

# A SLEEPY sanctuary

AS BALI GETS BUSIER, FAMILIES ARE CROSSING THE WATERS TO SLEEPY NUSA LEMBONGAN.

WORDS SUE WHITE



**F**or all parents who travel with their kids, there's a moment we've secretly dreamed of. Yours may be sitting on a surfboard in a tropical location, kids adjacent on their own boards. Or perhaps it's that first cycle trip when they ride their own bikes beside you.

My own family travel fantasy involves a snorkel mask and comes true minutes after my 4-year-old Ollie and I launch ourselves off a boat into the clear waters of sleepy Nusa Lembongan.

"Mum! Fish! Thousands of coloured fish!" he cries from behind his bulky life jacket, dog-paddling furiously before dipping his head in for another look.

Nusa Lembongan offers our family plenty of travel firsts – but most importantly it offers sanctuary. Bali remains beautiful, but even long-time fans admit it's getting busier. As I investigate quieter family friendly options, the name of this small island continually pops up as somewhere worthy of more than a daytrip.

On paper, I can see why. Firstly, the transit is easy; Nusa Lembongan is just 30 to 40 minutes by fast boat from Sanur to the 'port' at the small village of Jungutbatu. It's a beach landing, but boat operators have perfected the art of carrying three bags a time on their shoulders. Secondly, there are plenty of accommodation choices, although families are best to avoid clifftop hotels, due to their endless steps.

Twenty-four hours before my snorkelling success story, we spend our first day exploring Nusa Lembongan on land. For backpackers and kid-free adults, this is usually done by scooter. For families, it's by golf buggy. After a short lesson from the owner of Arjun Buggy Rentals, we are off, snorkels and swimwear strapped on the back seats. "Faster!" Ollie cries, ever the adventurer.

Aside from the occasional sign and a tourist map tucked underneath my right thigh, I have little idea where we are going, so I keep our speed through the winding jungle roads at a conservative pace. It doesn't matter – on an island this size, there's more than enough time for the highlights: the calm waters of Mushroom Bay, the crashing waves of Dream Beach and the thickly forested road leading to the island's mangrove forest (good for a short kayak adventure).

Of course, those are my own highlights. As it turns out, my second in command has another other addition.

"Stop – what's that?" Ollie calls urgently from the passenger seat about an hour into our exploration. I pull the golf buggy over and shift it into neutral – a simple exercise involving one foot on the brake and a flick of a switch.

He vigorously gestures to the tall double waterslides of Sunday Beach Water Park, which I've quietly tried to sneak past.



Sandy Bay Beach Club's casual eatery offers an array of gluten-free, dairy-free, nut-free, vegetarian and vegan meals.



Many of Nusa Lembongan's beaches feature unspoilt views.



# Nusa Lembongan

**Gentle giants**  
Snorkelling alongside manta rays in their prime feeding ground will remain a lifelong memory.

**Lazy daze**  
Base yourselves at Sandy Bay Beach Club when you want to be barefoot and beachfront.

**Paddle along**  
Not a fan of submerging into the deep blue? Explore above it in a kayak!

**Feel the thrill**  
When it's time for some curated fun, Sunday Beach Water Park will have you covered.

**A true gem**  
Dream Beach is an absolute, er, dream – 115m of white sand and one of the quietest places to while away the day.



“Do you think 4-year-olds can go on that?” Honesty prevails, despite knowing what comes next for my legs. Two hours later, I beg off slide duty and we continue our loose circumnavigation of Nusa Lembongan, passing daytrippers returning from snorkelling for manta ray sightings and local children riding motorbikes through the tiny villages.

This time, we are united on our destination: Sandy Bay Beach Club. Flopping onto one of the double beach beds perched on the sand adjacent to the infinity pool, I glance around and learn we’re not the only family that has realised this is the perfect respite from two hours of climbing waterslides. One neighbouring group has a whole baby play area set up on their beach bed, allowing them to entertain their little while watching the waves crash just metres away. Others come and go from the pool, where views of the beach and the upcoming sunset make supporting toddler swimming endeavours virtually relaxing.

Famished, I pour over the menu: jackfruit and avocado tacos for me, spaghetti meatballs for Ollie. Plus drinks, of course: a chocolate smoothie for my son and a suitably impressive cocktail for me. On second thought, I make that a mocktail – they come complete with a coconut paleta (ice block) sticking out the top. Plus, I forgot, the golf buggy calls and I’m driving. **ft**

*Sue White is the founder of the free Facebook community Kids Who Travel. She travelled with the support of various local operators.*



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## NEED TO KNOW



### GETTING THERE

A 30- to 40-minute boat trip from Sanur. Choose a reputable operator like Rocky Fast Cruise ([rockyfastcruise.com](http://rockyfastcruise.com)).



### GETTING AROUND

Hire a golf buggy – it’s a fun and useful vehicle to help families explore the land. They seat four and cost about AUD\$80 per day. We hired ours from Arjun Buggy Rental (62 812 367 5667). To explore the island by sea, most hotels will organise a snorkelling trip to find manta rays. Lembongan Water Sport is a good option with kids; our trip had a strong safety focus.



### STAYING THERE

There’s plenty of choice! We loved Song Lambung Beach Huts (family rooms available) for its short, flat walk along a clifftop track to plenty of restaurants. The 20m stroll to a calm beach was perfect when we wanted to try somewhere other than the hotel’s mid-size infinity pool.



### WHEN TO GO

Dry season is May to October, however Nusa Lembongan is significantly less rainy than Bali proper, so off season can be good too.



### BEST FOR

Kids of any age, as long as you’re not after the kids’ clubs that abound in other parts of Bali. Nusa Lembongan’s offerings are quieter, but there’s plenty to do for three to four nights.

## 5 MORE FAMILY ISLAND GETAWAYS YOU MAY NOT HAVE HEARD OF

### TIOMAN ISLAND, MALAYSIA

A nature reserve ringed by pristine beaches off the east coast of the Malaysian Peninsula. Get there via an easy coach trip from Singapore, followed by a two-hour ferry from Mersing.

### LOFOTEN ISLANDS, NORWAY

A unique daytrip where visitors arrive and depart by boat to spend the day walking the lush green hills and admiring whale skeletons laid out on the deserted beaches.

### ISCHIA, ITALY

Go for the hot springs, fabulous food and local vibe – this island just off Naples is the place Italians choose over Capri (visit Capri on a daytrip instead).

### IONA, SCOTLAND

Getting to this Inner Hebrides island takes some doing, but you’ll pass through some of Scotland’s best scenery en route. Visitors can’t bring cars over, so explore by taxi or, even better, bicycle.

### ISLA MUJERES, MEXICO

Now that it has become daytrip fodder for resort guests from nearby Cancun, 7km-long Isla Mujeres is far less sleepy than it used to be – but this Caribbean beauty rewards those staying a few days; serenity prevails after the daytrippers leave.

## images

**Main:** The bar at Sandy Bay Beach Club features cocktails, mocktails, smoothies, juices and fizzes. **Inset:** This swing at Sunset Beach is the perfect place to get your feet wet.