



## A Hotel with Attitude

Review by Justin Eeles

### Conrad, the hotel company with 'attitude,' has opened a new hideaway in Bali.

Amid the frenzied construction of villa complexes that are currently so *de rigueur* in Bali, Conrad have opened their first property in the country; an impressive beachfront resort in Tanjung Benoa. It's a bold move. Visitor trends have moved away from large five-star resorts recently, favouring the privacy and intimacy that Bali's wealth of villas have to offer. Too often guests can feel lost, unknown or unnecessary in expansive hotels where finding breakfast can be a logistical adventure in itself.

Conrad hopes to change all that, or at least to offer a hotel with a character of its own. Following the example of its older sister in Bangkok, which successfully entered a flooded market with a huge splash in 2002, Conrad Bali wants its staff and philosophy to be big attractions, as well as its modern design and facilities. Conrad Bangkok's slogan was a 'hotel with attitude,' and they're aiming towards similar goals in Bali, albeit with a local touch. All staff, from General Manager down to bellboy wear the same casual uniform, partly following the hotel's theme of quality through simplicity, but also to encourage staff to be themselves and engage guests as equals. It works. The staff are relaxed, eager and fun to be around. Whether this energy will continue as the hotel becomes more established remains to be seen, but as things are now, it is a definite reason to visit.

No resort worth its mettle doesn't offer a spa, and at Conrad guests head to Jiwa for their fix of aromatic oils, soothing sounds and beguiling range of treatments designed by spa guru Susan Stein, who concentrates here on treatments based on water, and herbal and floral essential aromatherapy designed to delight and indulge the senses. Modern and traditional recipes blend on the menu of signature treatments - try the Ocean Flow Massage, a combination of languid, rhythmical strokes and firm acupressure.

Those tied to the office, or uneasy if not connected, can rejoice in high-speed wireless internet here, a professional business centre and meeting/conference facilities. Alternatively, download those all important Emails poolside, while sipping a long *mohito*.

The only negative side to the Conrad could be its position in relation to Bali's other fashionable haunts. With the main concentration of bars and restaurants firmly placed in the Seminyak/Kerobokan area, guests wanting to party will have to resign themselves to a 30-minute drive to the action. It's not a high price to pay, and from the buzz the hotel's opening has caused, it seems most of the traffic is coming the other way. 🍹



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*The Conrad Bali: Palatial, bold and defiant*



## Hot Properties



Top: The Uma Paro's surrounding mountainous terrain  
Bottom: One of the many Buddhist temples perched precariously on a Bhutanese cliffside

### Mountain Kingdom Come

The rural, medieval Kingdom of Bhutan will witness the October opening of the Uma Paro, COMO Hotels and Resorts' latest venture.

Bhutan, the very word provokes immediate intrigue and, generally, the line, "You know, I've always wanted to go there." Well, around 8000 tourists a year *do* go there, and until recently have happily slummed it in Government-run accommodations despite paying the mandatory USD 200 a day for the pleasure of staying in the mistifying Himalayan Buddhist Kingdom.

The news that top-end resorts (initiated by Aman, who are opening six retreats in the mountainous realm) have been allowed to set up here has provoked a mixed response, with some fearing an influx of culture- and environment-threatening visitors; tourism, the modern colonising force claiming yet another land as its own.

However, they should not worry too much, both Aman and Uma are offering an average of only 20 rooms per resort, and the 'exclusive' rates ensure Bhutan's magic is unlikely to be diluted by such a small number of upmarket, well-educated guests.

Inland Paro, flanked by rice paddies, wheat fields, trout-filled streams, orchid-lined banks, scattered settlements, and the famous Bhutanese monasteries clinging wilfully to cliff sides, is an idyllic setting for 38-acre Uma Paro's 20-room, nine-villa resort, designed to look like a local village.

The resort's main house was formerly the residence of a Bhutanese nobleman; its surrounding gardens boast apple orchards, manicured lawns, and multi-layered glades and clearings. Each villa is set on a different level, ensuring complete privacy, and lending the resort an organic, unstructured sensibility.

Environmentally responsible, Uma is committed to developing its wildflower meadows and mixed-species woodland, with the aim of attracting ever more bird species. Local artists hand-painted the resort's white walls with flowers, birds and religious motifs; the interiors designed by Kathryn Kng who recently completed Metropolitan Bangkok's minimalistic concept.

Uma's kitchen celebrates wholesome local produce, and fuses world-class, traditional Bhutanese cuisine with Indian delicacies. Raw, organic foods heavy in vitamins and living enzymes are integrated into the menu. Meals can be enjoyed in a tall pine tree circular pavilion setting.

The COMO Shambhala Spa is comprised of a yoga room overlooking the Paro Valley, a Jacuzzi, indoor pool and gym. In the adjacent pine forest, a hot stone bath house includes a private massage room for couples. Therapies draw particular emphasis from Ayurveda detox programmes and Shiatsu.

If anyone actually manages to leave the resort, excursions include guided day walks, luxury camping treks and mountain biking. Visits to monasteries, festivals, villages, markets and museums can also be organised. PM 🍹

### Getting There

Druk Air (www.drukair.com.bt) connects Bhutan with Bangkok, Delhi, Dhaka and Kathmandu. It is a 10-minute drive from the airport to Uma Paro.



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