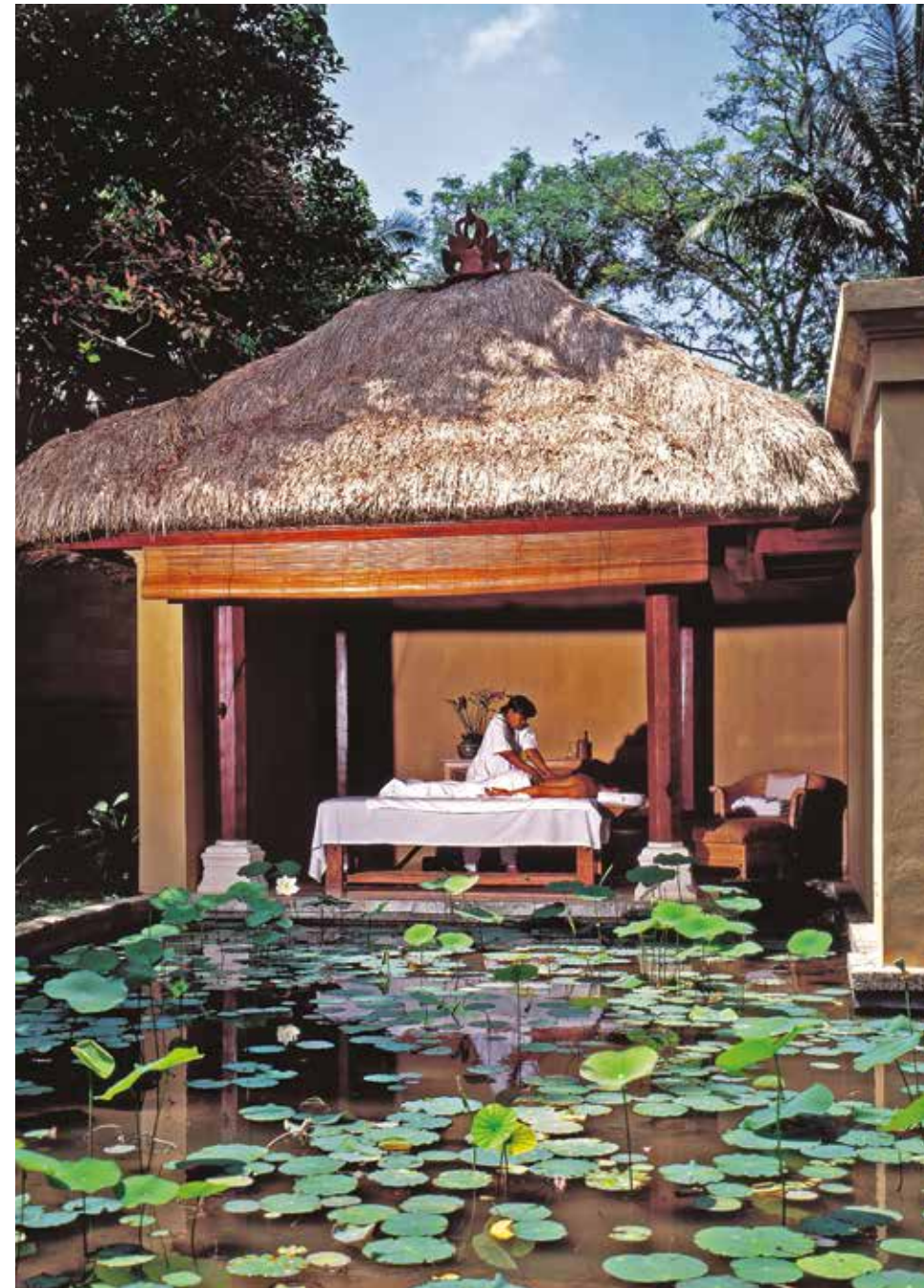
For some reason the five-star (apparently there is a seven-star too) hotels and resorts felt they gave the guest a full and honest experience that couldn't be replicated by anyone else. Aside from the marketing that drove all of this, with fancy words and brochures, the add-ons that appeared as luxurious have become meaningless. Massages are sold as fancy, pampering is pretend for wellbeing, and the term "a good life" is inserted into a brochure for bedtime reading.

