

# HERE COMES THE BOOM

Indonesia has long played its tourist drawcard. With beaches, mountains, cities and culture, it has courted the tourist dollar well. But that was just the beginning



THIS PAGE: The changing skyline of Jakarta; a computer-aided graphic of the new Raffles Jakarta.

rubbing their hands together in glee as they plan expansion — an additional 100,000 guest rooms are required within the next decade. That's an extra 700 to 800 hotels on top of the 1,600 or so currently operating. While they'll be scattered across the archipelago, many are setting their sights on the growing hub of Jakarta, along with traditional tourism honey-pots, such as Bali.

The Mantra Group plans to open twenty hotels over the next three years. Best Western International is doubling its portfolio, increasing their inventory from 700 rooms to more than 6,000 and GHM is opening its largest Chedi-branded hotel this year. Capitalising on Singaporean visitors, the iconic Raffles Hotels & Resorts are moving into the capital, Raffles Jakarta opening in 2014. Not a day goes by without a hospitality brand jumping on the Indonesian bandwagon.



“There are several reasons for Jakarta to be a destination in Raffles Hotels & Resorts’ development plans,” says Diana Banks, vice president of Brand Strategy for Raffles Hotels & Resorts. “Indonesia continues to be a growth economy. Jakarta is one of the key gateways and therefore benefits from this growth.”

Capitalising on their portfolio in the region makes sense for the premium hotel brand. “This gives Raffles greater presence in a region that continues to enjoy economic growth,” explains Banks. “It’s natural for luxury hotel brands to look at leading Southeast Asian countries for their new phase of growth. Whilst Europe and North America are still working their way out of the recession, Southeast Asia has continued to grow, and travel within the region continues to be healthy.”

Indonesia’s 240 million-strong population are also poised to buoy up tourism. There are a cool 35 million emerging

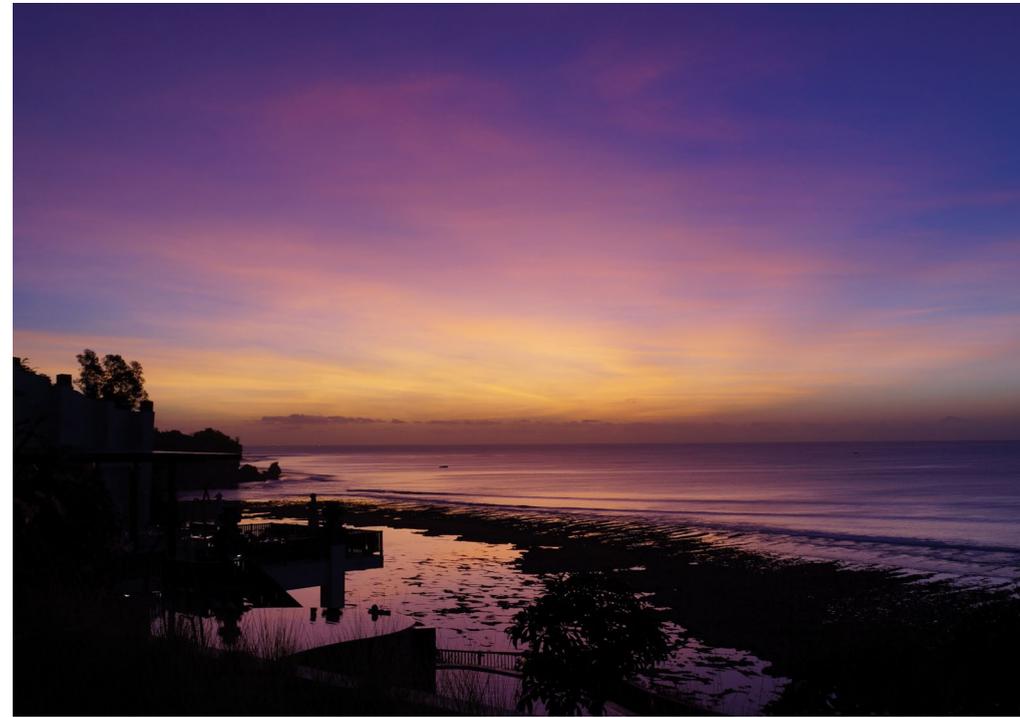
**LOOKING OUT OF THE WINDOW OF THE TAXI AS WE SIT** stalled at the traffic lights, I am faced with a wall of motorbikes. Like angry bulls, they rev their engines, ready to charge. As the lights change, the pack surges forward, dividing and flowing around the car. The energy of Jakarta swirls in eddies around us as we drive through this fast-growing metropolis. It’s been less than two years since I was here last, but the skyline is unfamiliar, new buildings sprouting up in clusters like spring bulbs.

