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PLACES TO DWELL FOR THE DESIGN DILETTANTE

THE INDIAN PACIFIC
INTAAYA
RAFFLES JAIPUR
RAES GUESTHOUSES
THE EMORY

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Niyama Private
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CONSCIOUS CONNECTION

On the remote cliffs of Nusa Penida, far from Bali's usual bustle, a new retreat invites guests to unplug, go barefoot, and reconnect with nature and self through sacred rituals, conscious architecture and a radical kind of stillness

WORDS BY MADELIN TOMELTY

Under a tree to my right there is a man sitting in lotus position. His eyes are closed, palms open on his knees, and there are strings of marigolds hanging from the branches around him like little orbs of sunshine. Next to him is a statue of Ganesha, the elephant-headed god of wisdom and learning, and patron of new beginnings – I’m told that a recent visitor sat in this very same spot and meditated for 16 hours straight. Nearby, another man stands alone at the edge of the cliff, hands lifted in prayer toward the ocean horizon where an eagle rides a thermal, soaring without a single wingbeat.

I’m at Intaaya, a new retreat on the unspoiled Indonesian island of Nusa Penida – just off the southeast coast of Bali – best known for its backpacker-luring, Instagram-famous beaches. This intimate and exclusive hideaway, which opened in October 2024, couldn’t be further from a hostel, though – or your typical Bali resort, lodge or wellness retreat. According to its website, which is mysteriously password-protected, Intaaya is a “sanctuary of transformation and reconnection” – a place to turn inwards and reflect while in communion with the natural environment.

“It is a radical invitation to put whatever is going on in our lives aside,” says voice artist and Intaaya facilitator Netanel Goldberg. “Most of us don’t have safe containers to express emotions, and this is a safe and loving container. If emotions will rise, there is a place for it.”

I’m participating in the signature ‘Discovery Experience’ retreat – one of many getaways held regularly throughout the year, aimed at sparking the flames of personal transformation. “It’s like a village for four days, and inside there are rituals and ceremonies happening,” says Goldberg. It doesn’t take long for me to discover exactly what this means.

AWAY WE GO

The retreat schedule includes three days of group workshops, experiences and rituals drawing on Balinese traditions and global spiritual philosophies. These range from yoga, movement classes and tea ceremonies to ‘conscious connected breathwork’, live ‘soul singing’ concerts designed to bring forth healing, a Balinese water purification event and a powerful Mayan-inspired fire ceremony with sacred music and cacao, among others. Some of the workshops are intense, and any free time (read: poolside lounging) woven into the schedule is a much-needed respite from the self-reflection and inner work you may be doing.

With no walls, no fences, no kids, no meat, no alcohol, no mobile service, practically no WiFi (a weak signal is on offer in the open-air lobby) and, if you choose to accept the invitation, no shoes (spoiler: you will), Intaaya seems idyllically off-grid and offbeat from the first resounding gong that becomes the background soundtrack of this retreat.

Even without its niche workshops, Intaaya is unique in Bali’s flooded resort market – not in the least because it is not in Bali at all. The journey to its isolated location on the southeast point of Nusa Penida involves a local ferry or pre-arranged private boat charter from Kusamba Port followed by an hour-long drive on a narrow, windy and somewhat perilous road. Hidden from the dirt track, it’s only upon descending the stairs, tucked behind a curved limestone wall, that the veritable Garden of Eden that is Intaaya is revealed.

A PLACE TO BE STILL

Positioned on a hectare slip of land at the edge of the Wallace Line – a biogeographical boundary separating Asia and Australia – Intaaya purposefully inhabits a landscape long regarded as spiritually potent, with some of Bali’s most sacred and mystical sites close by. But it’s the incredible beauty that strikes you first.

An emerald carpet of lush, soft lawn steps down into terraces then stretches towards the cliff’s dramatic, rocky edge. Smooth limestone stepping stones form whimsical, almost Hobbiton-like paths between the communal bamboo buildings, the 13 luxe Escape Nomade ‘tent suites’ and the iridescent pool – whose shape precisely matches the curve of the land when viewed from the air.

Upon arrival you’re immediately invited to leave your shoes – and if you don’t mind, your usual hyper-connected life – at the ‘door’ (there’s practically no such thing here) and embrace the rare opportunity to cut the cords of technology, ground yourself and allow a sense of childlike, barefoot freedom to bubble up. Whether you do or not is up to you – but the retreat hosts try their best to encourage it.

NATURE FIRST

“There’s a sensory and even transcendent dimension to Intaaya that stems from owners Kinga and Cezary’s vision,” says Bali-based architect Pablo Luna, who designed the retreat. “They aspired to create a space that could awaken something within us – something natural, perhaps even divine – through the architecture, the materials, and their connection to the environment.”

