

The Sydney Morning Herald

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# TRAVELLER

SATURDAY, APRIL 15, 2023

## EAT, PRAY, SPA

The ultimate guide to Bali's world of wellness

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THE GREAT ESCAPE



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## FROM THE EDITORS

If there was one benefit to emerge from the pandemic for the Traveller team, it was a renewed push to seek out and commission more travel writers based overseas, as opposed to those in our own backyard.

It enabled us to keep bringing the best of travel to our readers and it's something that has continued since the "new normal" began.

We now regularly commission writers, usually expatriate Australians, on the spot in cities such as London, Edinburgh, New York, Washington DC and elsewhere, even in Bali.

That South-East Asian idyll has become

the enviable home of Penny Watson, the writer of this week's cover story, "Spa pavilions". Watson, originally a Melbourne, boldly moved to Bali with her family during the pandemic.

As such, she is perfectly placed to compile our exhaustive guide to one of the world's wellness capitals and its plethora of pamper palaces.

Interestingly, if not a little worryingly, our writer refers to a survey of 500 women around the world who listed mental health at the top of their personal priorities for 2023 with the spas and retreats in our cover story the perfect balm to such concerns.

ANTHONY DENNIS  
@AnthonyTravelEd  
traveller.com.au

TOMORROW IN  
TRAVELLER ON SUNDAY  
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From splashing out on exotic holidays, to seeking out little pleasures on your doorstep, to taking on serious challenges such as high-altitude trekking: embracing life through travel is all about those experiences that you will replay in your mind's eye years later.



## WHERE ON EARTH

One of the many remarkable things about this 19th-century bridge is that it is made from field stones that were laid without mortar or cement. The parapet features upright stones, giving the bridge a spiky appearance.

Where is it? See page 24

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TODAY'S COVER Gdus Bali, Ubud  
PHOTO AT TOP Escape Haven, Canggu, Bali See page 12

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COVER STORY

# Spa pavilions



It was a few decades or so back in Australia when my mother, observing me practising yoga for the first time in the backyard of our family home, quipped: "Next you'll be meditating with the hippie beads on".

Since moving to Bali to live with my family in much more recent times, I haven't had the hippie beads on so much as those red, white and black tridatu ceremonial bracelets which have multiplied on my wrist with each Balinese blessing ceremony.

It may have taken the past couple of decades for yoga and meditation to become truly mainstream. But I've noticed that the move to other holistic wellness pursuits - where mental, physical and social factors are all taken into account - is definitely gaining pace.

Sure enough, when Janine Hall, founder of Bali's new Escape Haven (see below), surveyed a global network of 500 women, she asked respondents to state their top three priorities in 2022.

The results? Mental health came out on top (71 per cent), physical health (67 per cent) and making time for self-care (56 per cent) all rated above even career and financial security.

"The results align with the global post-pandemic values-shift where wellness travel



**These Balinese wellness retreats can help save your skin - and your sanity, writes Penny Watson.**

is viewed as a necessity rather than a luxury," Hall says.

Last year, the non-profit Global Wellness Institute listed "awareness and acceptance of mental health and its nuances" as a trend, reporting that more focused intervention programs "like meditation, breathwork, and holistic practices continue to grow".

Given my (relatively) early dabbling in holistic practices in a decidedly less exotic locale than Bali, and its reputation as a world-beating wellness destination, it's not surprising that I've taken an interest in Bali's more esoteric experiences, from healing Balinese massages to consciousness-bending breathwork sessions. Here are my recommendations for the best places on the "Island of the Gods" to rejuvenate, re-energise and renew or simply to relax.

## The Asa Maia, Uluwatu

**The lowdown** Ten luxuriously refitted traditional Javanese wooden houses sit in a tropical garden alongside a central swimming pool, infrared sauna, fire pit and two, deep hot and cold contrast therapy baths that are sunk deep below ground level. There's a yoga shala on the upper floor and a pool-level balcony restaurant serving vegetarian and vegan fare (but also pescatarian). The resort prides itself on building connections between mind, body and soul through holistic experiences including hypnotherapy, tummo breathwork (a Buddhist breathing technique, similar to the Wim Hof method, that increases body temperature and oxygenates the blood to bring about feelings of wellbeing - that is, a pretty amazing high) and meditation. Blind massage, the first of its kind offered in Bali,

is another heavenly experience where touch is imbued with deeper meaning and connection.

