

FAMILY TRAVEL

BRING THE KIDS TO BEAUTIFUL ISLAND OF THE GODS

MHAIRRI WOODHALL

Sharing Bali's treasures with my family has been a dream since before my daughter was born. I first explored Indonesia's island of the gods in my 20s, on a quasi-backpacking trip with friends. Guided by the reviews and recommendations touted in our dog-eared Frommer's paperback, we experienced the best of Bali on a less-than-modest budget. The island's warm and welcoming people, dramatic landscapes and throng of warungs — small shack-style cafes serving absurdly cheap and flavourful street food — are forever etched in my memory.

While I feel a deep sense of nostalgia for that bohemian-inspired adventure, as a mother now, my priorities have profoundly shifted. What I once considered to be an innocuous risk — think chicken satays cooked in a rundown market stall, void of refrigeration, food safety regulations and TripAdvisor reviews — seems completely absurd with a six-year-old (much to my husband's dismay). However, as I see it, long-haul travel with small children is arduous enough. Adding a case of Bali-belly to the itinerary would be disastrous. Also, having fantasized about this trip for almost a decade, the basic level of accommodation I endured with my backpacker buddies is another unnecessary gamble. This adventure was all about the splurge, which thankfully costs a lot less in Bali.

BUSTLING BEACH RESORT

To decompress and recover from the joys of jet lag, we stayed in the beach resort area of Seminyak, about a 40-minute drive from the airport in Denpasar. While drivers are easy to secure in Bali, we kept it simple by arranging a private transfer through our hotel — the Courtyard by Marriott. We chose the property, which is the No. 1 rated family hotel in Seminyak on TripAdvisor, for its on-site kids' club, complimentary buffet breakfast and exceptional value for the dollar. My daughter was also a huge fan of the fusion tacos from the on-site What the Truck food truck, and I surprisingly enjoyed one of the juiciest strip loins of my life at the newly opened Seminyak Meat Shop. The Courtyard is just a short walk from the beach and there's also a complimentary shuttle. If you want to get a little wet and wild, Waterbom Bali in neighbouring Kuta is the place to go. The world-class water park, set amid beautifully landscaped gardens, offers everything from a mellow lazy river and kids' splash zone to thrilling high-speed



Traditional Balinese dancers perform nightly at the Jati Bar in the Four Seasons Sayan.

water-coasters. Another unique attraction in Kuta is the Bali Sea Turtle Society — a non-profit organization dedicated to sea turtle conservation. Time it right and you may have the opportunity to help release the hatchery's tiny hatchlings into the sea.

BALI TWICE THE MAGIC

After a few days of beach play we ventured north to Ubud. This cultural hub, surrounded by lush jungle and terraced rice fields, is a haven for health and wellness, and home to Travel and Leisure's World's Best Hotel for 2018. We were fortunate to be staying at the Four Seasons Resort Bali at Sayan on the day it received the prestigious title. Experiencing this luxurious sanctuary overlooking the Ayung River is a true bucket-list moment and the villa-style accommodation is fabulous for families. After splashing her heart out in our private plunge pool, my daughter was keen to create Balinese crafts and play in Kids for All Seasons; allowing my husband and I to take part in the hotel's many cultural offerings, including the riverside cooking school, Sokaski. The four-hour culinary affair includes a tour of Ubud's morning market, live chef demonstrations with hands-on practice, and a drool-worthy Balinese feast featuring ceremonial dishes. Hang out at Sayan's spectacular infinity pool long enough and you'll soon be enticed to play in the sacred river below. Private rafting trips, available through the concierge, pair pristine jungle scenery with a lesson on

the area's farming practices and rich culture and history. Another hotel highlight is the complimentary Balinese dance show performed each evening in the Jati lobby bar. Having attended the larger Pura (temple) Lahur Uluwatu dance performance on my previous trip, I can confirm that enjoying drinks and nibbles at Jati is the simplest — and best — way to experience this entrancing traditional art form with your children.

Four Seasons' Bali Twice the Magic package also includes a two-night stay at Jimbaran Bay. Although Sayan garnered top hotel in the world, I'm madly in love with Jimbaran's spectacular cliff-side gardens and beachfront infinity pool overlooking the Indian Ocean. If a villa at Four

Seasons is above your budget, then spring for a day pass at the hotel's Sundara beach club. We practically lived in one of the poolside cabanas, arriving just after breakfast and staying well past Jimbaran's world-renowned sunsets for starlight swims. The only spot on Bali better than Sundara is Four Seasons' open-air bamboo spa pavilion where I indulged in a blissful two-hour Ocean Embrace treatment with sea water foot soak, blue sea-salt scrub and warm seashell massage.

LUXURY FOR LESS IN NUSA DUA

While I adored the elegance and beauty of the Four Seasons' Bali properties, my daughter fully embraced the family-focused fun

on offer at the Ritz-Carlton Nusa Dua. The Ritz Kidz programming encompasses everything from Balinese cultural crafts and nature walks to soccer and kite-flying on the beach. While our daughter was happily occupied, we drifted into dreamland with a couples Escape to Romance treatment in a Spa Villa. A body scrub, massage and rose petal soak with Champagne and chocolates completed our afternoon of delight. Complimentary bonfire s'mores, available nightly, are another win with the little ones, while all family members will appreciate the free sushi-making lessons, outdoor movie nights, yoga sessions and Balinese dance classes. And, for one of the best pepes ikan — Bali's ancient signature suckling pig dish — on the island embark on a delicious exploration of local cuisine at the Ritz's Bejana Indonesian restaurant. Standard rooms at the five-star beach resort start at \$310 Canadian per night. The hotel also has one of the best Marriott rewards points redemption values of all Ritz-Carlton properties, which is how we paid for our entire 12-night stay.

THE LONG HAUL

For flights, we booked premium economy on Cathay Pacific, via Vancouver and Hong Kong. Thanks to the extra legroom and lower seat recline in the premium economy cabin, we slept on the long-haul flight and almost felt human when we reached Bali. Cathay also allowed our daughter to use the inflatable foot pillow we brought (\$20 on Amazon), so that she could sleep across the seat comfortably. To make the 25 hours of travel bearable, we planned stops in Hong Kong in both directions. On the outbound we overnights at the SkyCity Marriott next to the airport and coming home, we organized a three-day layover to help break up the journey.

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Valid for travel:

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MUST book by: 30 Nov 2018

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* Prices mentioned above are per person, based on double occupancy.