

Kemah Tinggi

– Your Heart’s Desire

When family members travel a long way to spend time with you, it makes sense to show them something more of the region. So, when our son Carl and his girlfriend Carrie came out from the UK for Christmas, we took them somewhere really special – one of the loveliest villas in Bali.

*Above:
Carrie and rice-fields*

Near the end of a 40-minute trip from Denpasar airport, we glimpse tantalising views of a cerulean sea beyond emerald rice-fields. Entering a charming village, we turn into a couple of progressively narrow alleys, then into a neat courtyard. “Welcome to Kemah Tinggi!” beams Wayan – villa manager, driver and guide – and opens two doors into heaven.

An advertising copywriter might say that Kemah Tinggi is your home away from home in Bali, but let’s be honest: precious few of us have homes that can compare to this spot. Nothing – not the rave reviews of friends, not the website, not even talking to owner Penny Foulger – prepared us for the serene beauty of this place. Designed by a top local architect, Kemah Tinggi is a feast for the senses. A central, double-height living-space has open sides with roll-down

bamboo blinds; a dining-room is adjacent to it, and upstairs is a cosy TV room. Level green lawns surround a long infinity pool that reflects the incredible sunset; the eye travels lazily beyond to an expanse of rice-fields and a palm-fringed horizon.

*by Verne
Maree*



*Left:
The central living-space*

In typical villa style, the sleeping-accommodation is in separate buildings around a central communal area. Most holiday houses have one 'master bedroom' that is much more desirable than the others. Fine, if you go with your children – you get first dibs, of course. But if there is more than one adult couple, there can be a bitter race to get the best room (or a martyred sacrifice of it, which can be even worse) – not the best way to start a holiday.

So Penny and Adrian decided that all four bedrooms in their villa would be master suites. Each one is equally beautiful; no one will feel that they have drawn the short straw.

Luxury

Situated in the midst of rice-fields to the west of Canggu, a 20-minute drive from Seminyak, Kemah Tinggi is so beautiful and so self-contained that you may never want to leave. The daytime staff of 10 is

headed by Wayan. Uniformly warm, friendly and polite, they go home after serving the evening meal and another two beaming faces come in to do the night shift. It's the sort of service that tries to preempt your every need, but is never intrusive; it's a masterful balancing-act.

When you work out the numbers, it's fantastically good value for this level of luxury, especially when split between three or four couples. You can enjoy excellent food without having to go out for it, but if you *do* want to go

out, your driver will take you wherever you want to go. The staff will keep an eye on your children, so you can sleep in or catch an afternoon snooze.

If I could start every day with a private yoga session and end it with a traditional Balinese massage (followed, perhaps, by a large gin and tonic), I just *know* I'd be a nicer person. At Kemah Tinggi, everything your



heart may desire comes to you – including a massage service (\$25 an hour) and a Pilates or yoga instructor (\$60 for a 75-minute session).

The food is outstanding, at a fraction of the price you would pay at a restaurant. Imagine smoked salmon mini-blinis and Thai-style spring rolls with your pre-dinner drinks; a starter of tiger prawn and green mango salad; fillets of salmon with a pink peppercorn crust

on baby spinach leaves; and a trio of vanilla ice-cream, Kahlua and espresso with home-baked choc-almond biscuits.

Roy – something of a perfectionist himself – was struck by the minute attention to detail in every aspect. For example, the Balinese wedding figurines on the coffee-table face you as you sit on the sofas during the evening, but are turned in the morning to enjoy the view of the rice-fields. And when we retired to our room one night – after sitting up too late singing along to a Frank Sinatra CD (as you do) – the huge bath was aglow with candles and decorated with bowls of flowers. Just magical!

Service such as this doesn't happen by accident: it speaks of ongoing training and a management style that leaves absolutely nothing to chance.

Owners Penny and Adrian have young children of their own, so they've made Kemah Tinggi completely child-friendly, and I am told the staff are delighted to have children to look after. On the day we



left, we noticed that the two other rooms had been set up with extra beds, cots, baby monitors and storybooks in preparation for the next guests.



Out and About

If you like, Wayan will take you to Tanah Lot, a temple just 10 minutes away. Said to be guarded by sea snakes, it's one of Bali's most important sea temples and is famous for viewing at sunset in particular. It's rather nice to just wander around the neighbourhood, too – there's a strong sense of community and everyone smiles and says hello.

If you prefer to be in the middle of the action, however, this may not be the ideal location for you. The roads are narrow, winding, and full of motorbikes and dogs, and if there are road-works on the go – as there were when we visited – it takes a bit longer to get about. As at other villas, you need to decide in advance whether you'll be eating out or in, as the cooks have



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to shop for ingredients.

I would suggest that you take full advantage of everything the villa has to offer, and make just one or two trips out: to shop and dine in Seminyak, and to Ubud for a taste of Balinese culture (and more shopping, of course). We had an excellent Italian meal one evening at La Lucciola, followed by liqueur coffees at the uber-cool Ku De Ta (pronounced *coup d'etat*) nearby, both of which are superbly situated right on the beach.

The drive to Ubud takes about an hour and is well worth the trip. The cultural and artistic centre of Bali, its roads are lined with an overwhelming number and variety of shops. At Geneva, three huge floors of Balinese arts and crafts in Seminyak, we found two rustic wood-carvings to brighten up the lobby outside our front door. And in another shop, we found our own perfect duo of Balinese wedding figurines to remind us of Kemah Tinggi.

After four blissful days, it was difficult to drag ourselves away. But we *will* be back.

Other Things to Do:

- Sit by the pool and listen to *gamelan* players from the local village; you could also arrange for a full dance performance.
- Hire bikes to explore the back roads to neighbouring villages.
- Play golf at the best golf course in Southeast Asia – Le Meridien, Nirwana Tanah Lot.



- Ride horses along the beach and through the rice-fields at sunset.
- Take the family to Waterbom at Kuta Beach for a fun day on the slides or learning how to surf.
- Go on a diving-trip.

Getting There:

We flew Singapore Airlines to Denpasar Airport; their departure times gave us the most time in Bali. You could also check out Jetstar Asia on www.jetstar.com and Silk Air on www.silkair.com.

Booking the Villa:

Go to www.kemahtinggi.com. But be warned: the villa was featured in the UK Condé Nast Tatler in December 2006, so peak holiday periods are being booked up well in advance.



Sometimes it's all in the detail. It's something we excel at.

Exclusive luxury villa in Bali offering sophistication and romance for couples and exceptional child-friendly facilities for families. Stylish bedrooms, beautiful gardens and idyllic views are complemented by twelve staff, a bar service, delicious meals and blissful massages. From Ploah pillows and Molton Brown toiletries to Bose stereos and poolside lattes, this is one of Bali's most private and seductive seaside hideaways.

Rates include transfers, a la carte breakfasts, a chauffeured car and daily laundry.

www.kemahtinggi.com