Indonesia is booming. With a one-trillion-dollar economy growing at around six percent annually, Indonesia is Southeast Asia’s largest market. Business events and commercial interests are spilling out of the capital, which is set to host various Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation conferences this year, bringing additional revenues and visitors.

During the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s, Indonesia’s ailing economy was bailed out by the International Monetary Fund. In 2012, the nation showed the world how far it had come

by pledging a billion dollars to replenish the IMF’s kitty. There’s no better time to be investing in Indonesia’s future — especially in the tourism sector. The bustle of Soekarno-Hatta airport shows passenger arrivals are growing, the airport handling double its capacity daily. A US\$2 billion expansion is underway to triple capacity.

The increase in world construction activity is being partly attributed to the new generation of “Asian Tigers”— Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines. Hotel operators in Indonesia are



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BEACH BEYOND



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The infinity pool at the Regent Hotel; a vivid sunset viewed from Anantara Uluwatu; pool-side dining delicacies at the Regent Hotel; a Balinese musician playing the *rindik*; Regent Hotel's Nyala Beach Club & Grill; the Regent Hotel uses natural, locally sourced material in its design.

middle-income earners on the brink of making the leap into the bankable class, providing a whole new class of luxury leisure spenders.

"Locally there is a demand for a luxury lifestyle — in dining, retail and social events — the vibrancy of the dining scene in Jakarta can attest to this," says Banks. Raffles Jakarta, located in the prestigious Ciputra World Jakarta mixed-use development area will be in a prime position to cater for travellers and capture residents with the Raffles name. "We have not formally launched the hotel but we are confident the Raffles name will be well received," confirms Banks.

"The development is an interesting one as it will bring together a shopping mall for premium retail boutiques, office buildings, apartments, an art gallery and even a theatre. [It] will offer options for people to come to stay, to shop, to do business, to be entertained and to enjoy the arts — it will become a new meeting point," she enthuses. Add to this the hotel's amenities, including traditions from the original Singapore Raffles such as the Writers Bar and Raffles Spa along with an open-air yoga studio, a ballroom and private meeting rooms, and the city's latest "in" spot is born.

"Internationally we have found Raffles speaks well to a niche group of affluent travellers, for whom luxury is not merely about the physical aspects of a hotel but about how the experience relates to them as an individual," Banks explains. "We call this 'emotional luxury' and this is what we will bring to Jakarta."

This is exactly what the recently-launched Regent Hotel has instituted in Sanur. Still in its soft opening phase, the Regent is the newest addition to the luxury scene in Bali. The island is a well-established destination appealing to everyone, from low-budget backpackers to high-value premium tourists; each gravitating towards a specific area on "the island of the gods". Kuta is for the penniless surfers and students, Seminyak for the hipsters, and Sanur is Bali's oldest upscale resort area, the enclave of choice for the well-heeled visitor.

