

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>). 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.

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