

Bali high-style

If you want some serious and luxurious pampering during your vacation, check into Bulgari's new resort



Suzanne Sng

EVERYONE knows something about Bali, even if he has never been there before.

The Indonesian island – just 2½ hours and a \$200 budget flight away – is a popular tourist playground, known as much for its rich culture as for its laidback beach distractions.

But there is a side to the tropical paradise which only a select few get to experience – the international jetsetter's Bali.

The Bulgari Resort – opened last month by the Italian company better known for its high-end jewellery – is the latest luxury accommodation there.

Being more of a budget-air traveller than international jetsetter, I was rather anxious when I was invited to write about the opening. Would I have to abandon my usual beach attire of cheap and colourful bikinis in favour of something branded with a big logo?

After all, one night in its cheapest one-bedroom ocean-view villa at US\$1,100 (S\$1,740) would wipe out a big portion of my monthly salary. Obviously, this place is meant for someone in a different income bracket from mine.

In fact, this is one of the most expensive, extravagant and exclusive resorts on an island which has more than 5,000 hotel rooms.

These range from surfer shacks on the beach to something like one of the Bulgari's 59 villas perched on the edge of the Indian Ocean.

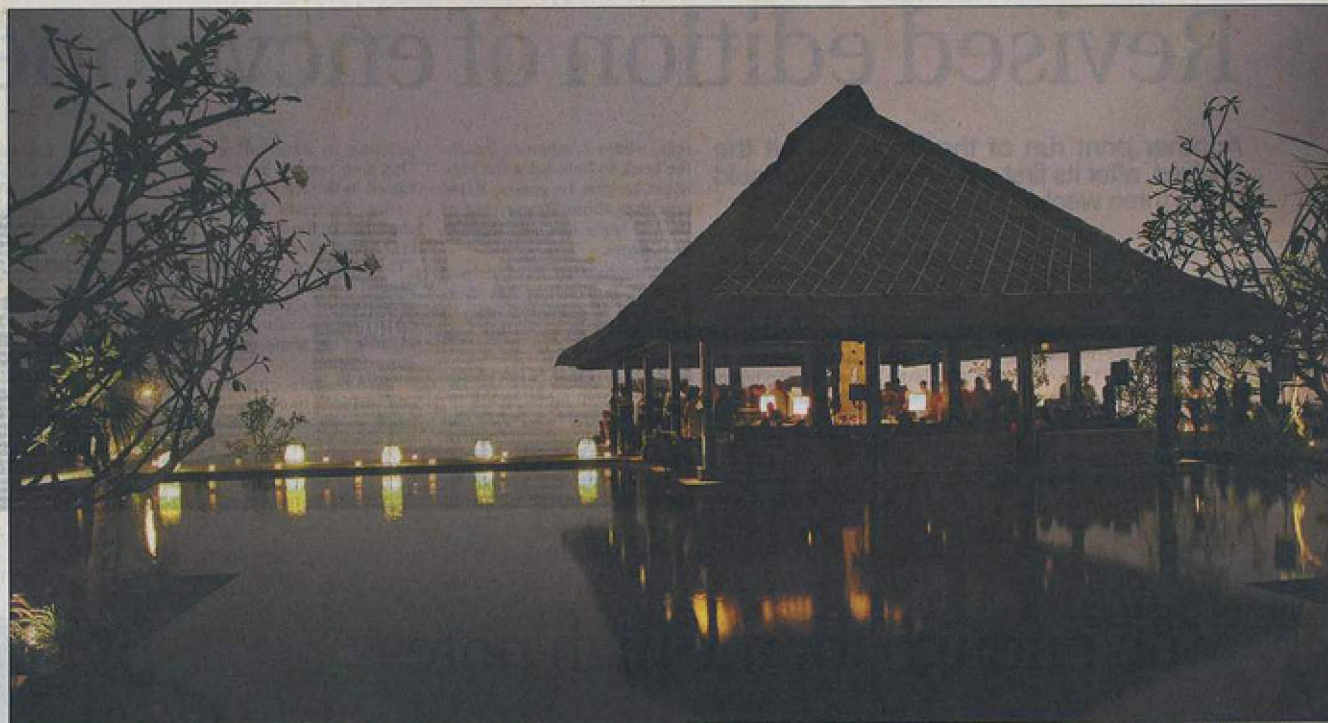
Of course, if you are one of the rich and famous checking into the resort – Hollywood celebrities have already made discreet advance bookings – only the US\$5,000-a-night Bulgari villa will do.

