



Right: The private plunge pool in the Alila villas

design aside, the views of the surrounding hills and greenery are absolutely mesmerising and are best absorbed first thing in the morning over a cup of coffee. From the edge of my outdoor pool I can gaze out at the panoramic vista of black sandy beaches and waving palm trees and dream.

Before breakfast at Cotta, the open air restaurant, I venture out of the sanctuary of the hotel and rent a bicycle. As I make my way through villages, past temples and entire families piled onto one motorbike, I discover the a side to Bali usually hidden from view. At 7 o'clock in the morning, the air is cool and damp and there is a lingering smell of clove cigarettes from the groups of men relaxing on street corners. Gradually though, the lively chatter of birds swerving from roof to electricity cables, and children waking up behind the red brick walls of their houses, and the wind rustling the kites in the rice fields begins to wake Bali up. The sun is out and the green patches of fields are a vivid

backdrop for the thatched roof temples and bright coloured entryways of the village homes.

In the afternoon I retreat to Spa Alila and indulge in a signature local massage. The more vigorous might be tempted into the main pool for a few laps or at the very least to bob gently on its surface on air-filled cushions while enjoying a freshly cut coconut or Asian inspired mocktail. A daytrip to nearby terracotta factories, blacksmiths and temples or the Royal Palace where the island's dynasty was created and later split after two of the wives of the Ruler bore him each a son within the same year is also a must for the beach-weary.

In the evening, I enjoy a fresh seafood dinner served on the beach at Ombak. Chef Fernando, whose speciality is the grill, is particularly adept at seafood and local lobster and line-caught fish, prawns and scallops are made to order on the barbecue and served at your table with salads, rice and Asian condiments - including a particularly fiery peanut sauce.

Without doubt, Alila Villas Soori has been created to calm the spirits and leave its guests in awe of the beautiful Balinese culture and heritage – and I for one was certainly captivated. ■