

Investing in your vacation home

John Duffield has converted his Bali home, Villa Bukit Naga, into a luxury resort, a splurge worth considering

By Lara Wozniak



John Duffield describes his Bali property, Villa Bukit Naga, as a place to retreat to normalcy. A typical executive's life – armed with a crackberry, a notebook set at the side of the bed to jot down midnight thoughts and the lightest laptop on the market – is arguably not normal. Waking slowly, to the sound of cicadas and birds, watching the morning mist rise off the valley floor while sipping Balinese coffee should be the norm.

Or at least a memory you can return to when you are back in your corner office – though I kept wondering: what if I actually saw a wild Komodo dragon, which are reportedly part of the local jungle scene?

A retreat at a hill station just 10 kilometres outside of the artisan town of Ubud in Bali should be idyllic. But Villa Bukit Naga takes the experience to new levels, most likely because it has been designed by Duffield, a former banker.

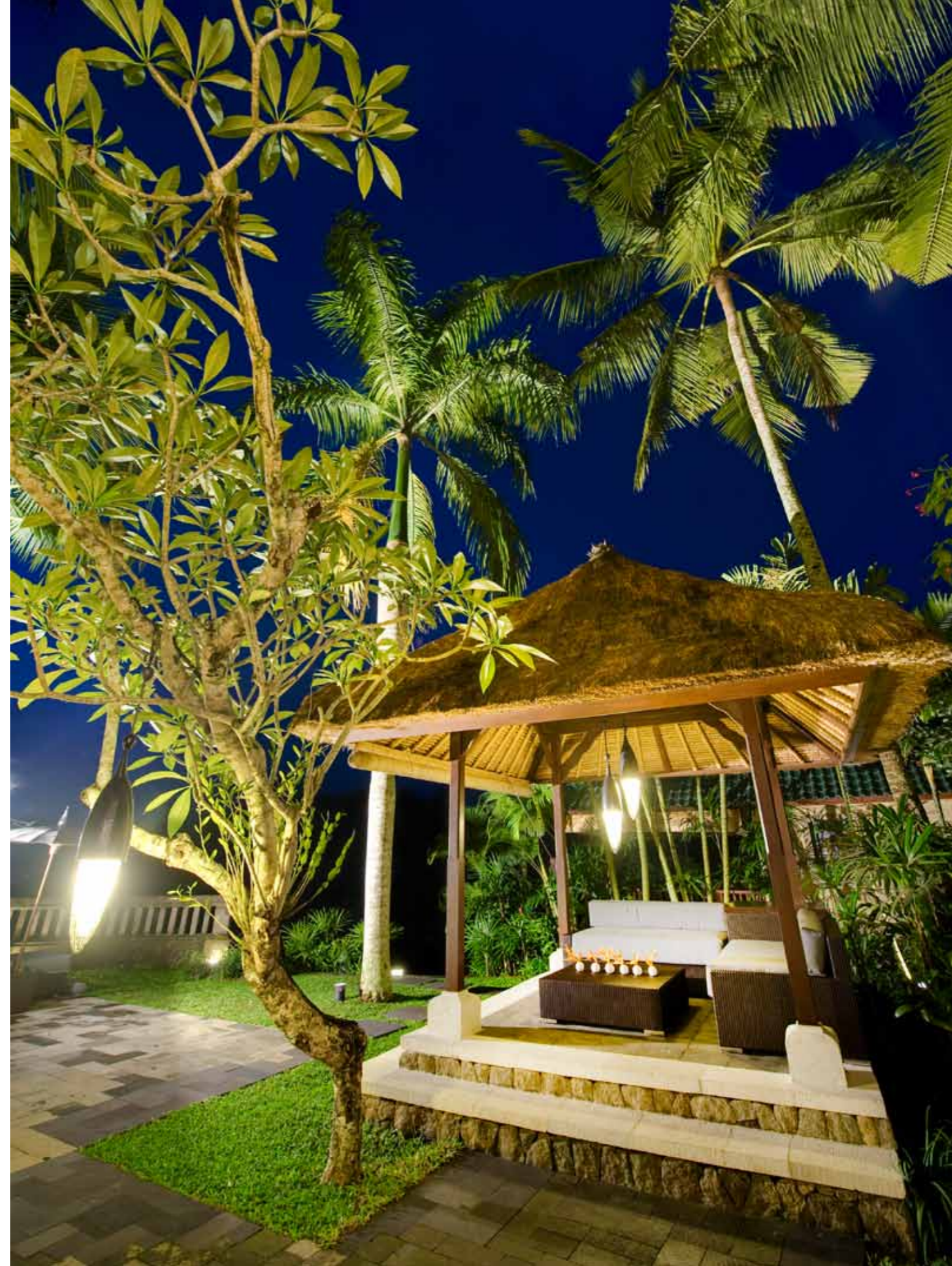
If you are a financial industry leader, a CEO, an entrepreneur, you understand stress. And therefore you understand what you want to de-stress. How you want to be

treated, indulged and pampered. You want to be indulged from the very first moment of your holiday, which is why, for example, Villa Bukit Naga provides VIP immigration clearance to all of its guests.

Even if you are on a six-month gardening leave from your former job, chances are slim that you can or will spend the entire time in Bali. You will have a limited window to relax.