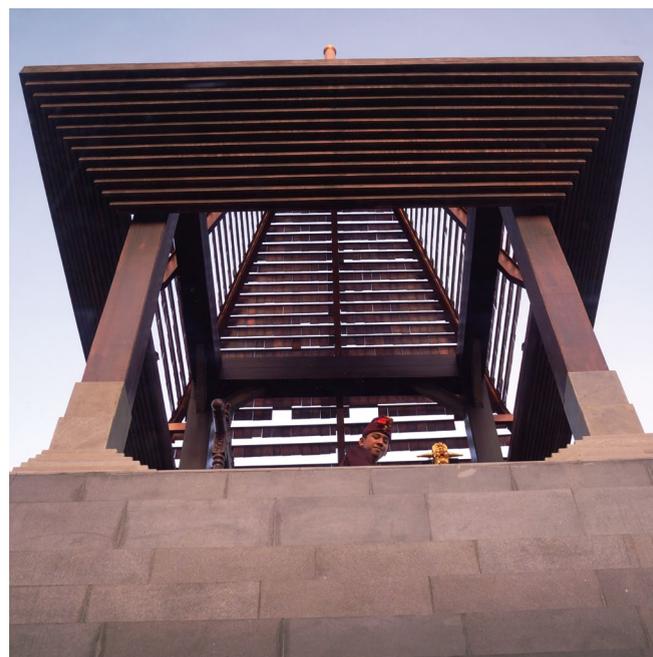


**MY MOTHER IS MEETING ME IN BALI FOR A WEEK, KEEN**

to see how the island has changed. We both restrain gasps as we walk into the Regent's immense open-air foyer, where we are greeted with cool facecloths and a chilled ginger and lychee drink. The hotel's PR Manager, Ria Leimena, escorts us to our room "We are not fully open, so we are still smoothing out some things," she says apologetically. With the warm welcome, the prompt service, and our gorgeous room, which features a generously-proportioned semi-open terrace overlooking a temple-like structure surrounded by greenery, we doubt we will find anything to complain about.

Over a sumptuous dinner at the hotel's pool-side restaurant, Nyala Beach Club & Grill, where I feast on *foie gras* and scallops, followed by grilled jumbo prawns served with a light Indonesian coconut curry sauce, Ria explains the logic behind the Regent opening here. "Bali still has a lot of potential for luxury brands and Sanur has its own charm which is what Bali was all about years ago. We are bringing that back; reintroducing oriental luxury," she says with a smile.

The Regent is a hotel of contrasts; the food combines local, regional and international flavours and traditional Balinese



architecture mixes with sophisticated contemporary Asian influence. The all-natural materials are locally-sourced, ranging from wood such as mahogany and merbau, to high-grade Indonesian marble. The kawung motif, a Balinese batik pattern, is blended into the design, a subtle reminder of the hotel's home.

The spa is hidden beneath the central temple structure, and every day two young men clamber to the top to play the *rindik*, a traditional Balinese instrument akin to a bamboo xylophone. Water features abound, not least the infinity pool we are sitting by, the water cascading to the beach beyond. The hotel is grand and inspiring, yet at the same time comfortable and casual.

**WE WAKE EARLY IN THE MORNING TO JOIN THE FREE**

yoga class at an ungodly 6.30am. Yogi Reni seems pleased that we have joined the small group as we stretch and bend, breathe and balance, facing the sun rising from the ocean. Feeling virtuous, we immediately undo our good work by overeating at the extensive breakfast spread out before us at Layang Layang restaurant.

Cycling along a narrow, buckled path on the hotel's bicycles, we make another attempt to work off our excesses. The track winds along a series of beaches, tiny eateries vying for diners, while beach clothing and souvenir vendors join the fray. "Welcome, welcome," say each of the vendors, grins plastered across their weathered faces.

By late afternoon I have earned a reward; the Regent's signature massage, combining movements from Eastern and Western cultures including Indonesian, Thai, Breema Shiatsu and Swedish. Yogi Reni morphs into therapist Reni as she gently scrubs my feet with salt, using the flower petals floating in the warm bowl of water as a conduit. "This will focus your mind," she says, reaching for a bowl. She gently runs a wooden peg around the rim, which sings a pure note that slowly fades into silence. Reni pushes, pulls, twists and eases my jetlag away, at points climbing on the table to delve deeper into my muscles. This is what Balinese luxury is all about.

**NOT CONTENT TO LIMIT OURSELVES TO SANUR, WE MOVE**

to the west coast for further exploration, choosing the more remote Anantara Uluwatu. My mother frowns as we pull into the hotel's somewhat hidden entrance and are faced with a bank of nearly one hundred stairs. Within minutes the staff rush to greet us, plucking our bags from our hands and racing athletically up the incline while we puff along behind.

