

TUE Sep 24, 2013 Updated: 12:45pm

## International Travel [\(/topics/international-travel\)](#)

### Trending

- [Bo Xilai \(/topics/bo-xilai\)](#)
- [Edward Snowden \(/topics/edward-snowden\)](#)
- [Occupy Central \(/topics/occupy-central\)](#)
- [Spirit of Hong Kong \(/topics/spirit-hong-kong\)](#)

LIFESTYLE TRAVEL

# Nusa Penida: paradise under siege

Nusa Penida is a haven for the endangered Bali starling, but the island's days as an unspoiled paradise may be numbered, writes Samantha Brown

**Samantha Brown**  
lifestyle@scmp.com (mailto:lifestyle@scmp.com)

Tuesday, 06 November, 2012, 10:10am



Patience, patience, patience," Nengah Sudipa says as we trudge through a sandy coconut grove on Nusa Penida, a limestone island lying a 45-minute boat ride east of Bali.

"You need patience if you want to see a Bali starling," he says. Nengah, who works at the Friends of the National Park Foundation, is referring to a bird of which fewer than 10 remained worldwide in 2005; these days about 150 swoop from tree to tree on the island.

The waters of the Badung Strait - which rush between a deep trench separating Bali and the islands of Penida, Ceningan and Lembongan - lap at a long beach near where we explore. Farmers haul in baskets glistening with seaweed and Gunung Agung, Bali's revered volcano, pierces the clouds in the distance.

"There's an egg in that box," ear-ringed, barefoot Nengah says, gesturing to a wooden birdhouse installed by the foundation, which runs a rehabilitation programme for the endangered bird on the island.

I sample a small green fruit from a "Singapore" tree - it's like a cross between a grape and a fig. "The starlings love them," he says. Not today, it seems; we don't spot any and retreat to the foundation's office and information area.

The birds released on Nusa Penida do well; over on Bali, where they used to try to free them in the hope they would repopulate their indigenous grounds, poachers snapped them up in no time. The current going rate for a single Bali starling? About 20 million rupiah (HK\$16,000) on the black market.

The irony, perhaps, is that Nusa Penida is a much poorer island, with tourism yet to bring spoils - positive and negative - here. The treacherous waters surrounding the island, along with its forbidding cliffs, led to it being used as a jail during Bali's 18th century Gelgel dynasty.

It's a hard-scrabble existence for the islanders, many of whom have left over the past few decades. Water is in short supply here; the terraced land - farmed with cassava, corn, papaya, bananas, teak and plants for animal feed - is a stark contrast to the lush emerald paddies that cover much of Bali,

### SHARE

4 0

Like

0

Share

0 0

Tweet

lifestyle/travel/article/1074291/nusa-  
travel/article/1074291/nusa-

### RELATED TOPICS

- [International Travel \(/topics/international-travel\)](#)
- [Southeast Asia \(/topics/southeast-asia\)](#)
- [Geography of Indonesia \(/topics/geography-indonesia\)](#)

### RELATED ARTICLES

- [Travel review: Verbier \(/lifestyle/travel/article/1150170/travel-review-verbier\)](#)  
15 Feb 2013
- [Discover Turkey's Turquoise Coast \(/lifestyle/travel/article/1150166/discover-turkeys-turquoise-coast\)](#)  
15 Feb 2013
- [Pizza on the Park returns as luxury Wellesley hotel \(/lifestyle/travel/article/1150166/discover-turkeys-turquoise-coast\)](#)

### Most Popular (/most-popular)

VIEWED (#QT-MOST POPULAR-UI-TABS1)

SHARED (#QT-MOST POPULAR-UI-TABS2)

COMMENTED (#QT-MOST POPULAR-UI-TABS3)

[Animal research provides clues to obsessive compulsive disorder \(http://scmp.com/lifestyle/health/article/1313906/animal-research-provides-clues-obsessive-compulsive-disorder\)](#)

[BlackBerry admits defeat as consortium bids US\\$4.7b to take it private \(http://scmp.com/business/companies/article/1316570/blackberry-admits-defeat-consortium-bids-us47b-take-it-private\)](#)

[We've cracked Apple's fingerprint scanner: German hackers \(http://scmp.com/business/companies/article/1315872/weve-cracked-apples-fingerprint-scanner-german-hackers\)](#)

[Banned books: a top five \(http://scmp.com/lifestyle/books/article/1313840/banned-books-top-five\)](#)

[Bridge Puzzle \(http://scmp.com/lifestyle/bridge\)](#)

### We recommend



**COMMENT**  
[Model societies we can learn from](#)

22 Sep 2013

[\(http://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/1315499/model-societies-we-can-learn\)](#)



**NEWS**  
[Hong Kong Airlines apologises to award-winning artist for damage to...](#)

23 Sep 2013

[\(http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1315569/hong-](#)

though it's similar to Bali's Bukit Peninsula. The farmers' homes on the beach here are not romantic shacks, but rough cinderblocks with corrugated iron or dilapidated red-tiled roofs.

Now the island's landscape may be changing. The Chedi - a five-star, GHM-managed resort chain - recently announced plans to build 100 villas on pristine Crystal Bay in 2015. Riffing on the success of the Bali stalling programme, and in recognition of the island's status as a sanctuary, Spanish designer Ismael Pindado has designed other-worldly egg-shaped villas to grace the bay. The shallow bay boasts a quiet arc of grey-white sandy beach where mola molas, or sunfish, come to frolic during the cooler months.

