The Best of Both

ANANTARA SEMINYAK VACATION CLUB in Bali is a luxurious, quiet hideaway amid the island’s energetic tourist centres. A perfect place to escape without becoming totally secluded, concludes DIETRICH NEU

Bali hasn’t needed an introduction for years, but here’s one anyway. Enraptured by clear ocean water and wrapped in ribbons of coral reefs, the Indonesian island’s beaches, iconic rice paddies, volcanic mountains, religious sites and animated nightlife have become the stuff of legend.

In fact, its reputation precedes it so far across the globe that many Western tourists mistakenly believe it is its own country. A blunder that’s somewhat understandable when you arrive. Bali has an entirely unique culture, language and religion that set it apart from its parent nation.

What’s never misconstrued is the island’s status as a tourist magnet. Nearly every wayward backpacker to set foot in Southeast Asia has travelled there in search of a party. But families find their place, too. As do couples; elderly tourists and most everyone else. Action-packed or laid-back, take your pick.

My very first trip to the island turned out to be the latter. A mellow, escapist experience in a cozy and quiet one-bedroom pool villa at
Anantara Seminyak Vacation Club. Surrounded by lush foliage and colonial-era architecture, it’s an easy place to forget the honking horns and buzzing crowds of Bangkok – if only for a brief weekend.

As the name implies, the luxury resort sits in the heart of Seminyak, a small beach-side region that feels torn between quiet resort town and loud party roughhouse. It’s been described by some as the ‘cool corner’ of the island, largely for its wealth of creative galleries and designer shops. A short stroll down a few winding paths at night reveals an abundance of nightclubs and bars, packed with tourists of all shapes and sizes. It has a little bit of something for everyone, and Anantara’s Vacation Club resort: here is a most fitting dance partner.

But what does the “Vacation Club” part mean? Launched in 2010, the Anantara Vacation Club programme is the brand’s premium shared ownership platform. Instead of renting days at a hotel, members receive an allotment of yearly points that can be used to stay at any one of the eight other Anantara Vacation Club-branded resorts in the world – and even many non-Anantara hotels. There are a range of membership options, but no matter what membership you buy you can expect better rooms and more amenities for less money. Simple as that.

It’s important to note that Anantara Seminyak Vacation Club in Bali is different from the more well-known Anantara Seminyak Bali Resort. The latter sits square on the beach, while the Vacation Club rests about five minutes inland. The two resorts are different, but not separate. As a member of Anantara’s Vacation Club guests receive full access to the nearby resort’s amenities. I personally indulged in a much-needed spa treatment, but you would also be free to swim in the pool or dine as any guest would.

There is a world to explore outside in Seminyak, and Anantara’s staff will happily show you around. But the Vacation Club’s cuisine might pull you back inside a time or two. The food is surprisingly good – and this is coming from someone who is often disappointed by hotel fare, even at five-star resorts. Everything from Balinese classics to Western staples was fresh and delicious – the banana fritters with maple syrup still haunt my dreams. To elevate the experience, Anantara offers a “Spice Spoon” cooking class that’s fun and informative – I’ve made some of the recipes since – and its candle-lit in-villa barbecue is tailor made for couples. It’s not Michelin-star food, but if that’s all you eat you’re probably impossible to please anyway.

Overall, the Seminyak Vacation Club more than holds its weight as a standalone property – the spa treatment was the only time I visited the other resort. The comforts of its pool villas are enough to eat up significant “chill time” lounging in the sun, slipping into the private pool and relaxing in the breezy alfresco rooms. High walls and quiet, courteous staff erase any feeling that you are close to civilization – even when in the heart of it.

Although Bali has myriad sides, Anantara Seminyak Vacation Club has a very specific role. It’s a slice of peace-and-quiet nestled next to more energetic centres of activity, perfect for people who want to slow things down a little without remaining on the sidelines the whole time. On this occasion, it was perfect for me.

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