**Something special** Contrast therapy, where participants are challenged to immerse for two minutes in Bali's coldest pool (set at six-degrees Celsius) by using breath techniques, takes participants way beyond their perceived capabilities. Suites from \$650 a night. Day passes for pool and wellness activities also available. See theasamaia.com

## Pyramids of Chi, Ubud

**The lowdown** In 2013, Australians Peter and Lynn McIntosh had a calling to build two structures in the tradition of sacred pyramid geometry. Four years later, Pyramids of Chi was born and its two central pyramids have since become a beacon for people wanting to experience the spiritual energy that Ubud is known for. Ancient sound healing uses gongs, bells and other sounds alongside vibration and breathing techniques to help symptoms related to stress, anxiety, sleep deprivation and anxiety. Cacao ceremonies, a sacred Mayan tradition where a pure cacao drink is shared in a group to help build deeper connections, is often held in combination

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Clockwise from main: Sea views at Karma Kandara, Uluwatu; Soulshine, Ubud; surfing at Escape Haven, Canggu; drinks at Soulshine; food at Escape Haven; and a floating feast at Escape Haven.

with a kirtan ceremony, a yogic practice using music and ceremonial chanting. There are also monthly celebrations of the full and new moons plus akashic heart readings, breathwork therapy and inner-child healing. **Something special** The "light sound therapy" combines kaleidoscopic lights, a vibrating water bed and intriguing soundtrack (featuring a didgeridoo), that essentially distracts users from the problems of the day in order to deeply relax. Open 8.30am to 6.30pm. Sound healing sessions 11am and 3pm daily. From \$25. See [pyramidsofcha.com](http://pyramidsofcha.com)

#### The Sacred River Spa at Four Seasons Resort, Sayan

**The lowdown** On the banks of the Ayung River, this spa is in a serene jungle oasis with incense-scented nurturing at its heart. The focus is about restoring inner-energies through Balinese traditions. The spa has it all: warm river stone massages; rice and spice body scrubs; personalised facials (including a decadent Codage treatment) and chakra ceremonies using crystals, massage, essential oils and coloured light to channel energy.

**Something special** The two-hour muladhara chakra ceremony is designed for

frequent travellers. This grounding chakra at the base of the spine helps keep emotions and actions in check. The ceremony includes a Balinese kemenyan smoke ceremony (relaxing on a stool with smoking wood underneath), a deep massage with essential oils, accompanied by singing bowls.

*Resort rooms and villas from \$950. The spa is open 9am-9pm to non-staying guests. Chakra ceremonies from \$340, massages from \$175. See [fourseasons.com](http://fourseasons.com)*

#### Udara Bali, Seseh

**The lowdown** Udara has rock-star status among those keen to supplement their yoga and meditation practice with more out-there experiences. The retreat features calming wooden peak-roofed yoga shalas with dramatic oceanfront views; a pool and spa area with a mystical meditation cave, and a cafe with a healthy menu that teams fresh produce with local seafood. Detox, transformation and energy upgrades range from three to 28 days. Yoga classes range from a daily schedule of vinyasa, hatha and yin to rooftop aerial yoga complete with sea breezes. More esoteric practices include sound floats, cacao and kirtan ceremonies (see above), shamanic breathwork

ceremonies and kundalini activation.

**Something special** Challenge yourself to an "ecstatic dance" in which well-known Indonesian DJs take dancers on a musical journey, from deep, to hypnotising to uplifting tunes. It is all about getting comfortable with your inner-self on the dance floor (it's drug and alcohol free). *Retreat accommodation including six classes a day, special ceremonies, and use of all facilities, from \$300 a night. Day passes and individual class passes available online. See [udara-bali.com](http://udara-bali.com)*

#### Taman Beji Griya waterfall, Badung Regency

**The lowdown** At Taman Beji Griya, the water purification ceremony known as Melukat and the paradisiacal location go hand-in-hand. With the help of a guide, visitors offer flowers, incense and offerings at shrines dotted along a creek bed (with snakes curved into its bank), in sacred caves (where water spills from far above catching the sunlight), and at two picturesque waterfalls. This ceremony is an integral part of the spiritual and cultural lifestyle of the Balinese, often done around the full moon. It helps purify the body and reignite the mind through water immersion, and paves the

way to health and happiness.