The hotel foyer sits on a ridge. The unprepossessing entrance faces the lush green hills of the interior, while the western side has sea views. The main building sits above the foyer, and a second series of stairs leads down to the ocean suites, cascading down to a series of infinity pools perched on a cliff. My mother raises her eyebrow at me as we trot down the ninety stairs to our suite. "We should have stayed in Sanur," she mutters. Walking into the bright airy room, her expression lightens. A smile creeps across her face when she opens the sliding door onto the private balcony, a spa-tub wedged into the corner, uninterrupted views of the roaring Indian Ocean stretched out before her. I am off the hook.

I become the number one child as we wade into the pool later, lazily leaning on the rim to watch the antics of the local surfers. One of Bali's premium breaks is in front of the hotel, providing pool-side entertainment as the surfers bob up and down in the water. It is only the lure of a temple tour that drags us from our refreshing reverie.

Uluwatu Temple, literally translating to "land's end rock" is a quick hop from the hotel, and is perhaps the most spectacularly located temple on the island, the inner sanctum perched majestically on the steep cliff's edge. The sun is casting vibrant colours along the horizon as we arrive and I point out one of the mischief-making resident monkeys chewing on a stolen hairband. We creep nervously past the rest of the troupe, clutching our belongings tightly to our chests.

Every evening *kecak*, a traditional dance, is performed on the temple grounds. A combination of dance and drama, it depicts a chapter of the Hindu epic, *Ramayana*. Seventy men sit in concentric circles, leaving an open arena with an oil torch at the centre where most of the dancing takes place. ▾



EACH FULLY-EQUIPPED VILLA HAS A PRIVATE POOL AND DECK, A BALINESE STYLE GAZEBO, AND THOSE ENDLESS OCEAN VIEWS



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The pool at Anantara Uluwatu overlooks one of Bali's best surfing breaks; Anantara Uluwatu's wedding venue extends over the beach from its clifftop setting; water lilies line the entrance to the Anantara spa.

Different characters in elaborate costumes dip in and out, the two female dancers drawing elegant patterns with their hand movements, the all-male chorus swaying back and forth, chanting rhythmically as the drama unfolds.

#### THE ANANTARA SPA'S SERENE LOCATION IS ENHANCED

by the water lilies lining the entrance walkway. I have booked treatments as a mother-daughter bonding ritual to secure another day of parental love, the therapists stroking away our aches and pains.

Anantara's assistant general manager Marc Ravegnini meets us as we stumble dazed from the spa. "Until now, we have been having a long soft opening. We are still finishing the villas — we have just one more to go," he says, beckoning us through the garden to see one of the two-bedroom abodes. It is simply stunning — offering complete privacy, each fully-equipped villa has a private pool and deck, a Balinese style gazebo, and those endless ocean views. Hardwood floors and accents of stone and glass give the interior a cool, contemporary, yet natural feel. It's impossible not to want to live there.

"Visitor numbers are growing. Europeans are decreasing, but Indonesia is growing, so we are seeing more and more domestic tourism," says Marc. "Our seclusion is an advantage

as a lot of travel in Bali is about relaxing," he states as we enthusiastically agree. "We also see some groups who want one night of luxury during their stay."

Luxury it is. In the evening, we are invited to try Dining by Design. I am also due to reunite with a school friend, so we invite him to join in the exclusive repast. From our balcony we watch the fishing boats speed across the bay as the sky turns from blue to pink, yellow and mauve, before making our way to our table set up on an island that juts into the now-closed pool.

The walkway is decorated with a heart made of blossoms — most of these dining extravaganzas are booked as romantic dinners for two. Our dedicated waiter subtly reshapes the blooms into three triangles as we take our seats. The remainder of the evening passes in a flurry of chatter and fine food. From our first bite of crisp asparagus salad to the last swipe of chocolate delicé, we consume every morsel with delight, the swirling breeze sweeping in across the waves, enhancing the flavours.

The only thing left to do is to pack our bags. By the time we return to Indonesia, there will be a raft of new hotels in the heart of the cities, lining the beaches and hidden along the craggy cliffs, creating an ever-changing visitor experience. Perhaps this is what keeps the country booming. 🌊

**WORDS GISELLE WHITEAKER**