For an island that, for now, has next to no tourist infrastructure, the change with The Chedi's arrival is likely to be drastic.

I hire a motorbike with a driver, Dayat, to scoot over to the bay.

Villages along the way cling to steep hills with rocks as walls and land painstakingly carved into terraces that somehow coax crops to life. The fierce blooms of the bougainvillea and the yellows and whites of frangipani pop against a bright blue sky. White limestone is literally pulled by hand from the earth by sun-weathered workers, leaving ethereal caves.

Some tourist literature speaks of Nusa Penida being "like Bali 30 years ago", but I'm not swayed. Nusa Penida and Bali are geographically different; volcanic Bali has its "subak" system, an irrigation network criss-crossing the island watering its green paddies; in two days on Penida, the only running water I see gushes out of a cliff towering above the sea, a few pipes pumping some of it back up to land to be used by some of the island's more than 40 villages.

The road to Crystal Bay opens out to a large sandy coconut grove, then the beach yawns to the left and right, a few rocky outcrops in the centre of the bay make it particularly photogenic. To one side of the bay, a few thatched roofed, open-aired huts have been set up for day trippers on Bali Hai cruises [balihaicruises.com](http://balihaicruises.com) (<http://balihaicruises.com>). Snorkellers' heads bob offshore. A couple clutching a few bottles of Bintang beer climb aboard their chartered boat, done for the day.

A little flotsam and jetsam lie on the beach, but it's a pretty, rustic scene, with cows lumbering by the beachside temple.

A small *warung* at the coconut grove shucks fresh coconuts for 20,000 rupiah; the perfect antidote to the dry midday heat.

Dayat looks at the dozen or so motorbikes parked in the grove and shakes his head: "Many, many tourists."

And it's just the beginning.

[lifestyle@scmp.com](mailto:lifestyle@scmp.com) (<mailto:lifestyle@scmp.com>)

*This article appeared in the South China Morning Post print edition as East of Eden*

## After reading this article, people also read

**We've cracked Apple's fingerprint scanner: German hackers**

(<http://scmp.com/business/companies/article/1315872/weve-cracked-apples-fingerprint-scanner-german-hackers>)

Sep 24, 2013

**Animal research provides clues to obsessive compulsive disorder**

(<http://scmp.com/lifestyle/health/article/1313906/animal-research-provides-clues-obsessive-compulsive-disorder>)

Sep 24, 2013

**BlackBerry admits defeat as consortium bids US\$4.7b to take it private**

(<http://scmp.com/business/companies/article/1316570/blackberry-admits-defeat-consortium-bids-us47b-take-it-private>)

Sep 24, 2013

**Commercial warfare** (<http://scmp.com/lifestyle/article/1313841/commercial-warfare>)

Sep 23, 2013

**Pressure points** (<http://scmp.com/lifestyle/family-education/article/1315786/pressure-points>)

Sep 23, 2013

[/1145232/pizza-park-returns-luxury-wellesley-hotel](http://scmp.com/lifestyle/travel/article/1145232/pizza-park-returns-luxury-wellesley-hotel)

8 Feb 2013

**Gorilla tourism is helping conservation efforts in Uganda**

([/lifestyle/travel/article/1145215/gorilla-tourism-helping-conservation-efforts-uganda](http://lifestyle/travel/article/1145215/gorilla-tourism-helping-conservation-efforts-uganda))

8 Feb 2013

**Five literary cities: book your trip**

([/lifestyle/travel/article/1140305/five-literary-cities-book-your-trip](http://lifestyle/travel/article/1140305/five-literary-cities-book-your-trip))

1 Feb 2013

[kong-airlines-apologises-award-winning-artist-damage-guitar](http://scmp.com/business/banking-finance/article/1299396/w-hy-children-many-important-people-are-hong-kong)



**BUSINESS**

**Why the children of many important people are in Hong Kong**

25 Aug 2013

(<http://www.scmp.com/business/banking-finance/article/1299396/w-hy-children-many-important-people-are-hong-kong>)



**LIFESTYLE**

**All the lit that's 'unfit' to print**

22 Sep 2013

(<http://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/books/article/1313837/all-lit-thats-unfit-print>)



**NEWS**

**New Bo Guagua photo sparks debate over fate of princeling's son**

03 Sep 2013

(<http://www.scmp.com/new/s/china-insider/article/1302523/new-bo-guagua-photo-sparks-debate-over-fate-princelings-son>)



**NEWS**

**Time for one last splash as Hong Kong bids farewell to Victoria Park...**

02 Sep 2013

(<http://www.scmp.com/new/s/hong-kong/article/1301367/time-one-last-splash-throwing-towel>)



**NEWS**

**Chinese passengers anger airline staff by refusing to hand over...**

28 Aug 2013

(<http://www.scmp.com/new/s/china-insider/article/1300042/chinese-passengers-anger-airline-staff-refusing-hand-over-flight>)



**LIFESTYLE**

**Banned books: a top five**

22 Sep 2013

(<http://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/books/article/1313840/banned-books-top-five>)



**LIFESTYLE**

**Sleep paralysis can be an indicator of neurodegenerative disease**

02 Sep 2013

(<http://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/article/1300682/sleep-paralysis-can-be-indicator-neurodegenerative-disease>)



**COMMENT**

**Among the young, hard work is passé but privilege is in**

03 Sep 2013

(<http://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/1302735/among-young-hard-work-passe-privilege>)

Recommended by (#)