**Something special** Towards the end of the ritual, visitors must get rid of pent-up anger and emotion by screaming until your throat hurts into the first waterfall, and then laughing uproariously into the second waterfall. The release of negative energy followed by laughter (which comes naturally given the circumstances) makes you feel palpably better.

*There's a special guest desk for foreigners who will be allocated a guide and given a sarong to wear over their BYO swimsuits. The cost is about \$18.*

#### Talise Spa, Jumeirah Bali, Uluwatu

**The lowdown** Jumeirah resort, which opened mid-2022, is themed like the Hindu water palaces of the 14th century Majahapit empire. And given the resort's parent company hails from Dubai, it makes sense that Talise Spa blends Balinese traditions with Arabic therapies. Hindu-Javanese inspired holistic facial treatments, energising massages, cleansing scrubs, and stress-release therapies are the hammam speciality. There's also a sauna, steam bath, Vichy shower treatments and a cleansing ritual that times with the moon cycles.

**Something special** A two-hour Royal

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## SCENIC°ECLIPSE

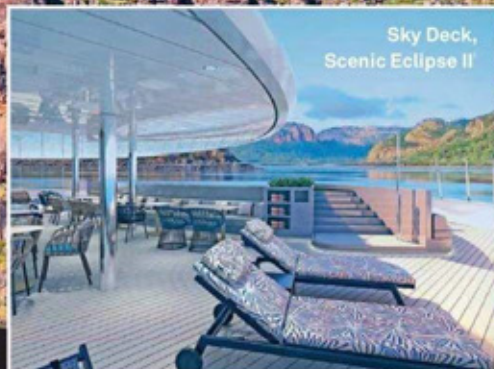
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### Cover story



Karma Kandara,  
Uluwatu.

Campa hammam treatment focuses on intense cleansing and detoxification for deep relaxation. Participants lie on a heated marble slab in a steamy room to be scrubbed (using Arctic salt flakes and marine clay), cleaned, massaged and moisturised.

Villas from \$1300 a night. The spa is open to non-staying guests from 9am-5pm daily. Massages from \$120. See [jumeirah.com](http://jumeirah.com)

#### The Yoga Barn, Ubud

**The lowdown** In the past 15 years, this Ubud icon has grown into a global epicentre for yoga, healing and wellness with seven yoga shalas and two healing spaces spread around a tropical garden. Kush Spa specialises in ayurvedic massages. Garden Cafe dishes out nourishing food with all the dietary ticks including raw, vegan and vegetarian. There's accommodation too. It offers in excess of 100 weekly classes from healing yoga nidra and guided meditation, to shadow dance and tea gong workshops, and seven-day healing retreats.

**Something special** Catch the Tibetan bowl sound meditation with Pak Wakuha every Tuesday at 7.15pm. Participants lie

on mats and slowly drift into another realm of consciousness as the resonant ringing sounds vibrate around the shala. Double rooms from \$100. Single drop-in classes \$15, less if you buy more. See [theyogabarn.com](http://theyogabarn.com)

#### Soulshine resort, Ubud

**The lowdown** Well-known American musician Michael Franti (touring Australia this month) and his partner, Sara, have recently upsized their resort to offer both traditional villa-style rooms and modern lux suites. The latter are kitted-out with acoustic guitars, Marley record players and vinyl collections (based on your pre-selected music taste). There are three pools, a waterslide and a bar-cum-restaurant with an intimate stage where Michael and his muso mates get the party started. Soulshine is a place of spirituality and healing too, offering a variety of retreats with themes including Pilates, dance, writing, photography and yoga, plus private sound-healing sessions and spa treatments.

**Something special** The signature seven-night Soulrocker Music retreat hosted by Michael and Sara is "wellness, but with a

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## SIX MORE BALINESE SPAS AND RETREATS

**Karma Spa, Karma Kandara resort, Uluwatu**

Sitting atop limestone cliffs overlooking the Indian Ocean, Karma Kandara resort's Karma Spa has daily yoga, meditation, reiki and hypnotherapy classes alongside spa and beauty treatments. A couples' ocean spa suite with an infrared sauna and 180-degree sea-view spa, is one of Bali's best wellness locations. See [karmagroup.com](http://karmagroup.com)

**Mekar Spa, K-Club, Ubud**

In an arching bamboo pavilion surrounded by jungle, Mekar spa is a soothing antidote to the resort's three-level day club. The "farm-to-spa" experiences draw on natural, organic and native ingredients to complement a modernised version of Bali's unique healing and wellness therapies. Standouts include the indulgent "chocolicious" massages and seaweed extract body wraps. See [kclubbud.com](http://kclubbud.com)