This tops the US\$4,400-a-night villa at the secluded Commo Shambhala Estate owned by Singaporean hotelier Christina Ong.

Stepping into the resort with its breathtaking ocean view as its first non-paying guest, I'm slightly disconcerted to find that everyone knows my name.

I feel like a C-list celebrity imposter, with chambermaids, bellboys and waiters addressing me respectfully as "Miss Suzanne" everywhere I go.

Ruiny drivers appear with



PHOTOS: BULGARI, SUZANNE SNG

vator – just so you can do a spot of tanning on the sand.

This is pampering you can seriously get used to. Needless to say, everything in the resort is designed with the signature Bulgari style – bold, contemporary Italian, lots of dark woods and clean lines – but with a Balinese twist.

For instance, the luxurious bed linen is topped with a traditional songket, which takes four months to weave by hand. Every room also has Indonesian antiques adorning the space, some as old as 400 years.

The target clientele is Asian, says Mr Francesco Trapani, chief executive of the Bulgari group, whereas its first hotel in Milan caters to Europeans. Bali is the second of seven planned hotels in the jeweller's strategy to move into the luxury-hotel business, and took three years to build.

"Asia, for us, is a very important market – 40 per cent of our total sales come from Asia – and we want to please our Asian clients, especially the Japanese," he says.

Even though the big boys such as the Ritz-Carlton, InterContinental and Four Seasons have already established themselves in Bali, he is confident that Bulgari offers a little something extra – style.

"We are unique, and better than the others," he says. "Our philosophy is to develop hotels which are PR machines for us."

"It's a matter of being unique



A TOAST TO STYLE (above): Enjoy a tippie and a lovely sea view at the resort bar, which is by the edge of a cliff.



GLASS CLASS (above): Glass panels let in views of the lush greenery outside the master bedroom which is fitted with, among other things, a Bang & Olufsen flat-screen TV.

WET AND WILD (left): Prefer a quick shower to a long soak in the bathtub? Head for the outdoor shower among the foliage beyond the glass doors at the end of the bathroom.



Best of Bali

Bali has long been heralded as one of Asia's most stunning backdrops and has a long history of providing visitors with the perfect holiday. With the advent of Bulgari's Balinese hideaway, the island is one of the best possible locations for a romantic break. The Bulgari Resort's unique location, the blend of traditional Balinese style with dramatic contemporary Italian design and the stunning variety of services all add to a fantastic, one-of-a-kind vacation.

"With its dramatic setting on a secluded plateau 160 metres above the Indian Ocean dropping straight to the sea, as well as its breathtaking natural beauty that offers unrivalled views across the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean which no other areas could compare, the Bulgari Resort



Above: Enjoy a spa treatment with unrivalled ocean views at Bulgari Resort, Bali. Left: The villas at Bulgari Resort skillfully fuse Balinese style with dramatic contemporary Italian design.



offers a unique experience of glamour and excellence in an exclusive and intimate setting", says Alejandro Helbling, General Manager, Bulgari Hotels & Resorts, Bali. The resort features a private beach, only accessible from the property and pods of dolphins are often seen from the shore.

The resort is planning some culinary surprises for Valentine's Day, with Executive Chef Andrew Skinner creating traditional Balinese dishes, imbued with his years of experience in the kitchen. Exquisite, contemporary Italian cuisine is also on offer and Helbling suggests guests experience "a romantic dinner in their villa, in the outside lounge area next to the plunge pool. With outstanding views and sounds of the ocean as background, a dining experience in the privacy of the villa will ensure a Valentine's Day that is a memory of a lifetime." ■