



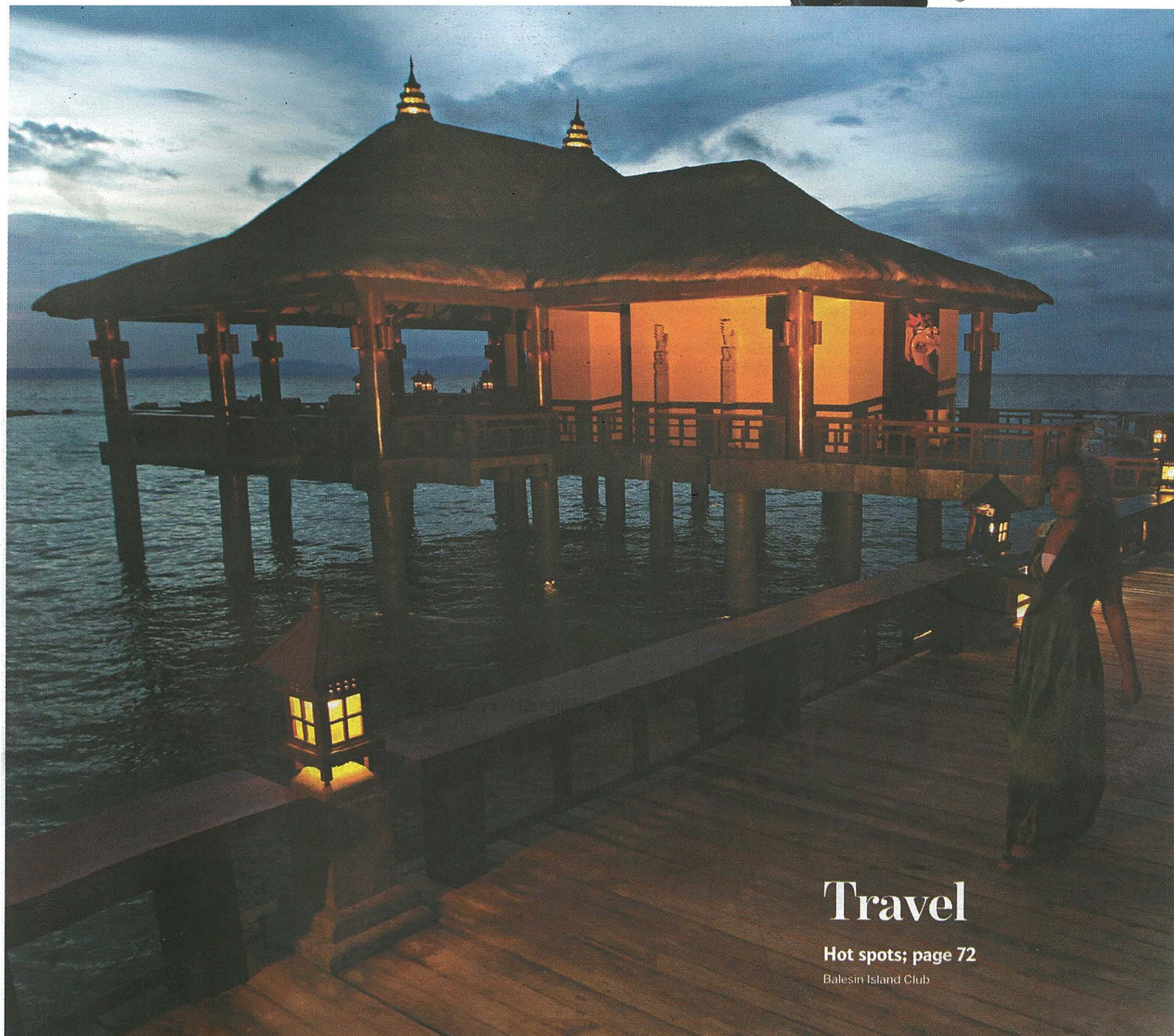
PostMagazine

October 2012

GoodLife



Off the wall
Page 68



Travel

Hot spots; page 72

Balesin Island Club

Balesin Island Club, the Philippines

Another Philippine beach resort- what's the big deal?