**One World, Tegallalang and Ubud**

Ayurveda draws on the centuries-old Hindu holistic medicinal system that relies on a natural mind and body approach to health and nutrition. With medical practitioners onsite, One World hosts one-week to one-month specialised Panchakarma (detox) programs and spa-heavy wellness retreats. A new second location has recently opened in Ubud. See [oneworldayurveda.com](http://oneworldayurveda.com)

**Desa Seni hotel, Canggu**

Antique villas, wood-carved curios and a curated collection of Indonesian fabrics and artefacts add to the rustic vibe of Desa Seni. The hotel offers three-night to one-week packages for guests wanting to recharge through daily yoga (including vinyasa, kundalini and yin), meditation and pranayama breathing classes, along with massages and reflexology. Classes are open to the public. See [desaseni.com](http://desaseni.com)

**Gdas Bali, Kumbuh**

Gdas is a new resort combining latest facilities with holistic healing. Speciality five-night retreats focus on sleep, emotional balance, detox and balancing the mind, with an all-inclusive line-up of plant-based food, daily yoga (hot and cold), meditation sessions, full spa access, temple purifications and evening aromatherapy. See [gdasbali.com](http://gdasbali.com)

**Sanctuary, Potato Head, Seminyak**

Sanctuary spa has taken its cue from Pyramid of Chi (see previous page) with its vibroacoustic audio visual therapy, breathwork and sound-healing offerings. It's more modern, but the aim is similar: release emotional blockages and elevate the mind to reach a higher level of consciousness. See [seminyak.potatohead.co](http://seminyak.potatohead.co)

rock and roll edge". Highlights include yoga classes where Michael accompanies the final savasana with his best-loved hits. Rooms from \$300. Seven-night retreats from \$5630. See [soulshinebali.com](http://soulshinebali.com)

**Waroeng Djamoé Spa, Hotel Tugu, Canggu**

The lowdown Hotel Tugu is lauded for its incredible collection of Indonesian antiques and artefacts. Amid the frangipani trees, its traditional spa riffs off this theme, offering heritage treatments from ancient Balinese, Javanese and Chinese Peranakan cultures. Javanese deep-tissue massages, hair and scalp treatments, and herbal baths along with Balinese dance massages inspired by rhythmical temple dances and gamelan music are on offer. The new wooden Guan Yin yoga pavilion is a space for meditation sessions, sound healing and classic yoga practices including hatha and yin.

**Something special** The 90-minute eastern spirituality massage is a coconut oil, herb and spice rub accompanied by soft vocal incantations for a deep relax. The 90-minute jama, or djamoé, explores

traditional herb and spice concoctions used in healing and rejuvenation. Suites and villas from \$430. Drop-in yoga classes \$13. Massages from \$40. See [tuguhotels.com](http://tuguhotels.com)

**Escape Haven, Canggu**

The lowdown Escape Haven hosts nurturing luxury wellness retreats (minimum one week) for women only. The focus is on self-care through limitless yoga and spa experiences, healthy food indulgences, healing rituals, ceremonies and excursions. The idea is that guests don't lift a finger. Retreat package themes including revive, surf, refresh yoga, renew fitness, ayurveda healing, detox, Pilates, bucket-list and Bali healing.

**Something special** The Bali healing package is the most popular. It's designed for guests emerging from the rigours of the pandemic who are seeking rest and relaxation along with a deeper healing experience. It includes chakra balancing, Balinese massages and a Balinese "melukat" or letting-go ceremony on Batu Bolong beach.

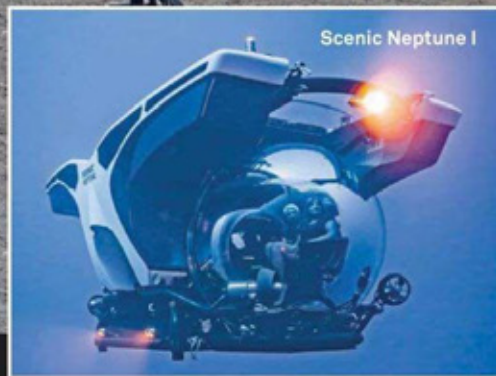
**Week-long retreat packages** from \$3880, all-inclusive. See [escapehaven.com](http://escapehaven.com)

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