So from the moment you walk in, the management encourages you to do just that – a suggested itinerary from the staff would be to book you in for a massage at a table set up in your own bedroom within an hour of arrival. This is not a Hong Kong-style beat-you-to-a-pulp massage, it's a relaxing one with Aesop geranium leaf and jasmine oils and frangipani flowers set in a bowl on the floor beneath your face, so you inhale sweet, but not cloying perfumes. But that is the obvious physical effort to set you in the Bali frame of mind from the onset. A more subtle sign from management is the collective, heartfelt warmth extended by everyone from the driver who meets you at the airport to the manager of the estate, who greets you at the door of the home. While you may be thinking: "Every hotel in the world does this, love, so what?", trust me when I write that this is beyond that superficial smile

Perfect for drinks at night





One of the seven bedrooms throughout the property



A place to chill out



To infinity and beyond

and hello. Parta, the manager of the compound, is hopeful he will some day grow a rare, black orchid. His collection is prized but, most important, personal.

The majority of the staff has worked at Villa Bukit Naga (which means dragon hill) since it was built in 2001, which in Indonesian terms is a long time. This is their home. They live here. They don't want you to be stressed. Excuse the hippy, metaphysical language for a moment, but they don't need that negative energy. And if it takes you more than a day to unwind and enjoy their upbeat nature, then you needed to have booked this holiday months ago.

Sound investment idea

Duffield built the private residence nine years ago and has used it as a family getaway ever since. The value of that

alone is worth the investment. But if you're not using it regularly, why not rent it out and earn 4% a year?

Of course, if you have designed the ideal holiday home, you do not want to rent it to just anyone. Duffield has decorated his home with some 40 hand-carved Balinese and Chinese stone statues, more than a dozen paintings by local artists and a seven-foot Buddha that is more than 300 years old in the entryway. It's a home, not a hotel.

The villa sleeps 13 people and he only rents it out to one group at a time. So visitors are not sharing the home with strangers – they have an exclusive stay at the property. This makes it perfect for a small wedding, commitment ceremony or renewal of vows. Given its closed setting, it far outshines a chain-hotel for a small corporate meeting, a training seminar or team-building exercise. And it is ideal for a group of friends looking for a getaway together

– one that can be tailored to their tastes.

The property comprises three buildings: the 8,000 square foot, two-storey main house, which has four bedrooms, two potential dining areas, a massive living room, an entertainment room and an expansive Javanese marble bathroom the size of many Hong Kong flats; a 2,500 square foot, two-storey, two-bedroom villa – also a house in its own right; and a 1,500 square foot one-bedroom villa. All in, that is seven bedrooms, of which six are suites with private bathrooms and four have outdoor shower sanctuaries. There are two infinity swimming pools, a jacuzzi and a fitness centre as well.

The owner/operator will arrange the stay to your tastes. Armed with a Swiss-German private chef, a certified yoga instructor, masseurs and even life coaches, you can turn the stay into a wellness retreat. If you want to combine

it with shopping at galleries in nearby Ubud, long considered a handicraft centre of Asia, the villa's private car and driver are at your disposal. Yoga may be required the morning after, if you choose to indulge in a six-course gourmet dinner with select fine wines for each serving at the world-renowned restaurant Mozaic in Ubud.

The starting price is \$1,150 a night for a 13-guest maximum, for the entire three-villa estate, though during peak season (August 1-31, and December 20-January 8) it is \$1,450, and during high season (July 1-31, and September 1-15 inclusive, as well as Easter and Chinese New Year) it is \$1,650 per night. And, perhaps most important, the property has wireless internet throughout, so if you max out on massages you can easily rack up a bit more stress by reading a few emails from your boss. 🌸

For more information, see: www.villabukitnaga.com

If you go

Dine at Mozaic Restaurant, Lounge, owned by world-renowned chef Chris Salans. His intimate fine-dining restaurant set in a luxurious tropical garden has made the Miele Guide's list as one of Asia's finest restaurants. Jl Raya Sanggingan. Be sure to book in advance: www.mozaic-bali.com or phone/fax: +62 361 975 768

Shop at Pusaka for handwoven, natural-dye clothing and textiles. Jl. Monkey Forest No. 71, phone/fax: +62 361 978 619; John Hardy for silver jewellery and semi-precious gems on display at the factory grounds (the pieces are normally for export only). Call for an appointment on +62 361 469 888. If you're after Balinese classical painting stop at Puri Lukisan, Ubud Main Street or the Neka Museum, Jl Campuhan +62 361 975 074. For something altogether different, check out the vintage kimonos sold at Sei-Sui on Jl Sanggingan, +62 361 794 5153.

Don't miss At least once, you should watch a Balinese dance performance and the best place to see that is at the Arma Museum; shows are daily but check for the latest news with Parta at Villa Bukit Naga. A second option is to watch performances at the Puri Saren Palace, which are daily at 7.30 pm on Ubud main street.

Fast Facts

Location North of Denpasar and situated on Bali's scenic hillsides.

Climate A near-constant temperature somewhere between 20 and 32 C (70 to 90 F). Expect a brief daily shower December into March, which offers a mid-day respite from the sun.