The Balesin Island Club, off the east coast of Luzon, is not one resort, but seven, each designed to embody an iconic seaside escape. Jet-setters yearning for the Mediterranean will feel right at home in Mykonos "village", modelled after the Greek island; St Tropez (inspired by the Riviera town in southeastern France); Costa Smeralda (Sardinia); or Costa del Sol (Spain). A couple wanting to recreate an Indonesian honeymoon can unwind in a villa perched on stilts over the water in the Bali village. Then there is Phuket (for a taste of Thailand) and Balesin, naturally enough.

Each village goes beyond architectural imitation and includes a bar and restaurant serving authentic fare from the mother country. A leisurely lunch of grilled lamb and humus can be enjoyed in Mykonos before an afternoon of sailing off St Tropez and an opulent Thai dinner in Phuket. Imagine your carbon footprint if you could manage to do all that for real!

The place is a bit surreal, especially so because nature intrudes everywhere. Dirt roads connecting the villages wind through dense jungle; appropriate for Phuket, perhaps, but it feels a tad bizarre emerging from the tropical forest into St Tropez.

The pictures look lovely; can we go any time?

Not unless you buy a share, no. Balesin is a members-only resort in the final stages of construction, and each share entitles the holder and his or her family to a 14-day stay. Guests are given freedom of the entire 500-hectare private island, which possesses flawless white sand beaches between the villages and views of a strikingly blue sea from everywhere. Exclusivity is one of the club's biggest selling points: the island is off-limits to non-members.

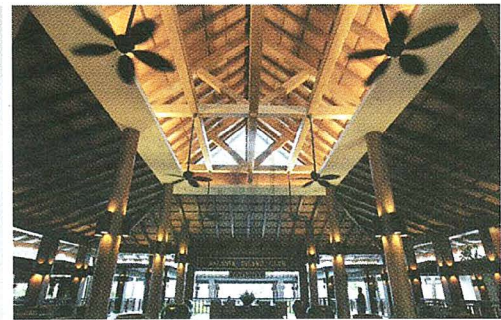
Oh, it's a timeshare! This is not what your parents thought of as timeshare. There is no comparing schedules, no mad rush for holiday weekends and no getting stuck with a beach property in the dead of winter. Guests can stay for up to 14 days whenever they want, guaranteed. Club employees shudder at the mere mention of "timeshare" and guests are encouraged to think of Balesin as their own private island.

Is guest accommodation in Bali the same as that in St Tropez? More or less, yes. Villas, each of which is 100 square metres in size, have an understated luxury and are more akin to cosy holiday homes than to high-end resort accommodation. The star of each room is undoubtedly the bed: superfine linen covers a thick pillow top mattress. Outdoor jacuzzi tubs and indoor/outdoor shower stalls in some of the villages help remind you you're on holiday.

Would you say the place is "green"? Radically, fanatically green. Plenty of places preach conservation but how many will actually re-position roads in order to avoid knocking down trees? Only 50 hectares of the island's 500 have been developed and a no-fishing zone extends more than a kilometre out from the shoreline. Seas are teeming with marine life. Sewage is recycled on-site using state-of-the-art technology, the water used for irrigation. Drinking water comes from the sky; rain is gathered using a drainage system centred on the 1.5 kilometre-long airstrip and stored in a reservoir. The fruit and vegetables



Clockwise from above: the Phuket pool; Bali, which has yet to be completed; the Balesin Island clubhouse; Mykonos' bar/ restaurant; one of the club's planes on the island trip



served on the island come from Balesin's own organic farm and the seafood from local fishing communities.

Is it hard to get to? Balesin feels like it's in the middle of nowhere, but it's actually just a 25-minute flight from Manila's Ninoy Aquino International Airport. The club leases and owns its own aeroplanes to ferry guests back and forth but, from the look of prospective members, many are likely to arrive using their own transport. Balesin has full customs, immigration and quarantine facilities, so direct international flights should be a possibility soon.

Being stuck on an island grows boring, no?

Hardly. In fact the island offers many activities, leaving beach bums and those who prefer to pass their holidays dozing with a good book feeling like they're missing out. The club

offers full equestrian facilities, an archery range under the guidance of an Olympic archer; an outdoor paintball arena, an Airsoft gun range, tennis courts, a full gym, indoor basketball courts, full water sports facilities and even a zip line.

If that leaves you feeling aching and exhausted, there is also a fully equipped beachfront spa.

What's the bottom line? Here is the catch. One share, which is good for an annual 14 days on the island, runs to US\$75,000, or buyers can settle for a seven-day share for US\$45,000. Exclusive indeed.

See www.balesin.com for an online brochure and membership details.