



BEST HOTELS IN TABANAN: THE UNSPOILT CORNER OF BALINESE PARADISE YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF

The island's serene district boasts moody black sand beaches, charming traditional villages, and lush rice fields

While Bali may conjure visions of noisy beach clubs and backpackers to some, the serene southwest coast in Tabanan is a gloriously unspoilt and welcome respite from the tourists.

Twenty minutes from the wildly busy hotspot of Canggu, this agricultural province has remained peaceful and, as yet, undiscovered, boasting moody black sand beaches, charming traditional villages, and lush rice fields. Subak irrigation channels still feed the rice paddies, fishing boats leave from the beaches, and the temples remain places of ceremony rather than fodder for influencers.

A slew of quietly luxurious boutique hotels have sprung up in Tabanan, all sustainable, green, and perfectly in keeping with the local vernacular. Having backpacked through the island's party spots in my mid-twenties, where pretty much all I did was drink at beach clubs and stay at hostels, I felt apprehensive and excited about the abundant, grown-up version of Bali I was about to experience and my God, did it deliver.

Grounded in nature and the ethos of switching off from the digital world, these hotels were a balm for my tech-weary soul. From a sustainable hideaway built around a waterfall to an unfussy yet lavish beach resort boasting treehouse suites, here are my picks of the best Tabanan has to offer.

Nirjhara



NIRJHARA IS TUCKED AMONG VERDANT RICE FIELDS AND COCONUT TREES

NIRJHARA

Nirjhara is a thoughtfully designed eco-lodge built around the cascading waterfall from which it takes its name, where I could happily spend, oh, twelve, fourteen, 28 days? Combining understated luxury with easy access to some of the world's best surf spots, it offers the best of both worlds for travellers who want the waves within reach yet the calm of the jungle to return to. Set in Banjar Kedungu just a few minutes' from Kedungu Beach, it's within easy reach of Yeh Gangga, Soka and, a little further west, Balian.

The beauty is in the details. The moment I arrive, sweaty and frazzled, I am presented with a cold towel, a wonderfully herby welcome drink and three aquamarine jars of the hotel's signature scents so I can pick exactly what scent I would like for my room. And oh, the room. One of just 25 villas, my treehouse canopy suite with its modernist timber-clad exterior is perched high among the coconut trees and boasts a private terrace with a freestanding tub overlooking the surrounding rice fields and jungle. The decor is achingly tasteful, blending mint-green textiles, recycled wood structures and natural stone with contemporary minimalist design. Furnishings are created by artisans or upcycled, teak shelves are hand carved and woven walls lend texture to the rooms.

The hotel's infinity pool overlooks the cascading waterfall, with gnarled frangipani trees arching over the water and chattering bulbuls and cooing spotted doves flitting in and out of the lush greenery. Over by the waterfall, I spot a huge parrot swooping through the air and later, an Asian water monitor lizard glides through the water and climbs onto a rock to bask in a shaft of sunlight.



THE CANOPY SUITE OVERLOOKS THE WATERFALL AND HAS A FRONT-ROW SEAT TO THE SUNSETS

NIRJHARA



LIKE A MODERNISTIC TREEHOUSE, THE EXTERIOR IS CLAD IN STREAMLINED TIMBER

NIRJHARA

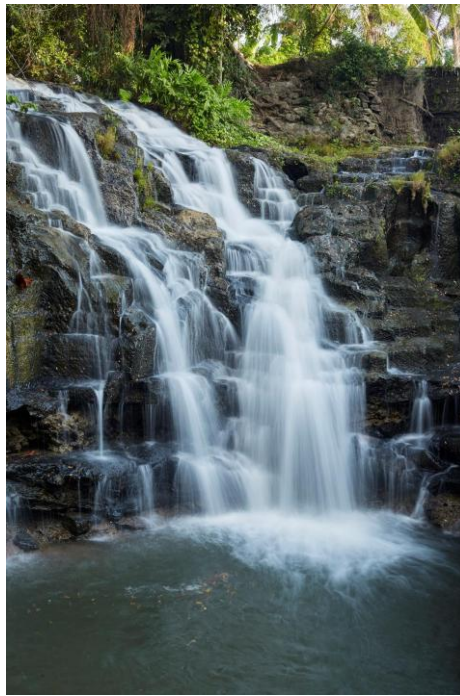
When I reach my sunlounger, a smiling waitress immediately fetches me a bowl of vegetable crisps and two glass bottles of water in an ice bucket. As the blistering midday sun approaches, she hands me and the other guests perfectly spherical popsicles in flavours like grape, lime and strawberry. She seems to guess what I need before I do, rushing over with a lunch menu or more water if I so much as exhale loudly. I am truly in hospitality's safest pair of hands.

The restaurant, Ambu, leans into the local produce with precision. There is a farm-to-table approach to the food, with 95 per cent of ingredients sourced from the hotel's own vegetable garden, neighbouring farms and local suppliers. I fall in love with the Nusantara breakfast board, which has every Indonesian dish I could have wanted and more - nasi goreng (wok-fried rice with vegetables), jagung goreng (corn fritters) and pecel (soybean salad with peanut sauce). Not to mention the Jamu shot, a bracing turmeric drink, and bubur ketan hitam, black rice porridge with coconut milk that I could happily eat by the bucket full. Other standouts include the lumpia semarang, which are Peranakan-style fried rolls, the vegetable red curry and the Indian Ocean seafood risotto.



AMBU RESTAURANT LEANS INTO THE LOCAL PRODUCE WITH PRECISION

NIRJHARA



THE HOTEL IS BUILT AROUND A MAJESTIC NATURAL WATERFALL

NIRJHARA

In keeping with the hotel's slow pace, guests can use complimentary bikes to cycle through the surrounding villages and rice fields to the beach. Tanah Lot, one Bali's oldest Hindu pilgrimage ancient sea temples, is a twenty minute bike ride away. I cycle past bushy-tailed dogs snoozing in front of traditional Balinese family compounds, bougainvillea curling around the elaborate framework of the gates. Locals peer out from colourful roadside food stalls as towering coconut trees sway overhead and rice fields (so green it looks like someone has turned up the saturation on them) are punctuated by rickety makeshift scarecrows.

Private surf lessons can be arranged with Nirjhara's instructors at Kedungu Beach, while more experienced surfers can venture to Echo Beach. You can also unwind at The Retreat, Nirjhara's reflection-pool wellness sanctuary, which includes the yoga shala, ancient reiki blessings and treatments rooted in ancient Balinese wisdom. The "spiritual healing" experience includes sound healing and breathing meditation in the foothills of Ubud, followed by a cleansing ritual at a revered sacred spring. The overall ethos is slow down, take stock and relax and it's achieved perfectly here.

www.nirjhara.com/en/