But quietly in the background, and ever-so-discreetly of course, is the Aman set of resorts (and a few others around the planet worth mentioning, such as Singita in Africa). On the world's most

famous island, where everyone and their aunt have come to *Eat Pray Love* Julia Roberts-style, is where the Aman brand has three of the most understated, subtle and refined resorts. Bali, with all of its loud and colourful history, embraces all three with their unique complexions.

On the eastern side of Bali, where surfers find hidden coves, beaches and swells, is where Amankila rises on a cliff. Known as the quiet and authentic end of the island in the regency of Karangasem, this is where the resort has breathed for about 20 years, growing moss and emphasising its very character by offering guests a peek into what reflective time on an Indonesian island should be about. The smell of frangipani, the views across the bay and the sounds of petite birds all remind one of the power of the senses and how much they play a role in the entire experience of a resort.

The focus here isn't on dazzling; it's on offering a humble and intimate experience where guests can feel connected to the powerful earth, the black volcanic sand and the clouds that float by. Time is the gift here – whether you're tummy-down on a surfboard looking up at the vast sky, waiting for a wave, or having a massage from an intuitive healer that has run over the scheduled



hours, you have nowhere else you need to be. Time, some may whisper, is the healer, and Bali has centuries of time just waiting to divvy up.

Heading west and slightly inland is where you will find the now-famous village of Ubud, and the Amandari. Priding itself on not impressing with gadgets or televisions, the resort, designed as a traditional Balinese village, is an introspective experience. Time with an old-world healer, hatha yoga alongside a functioning rice paddy, or a blessing from a high priest are un-touristy, and experiences that exceed all expectations.

This is what luxury is about now: time and freedom, not the tourist trap of itineraries, pedicures and minibuses. Stretch out anywhere and become aware of the path through the resort's sacred grounds, down to a pool of holy water for deep restoration of body, mind and psyche.

In the little southern nodule of Bali is where Amanusa hides, up against a slight hilltop. Away from the fast-growing Nusa Dua, the resort plays with perspective in its design and outlook, translating into a sense of groundedness and respect for the land. Access, as with all of the Aman Resorts, is a privilege, and the immensely private pool villas looking out towards the Indian Ocean and the golf course below act as that reminder.

Bougainvillea colours the area, and the discreet service and smiles of the locals fill in the hues. But it's the privacy that's the point here; the absolute height of luxury is to be able to be completely private in a world that's overpopulated and in constant need of stimulation. Not just alone, but freed from disturbance on any level. Amanusa, with its leafy trees and gentle design, feeds the deserving.

The war within is often a silent one, one that luxury hotels encourage us to abandon. Don't challenge the self (spiritually or otherwise), don't look at the holistic way of incorporating wellness into your life, don't think, don't – just don't. The world has been

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set up in this odd, but utterly convincing way, and “luxury travel” promotes the fantasy.

But a new understanding of what luxury should mean is slowly growing, from the tourist-crazed streets of Paris to the well-trodden Machu Picchu. Luxury has to change, as a new critical mass will push it as far as possible from the monogrammed Louis Vuitton bag and mini-facial.

The word “luxury” needs to be challenged. Who made it what it is today and how can we reclaim it for what it really means: “a state of great comfort”? Pair this “extravaganza” with a renewed sense of beauty in wellbeing, and a whole new wellness industry will develop. Wellness will be seen as part of the natural order of things, not just pampering, but something much more fundamental.

Luxury needs to be retaught to some, while others just need a shiny invitation to come and experience what it truly means – the “essence-feel” of it all. It’s simple and it’s humble; it’s not the obvious that can be read about in Tripadvisor or critiqued on Facebook. It’s a life-changing experience that happens if you’re willing to take a plunge towards time, space and that simple (oh, so simple) freedom. ■

IF YOU GO

Make enquiries about the Aman Resorts on the island: amanresorts.com.

HOW TO GET THERE

Cathay Pacific has daily flights from Johannesburg and Cape Town to Hong Kong, and from there Bali is just a short hop away. Book flights at cathaypacific.com.

