



An Island of Dreams

Balesin Island Club is an innovative resort concept that brings seven of the world's great coastal towns in a single destination

By GABY IGNACIO • Photography MARK JACOB

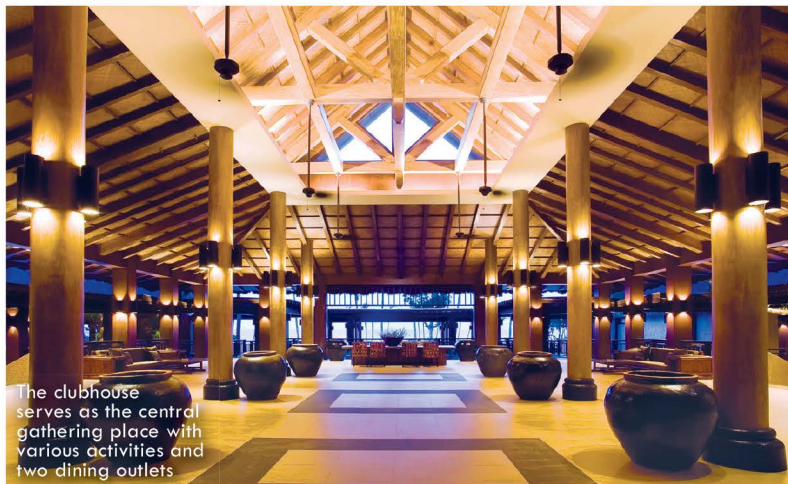
Balesin Island is a mere 25 minutes away by plane from the Philippine capital, and little more than 20 kilometers from the shoreline of Polilio, Quezon. However, the verdant isle, flanked by clear blue waters of Lamon Bay and the Pacific Ocean, might as well be a world away.

Named for the massive banyan trees – locally known as the balet – which dot the 500 hectares that make up the island resort, Balesin has long been an exclusive, almost secret destination for many of the country's most intrepid travelers and holiday makers. Today, however, with the purchase of a vast majority of the island by Alphaland Corporation, Balesin has been transformed into a luxurious holiday destination of international standards. Gone is the packed dirt runway of the airstrip that welcomed guests as they landed in private planes

for a weekend of rest and relaxation. Now, visitors, who arrive on the island from a direct flight which departs from Alphaland's private hangar in Manila, are greeted by the sight of the E.L. Tordesillas Airport named in honor of the island's former owner, who hosted friends and guests in the tropical haven.

Creating Communities

One of the guests so taken by the beautiful, unspoiled island was Alphaland founder and owner Roberto Ongpin. He purchased the land in 2010, broke ground, and began creating what would become the Balesin Island Club. Ever the innovator, Ongpin turns the traditional concept of the luxury resort on its head: in lieu of a single, sprawling complex of villas and facilities that have become the norm for such developments,



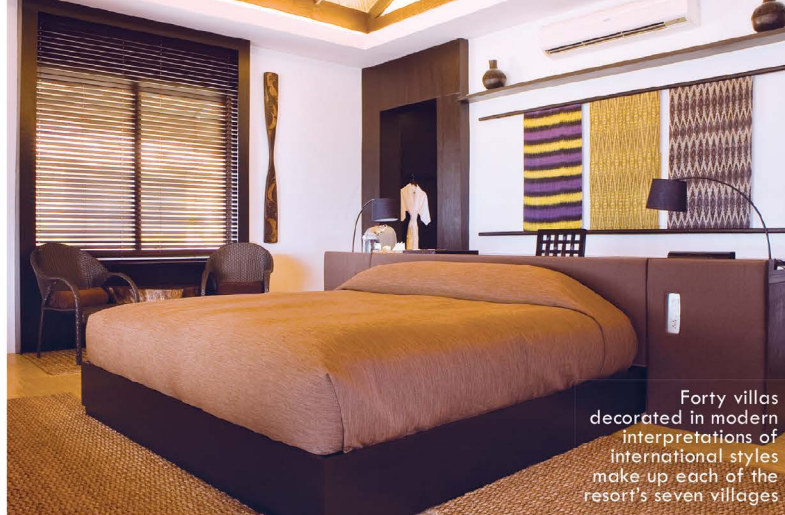
The clubhouse serves as the central gathering place with various activities and two dining outlets

Balesin's designers opted for smaller yet equally self-sustaining and luxurious communities throughout the island, creating a unique resort concept as yet unheard of in the country.