Luna’s magnificent bamboo structures – housing the Shell Restaurant, lobby, massage villa, Tea Temple and Manta Yoga Shala – reflect the retreat’s coastal setting, designed to merge seamlessly with nature.

All but the Tea Temple and massage villa, where a skilled Balinese masseuse is on-call, are open-air. “The owners envisioned a place where the architecture would not dominate the land but rather coexist with it,” Luna adds. “As much as it emerges from the land, it also celebrates and deepens the connection with it.”

OPENING PAGE The bamboo Manta Yoga Shala © Mo Arpi

TOP LEFT Yoga is a daily practice

TOP RIGHT The retreat’s dramatic coastline views © Madelin Tomelty

BOTTOM The menu is mostly plant based and produce is locally sourced







“The owners envisioned a place where the architecture would not dominate the land but rather coexist with it.”

LEFT The pool stretches into the Indian Ocean
© Madelin Tomelty

ABOVE Pablo Luna designed the retreat to blend into the landscape
© Mo Arpi

He’s not wrong – Intaaya is not just a pretty face. One hundred per cent solar-powered and off-grid, the property is a leading example of locally and environmentally sensitive design, with sustainable practices kept at the forefront from concept to execution. The topography of the cliffside environment was respected during the low-impact build, seen in the retreat’s lawned terraces. “We focused on working with the land’s natural contours, ensuring that the building’s placement and layout did not disrupt natural water flow or the surrounding ecosystems,” explains Luna. Pre-standing mature trees remain rooted in place, and renewable, locally sourced natural materials like bamboo, limestone and rammed earth are ubiquitous – with the latter sourced from the site.

Incorporating rammed earth into the design is just one of the ways in which Luna and Intaaya’s owners – who hail from Warsaw but have a base in Ubud – aim to form a connection with the local environment and its people. “It sparked memories for some of the experienced local builders who participated in the process,” says Luna. “They said it reminded them of how their grandparents used to build, of how shelter was made in their lineage.” The commitment to the handcrafted, manual process of building with bamboo rather than relying on machinery was also a deliberate way of honouring the local culture. “It was about celebrating the tradition of local materials, and valuing processes that prioritise care over efficiency,” he says.



In the simple yet elegant tented suites, local craft is on show in the furniture, handmade from reclaimed wood by regional artisans, while the bedding is organic linen and the toiletries are all-natural and made by hand. There is not as much privacy in the ensuites as I would like, but while full-height walls – along with chemical-filled sunscreen and plastic – are all but outlawed, it comes as a relief to find that air conditioning is not, and I can rest easy at night.

GREEN AND GREENER

Intaaya's water comes from rainwater collectors and sweet water wells, while the drinking water comes courtesy of the clouds – thanks to a futuristic air-to-water atmospheric generator system. The 17-metre-long infinity pool, meanwhile, is salt-chlorinated and as warm as bathwater, making it ideal for long spells of 'water dancing', as Intaaya's tea master calls one of her favourite pastimes.

The retreat also employs eco-engineering practices, including a wastewater garden system, and all waste is managed through composting and eco-friendly disposal systems. A short drive from the retreat, some 6,000 square metres of dedicated organic permaculture farmland provides fresh fruit and vegetables for the nourishing and delicious, mostly plant-based meals served at Intaaya – a favourite is the locally caught fish served as a curry.

Back at the pool, a monkey family reunion is unfolding before me. Nearly two dozen of them – from babies with their mothers to solitary males – gather along the craggy bluff under the sinking sun. I watch them lick their fur, somersault and then begin a comical monkey crossing up towards that sacred spot where Ganesha sits. Utterly consumed by the entertainment, I suddenly realise I've lost track of time – the gong will sound for dinner soon. If personal growth begins with presence, then it seems my time at Intaaya has been a step in the right direction.



RETREAT NOTES

Rates at Intaaya start from €1,520 (around AU\$2,670) per tented suite per night for a minimum three nights, with the rate decreasing for longer stays. Stays include full organic board with daily meals and non-alcoholic drinks, a sustainability orientation upon arrival and one 90-minute massage.

Exclusive buyouts are also available from €16,730 (around AU\$29,400) for a minimum three nights, with the rate decreasing for longer buyouts.

intaaya.com

LEFT, TOP Interiors hero local materials © Mo Arpi

LEFT, BOTTOM Most buildings come sans walls, but with plenty of design drama © Madelin Tomelty

OPPOSITE Open-air dining at Shell Restaurant © Mo Arpi

CHOOSE YOUR OWN RETREAT

In addition to the offering of individual stays on one of Intaaya's regular retreats, facilitators can book the property to host their own programs while taking advantage of Intaaya's facilities and network of global wellness gurus – many of whom are based in Bali.
