

Split 📍 NUSA DUA *decision*

Emerging from a multi-million-dollar makeover, Paradisus by Meliá Bali is an all-inclusive resort with a strong cultural program and two distinct parts to it. Carrie Hutchinson weaves, dines and chills her way through a few days in The Reserve adults-only wing but there is plenty of fun for families as well.



I'm sitting cross-legged in an open-air *bale*. To my right is a Balinese temple; to my left, staff members are readying Arum restaurant for the evening's service. Meanwhile, I feel like I am all thumbs as I attempt to hold some strands of palm frond in place and weave others at the same time.

"Let me see," says Aditya, leaning over to check my work. "That one goes here." He directs a wayward strip into its correct spot. There is no way, I tell myself, this is going to become a hat.

Each day at the new Paradisus by Meliá Bali on the beachfront at Nusa Dua, a member of staff leads guests in a cultural activity, part of the resort's Destination Inclusive program that also includes excursions to temples and local theatre shows. Today, Aditya is showing me how to make a *capil*, one of the traditional woven hats worn by farmers across the island.

"How long does it take a farmer to make one of these?" I ask him, as I'm gently pulling the weave tighter and wondering how on earth this coconut confusion is ever turning into a cone.

"About 30 minutes," he says. Without looking at my watch, I know a lot more than half an hour has elapsed since we started.

Soon, though, the *capil* begins to take shape as Aditya tells me he also teaches people how to make *canang sari*, the daily offerings to the deities. "And sometimes I take yoga classes," he adds.

It's very easy to imagine an all-inclusive luxury resort as some sort of bastion of hedonism, but Paradisus is more low-key than that. I'm staying at The Reserve, a secluded adults-only experience where most guests spend their days lying by the vast pool, blissfully unaware of the activity going on in other parts of the resort.

Paradisus's other "half" is the Family Concierge, where kids and their adults are doted upon by staffers who oversee the aqua park, playgrounds and activities. There's even an exclusive Teens Club, with beanbags, games and three lanes of ten-pin bowling.

The Reserve's other exclusive area is Sante, a serene restaurant overlooking both pool and beach where breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea, cocktails and dinner are served. One day, at lunch – seared scallops with buttered pea puree followed by crab ravioli with a fermented chilli and black bean crab shell bisque – I finish my main course just as afternoon tea begins.

"Would you like some dessert?" the waiter, Teja, asks.

"Maybe I'll just have afternoon tea," I tell him, and with that he pours a glass of champagne as I help myself to mini madeleines and meringues.

OPPOSITE: the pool at the newly renovated Paradisus by Meliá Bali, one of the hottest new addresses in Bali.

THIS PAGE: the resort has a series of restaurants, including Arum.

Resort living

Back at my room, The Reserve Junior Suite with Lagoon Access, I pull on my swimmers, grab a book and Sprite from the free minibar, and exit the sliding doors off the living area to my deck chairs on the edge of the quiet pool. At one point, I discover an underwater seat near an island where I can read listening to the pops and calls of the tiny waterhen that's taken residence in the lush foliage behind me. Most of the time, this pool – it's more like a languid river – is completely deserted, a true luxury in a resort with more than 400 rooms.

Surprisingly, Paradisus, which is large but manageable – you can walk from the lobby to the beach in less than five minutes – never feels crowded. Apart from Sante, there are six other restaurants offering cuisines from

around the world, as well as three bars, a casual coffee hut and a kid-friendly spot called The Shack adjacent to the Aquazone. There are always free deckchairs around the main lagoon pool, and places where you can find respite from both the sun and other people.

In the four days I'm there, I soon develop a routine. Breakfast at Malva, where the main buffet is located, followed by an iced coco pandan latte at Kopi Petani while watching the aqua aerobics in the big pool. Then it's time for relaxation by the beach – The Reserve has its own squishy loungers and shaded bales where staff offer up cold towels and iced water and clean your sunglasses – watching the surfers riding Mushroom Secret,

a mellow righthand reef break, when not floating in the warm water. The one time I put my hand in my pocket is for a treatment at YHI Spa. Arriving an hour early, I use the time to take full advantage of the steam room, sauna, jacuzzi and cold plunge before being slathered in *boreh* – a blend of rice and spices that smells like a gingernut biscuit – to warm the muscles and massaged into a state of complete oblivion as part of the Authentic Balinese Ritual. After, as I'm seated in a state of blissed-out somnolence in the outdoor lounge, I'm presented with a locally produced pink guava, lime and turmeric juice and a slice of decadent chocolate torte. If this is luxury resort living, I'm all in.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: the new resort has opened after an extensive makeover; breakout spaces; the rooms are calm and inviting; breakfast is at Malva restaurant. OPPOSITE: Paradisus by Melía Bali is split into two zones for adults-only and families.

Paradisus by Melía Bali

After a multimillion-dollar, 15-month makeover Melía Bali, on the beachfront at Nusa Dua, reopened on 1 February as Paradisus by Melía Bali, the brand's first all-inclusive luxury resort in Asia. With 485 luxurious suites, including family rooms with bunk beds or tents, and seven villas, it has distinct areas for different styles of travellers, including adults-only The Reserve and the Family Concierge. The resort has eight restaurants, three bars, a spa and a daily program of activities that emphasises wellness and cultural connection.

