

THE WEEK

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Travel

Five of the best Balinese boltholes

Bali is back on the tourist map, with a new breed of beautiful resorts and hotels. Here are some of the best

Uma Ubud, Ubud

Ubud is the "cultural heart" of Bali, says Fred Mawer in *The Daily Telegraph*. The town is also home to the recently opened Uma Ubud, a member of the "top-notch" group of luxury hotels that includes Parrot Cay. The design is elegant and contemporary with a Japanese slant, and the focus is on "health and wellbeing". There's a "sophisticated little spa and yoga pavilion" offering all kinds of holistic therapies, all the dishes are organic, and if you're feeling really worthy, you can opt for raw ingredients in your meals. In the centre of Ubud, which is within easy reach, you can watch local craftsmen whittle their wood carvings, or a nightly performance of traditional Balinese dance. The resort arranges guided walks and, for the more adventurous, mountain treks and white-water rafting. *Contact: 00 62 361 972448; www.uma.com.bz. Prices from £131 per night.*

Istana, Bukit Pensinsula

The ultimate in extravagance, Istana has "all the luxuries of a hotel without the other guests", says Matthew Brace in *Tatler Travel Guide*. There are five double suites in this clifftop villa, plus "mod-cons galore", including a fully stocked bar and wine cellar, a pool, and a hi-tech sound-



Istana: the ultimate in extravagance

system. The "superb" staff includes a butler who serves martinis as the sun goes down. The views are fabulous, but it's a long way to the nearest nightspots, "so choose your fellow guests carefully". *Contact: 00 62 361 730668; www.theistana.com. Sleeps ten at £560 per night.*

Puri Ganesha Villas, north-west coast

This idyllic resort is so quiet, "you can hear the coconuts fall and the fish plop", says Brace. It comprises four two-storey, fully serviced villas; the food is "among the best on the island", and there's not a whiff of pretension – you can be as "inclusive or exclusive" as you wish. The diving and snorkelling – courtesy of the nearby Padi shop – is excellent, but if you just

want to swim you have to make do with the private pool, as the reef off the beach is horribly scratchy. *Contact: 00 62 362 94766; www.puriganeshabali.com. Doubles from £200.*

Damai Lovina Villas, Lovina

Located on Bali's "sleepy" north coast, this small resort is surrounded by paddy fields and jungle-clad valleys, and overlooks a bay, says Mawer. Guests stay in charming bungalows furnished with antiques, and there is a "highly rated" organic restaurant. The owners grow most of the produce in the garden, and run cookery courses for guests who want to take a little Balinese expertise home with them. *Contact: 00 62 362 41501; www.damai.com. £91 b&b.*

Waka Maya, Sanur

Sanur attracts an older crowd and, although it's only a few miles from brash Kuta, it has a much more friendly, laid-back atmosphere, says Mawer. Guests at Waka Maya stay in one of 14 thatched villas, hidden away in "jungle grounds" at the end of a lane. They have four-poster beds and private gardens and some have their own pools. The town's bars and restaurants are only five minutes away. *Contact: 00 62 361 482064; www.wakaexperience.com. £74 per night.*

Last-minute offers from top travel companies

Co. Wexford beach house

Cresta Holidays (0870-333 3303; www.crestaholidays.co.uk) has a four-bedroom, luxury beach house at east Ireland's Roney Point available for seven nights' self-catering between 4-17 June. It costs £248pp, based on eight sharing, including ferry crossings.

Sri Lanka saving

Save £439pp on two weeks at Taj Exotica with Elite Vacations (01707-371000; www.elitevacations.com). 14 nights' b&b with flights and transfers now costs £719pp, until end June.

Amazing Istanbul

Deckchair.com (0870-043 5321) has three nights b&b at the three-star Ilkay Hotel in Istanbul's old city, close to the Grand Bazaar, for £231pp (two sharing). Departs 16 June.

Rock climbing in Cornwall

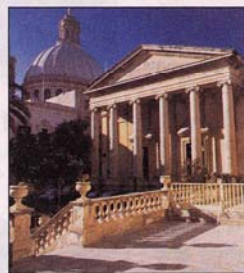
Climb Cornwall's spectacular rugged coastline, staying three nights' b&b at Primrose Valley Hotel (01736-794939; www.primroseonline.co.uk) for £275pp (two sharing), including climbing equipment and tuition.

This week's dream: Malta

There's something deeply comforting about Malta, says Gareth Huw Davies in *The Mail* on Sunday.

Standing alone in the Mediterranean, it's "as foreign as you like, yet as shot through with a familiar sense of Britain as a stick of Blackpool rock". It has buildings to rival the Parthenon, and a local architecture influenced by numerous invaders, including the Romans, the Ottomans and the Greeks. The capital, Valetta, is an astonishingly beautiful city, with ancient churches, monuments and 16th century fortifications.

Malta doesn't have much in the way of open countryside, but it is peppered with "quaint" little towns. To see them, you can either hire a car or catch one of the "dear old buses" – a fleet of traditional British design, dating from the Fifties and painted bright yellow. Mosta is well worth a visit: this vibrant town is dominated by the "glorious blue and gold dome of St Mary's Church" which, in 1942, was hit by a bomb while a packed congregation prayed



Valetta: astonishingly beautiful

inside. The explosive landed on the floor, but – incredibly – didn't detonate, and the site is now a war memorial, complete with a replica of the "miracle bomb". The island's entire population received the George Cross for their wartime fortitude.

Further inland, you'll find a collection of prehistoric remains that are "much less famous than they deserve to be". They

include seven megalithic temples, dating from 4100 to 2500BC, all of which are surprisingly well preserved, a testament to the extraordinary skill of the people who dragged the massive stones into place.

When it's too hot for sightseeing, there are ample beaches and tiny fishing towns, where you can relax in a harbour café over a lunch of local lampuka fish, and watch fishing boats at work, their prows "emblazoned with the huge eye of Osiris", the Egyptian god, to protect them from harm at sea.

BelleAir Holidays (020-8785 3266; www.belleair.co.uk) has packages from £259pp including flights and transfers.



ISTANA, BUKIT PENINSULA

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