With each community, or "village" themed around one of seven popular resort destinations around the world – France's St. Tropez, Italy's Costa Smeralda, Greece's Mykonos, Indonesia's Bali, Thailand's Phuket, Spain's Costa del Sol, and the Philippines' own Balesin – members of the exclusive island resort can immerse themselves in the towns' spirit without the taxing long-haul flights and other aspects of international travel.

From the stylized, luxurious take on the traditionally Filipino bahay kubo for Balesin Village, to the stark white and blue, narrow street-lined Mykonos Village, the essence of these world-renowned destinations have been distilled into the coastal pockets that make up each community designed by architects Jorge Yulo and Conrad Onglao.

Forty well-appointed villas make up the beachfront village. Conceptualized to easily accommodate up to four guests, each of the villas features a super king sized bed decked in sumptuous linen, satellite television,



Forty villas decorated in modern interpretations of international styles make-up each of the resort's seven villages



Named in honor of the island's former owner, the E.L. Tordesillas airport greets guests as they arrive on the island

Through mere steps away from the surf, family-friendly pools give guests an alternative option for water activities



iPod docks, and personal espresso makers. In addition to the luxurious en suite bathroom, each villa also offers the option of a fully-enclosed, adjoining outdoor shower, as well as Jacuzzis on each villa's porch, an amenity best enjoyed with views of the coastline literally steps away from the door.

In keeping with the theme, cuisine from all seven countries is available in dining outlets within each compound. Every restaurant follows the idea of a casual, low-key, neighborhood bistro, offering dishes inspired by the tastes and flavors of each resort town.

Beyond Sand and Surf

In such enjoyable, peaceful surroundings, days on the island can be spent whiling away the hours contemplating the tranquility of nature. Those inclined to take part in more physically demanding activities, however, have no shortage of options. There are facilities for water sports like surfing, sailing, scuba diving, snorkeling, kayaking, or wakeboarding. With at least a dozen beaches and coves, including a pristine stretch of beach

over seven kilometers long, these tend to be the island's biggest draws. A unique archery and horseback riding facility is also worth trying. The soon-to-be-completed Sports Center will also expand the resort's repertoire with such offerings as both indoor and outdoor tennis and basketball courts and a driving range.

When weather becomes uncooperative, guests can spend time at the centrally-located Clubhouse. An entire lower floor has been dedicated to leisure activities such as billiards, mahjong, cards, and the inescapable karaoke. Salons for men and women, as well as a dedicated cigar room may also be found at the Clubhouse's lower level. Save for housing resort offices and indoor activity rooms, the Clubhouse also offers suites available for guests' use. Ideal for families, these have the same luxurious appointments as the villas in a more accessible location. There are also several dining outlets at the Clubhouse which serve a selection of cuisines; from Sakura restaurant's delicious take on Japanese, care of chef Edwin Ogarte,

to continental, all-day dining at The Veranda.

The Zen Spa, a separate, facility with sleek lines and a clean, all-white color scheme reminiscent of a 60s spy movie, is another alluring option for relaxation. Whether it is one of the signature massages of body wraps, or a leisurely dip in the black-tiled, chlorine-free, sun-warmed lap pool, a visit all but guarantees stepping out of the spa in a more serene state of mind.

A Return to Nature

Beyond providing an array of leisure activities in a beautifully designed environment, Balesin Island's developers blur the line between resort and sanctuary by making a commitment to preserve as much of the stunning natural beauty indigenous to the environ. With the help of American design firm EcoPlan, Alphaland has maintained not only a 190-hectare forest sanctuary which guests can explore, but also the creation of a system of water harvesting and processing,



implementation of a ban on gas-powered vehicles, organic farming activities, and production of energy through alternative sources, a self-sustainable community that brings together luxury and forward-thinking innovation in a single, beautiful destination.

For more information on memberships and the Balesin Island Club, phone (2) 846 6205, or visit <balesin.com>