

# VOGUE

A photograph of Margot Robbie on the cover of Vogue Australia. She is shown from the waist up, turned slightly away from the camera but looking back over her shoulder. She has long, wavy, light brown hair and is wearing a white, textured, possibly lace or floral-patterned dress. The background is a solid, vibrant blue.

AUSTRALIA

MARGOT  
ROBBIE  
interviewed by  
Quentin Tarantino

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# ISLAND HOPPING

From an exclusive private island to Aman's serene resort overlooking the Bali Sea, Zara Wong takes a luxurious odyssey through Indonesia.

Bawah Reserve, a private island in Indonesia's Riau archipelago between Singapore and Borneo.

## BAWAH RESERVE, RIAU ISLANDS

**THERE ARE FEW** phrases in the holiday vocabulary that can be uttered with the same hushed thrill as 'private island'. Private islands are for Richard Branson, members of the Onassis family and Julia Roberts (if rumours are true). For the most part, they are not for us laypeople. Except now, where you can secure a stay at Bawah Reserve.

Three hundred kilometres north-east of Singapore, Bawah Reserve lies in an Indonesian archipelago that encompasses 250 islands with only 50,000 inhabitants. Such numerical factoids are impressive, if difficult to fathom, at least until we actually embark on the journey to Bawah.

My husband and I fly into Singapore and stay the night in the city; the next morning we head to the port to catch a ferry to Indonesia's Bintan Island. From here we board a seaplane, chaperoned by Bawah staff to ensure a smooth transit. For the whole 80-minute seaplane flight we look out to a great expanse of ocean. The descent to Bawah and the surrounding islands that make up the resort is when the magic begins. The pilot takes a lap around the island with a flourish, the white sand beaches fanning out to blues of lapis lazuli and to topaz, demarcating reefs and the depths of the ocean.

Previously untouched, Bawah Island was once only frequented by scuba divers in the know. Bawah Reserve's owner, shipping entrepreneur Tim Hartnoll, was one such diver. He became so enamoured of the reefs, forests and pristine beaches that Bawah Reserve became his passion project. It took five years to build the resort by hand; no heavy machinery was used as it would mean a loss of trees. Building materials were mostly sustainably sourced, including bamboo, driftwood and recycled teak. Rainwater and seawater are treated and filtrated to keep the resort as sustainable as possible.

Befitting the environmentally aware stance of the resort, the design has an understated sense of luxuriousness. Twisted-rope balustrades and sandy pathways abutting the jungle lead from the pool to thatched-roof private villas with leather-trimmed rattan furniture. The villas are either nestled amid the jungle, on the beach or on the water. The bathrooms are particularly memorable, with stand-alone bathtubs made of recycled copper that retain the heat, and water warmed with solar energy.

There are elements of Bawah that have made it a hit on Instagram, like the photogenic transparent canoe, but what cannot be captured so truthfully on social media is what makes the resort so appealing: the remoteness and close proximity to nature. Childhood fantasies of stranded island adventures come to life at Bawah: there is a rawness to being on the resort if only for a few days that lets self-confessed city slickers feel as though they are intrepid explorers on an adventure.

We snorkel and kayak, partaking in outdoor activities that are included in the cost of the room, making it one of the first all-inclusive resorts in Asia. Rina, the activities manager, warns us that many couples run the risk of overbooking themselves, which admittedly I'm tempted to do, as I'm learning how to properly relax and do nothing on a holiday. Bawah has a solution to this conundrum, of course, by offering daily massages as part of each guest's stay.



The infinity pool at Bawah Reserve.

There is a rawness to being here that lets a city slicker feel as though they are an intrepid explorer

Snorkelling is the best way to experience what captured the imagination of Bawah's founder. There are corals studded with clams pulsating as they open and close, their lips edged in iridescent colours. Parrotfish pause to look up, turtles swim by, clownfish bounce up and down in their anemone home (I naively think they are greeting us; I'm later told they're protecting themselves, not waving hello).

For a more relaxed pace, we are whisked away to one of the 13 beaches for a private picnic. As someone who doesn't usually take a resort holiday and revels in scheduling vacation activities, I was struck by how relaxing it was and how quickly time went by sitting on an empty beach, doing absolutely nothing but marvel at the world around us. (I get it now! And yes, my husband was relieved that he finally got a break.)

On our last night we partook in star-gazing on the beach with the resort's telescope. In the crystal-clear night sky we spot the hazy grey shimmer of the Milky Way and Orion's Belt pointing to Sirius. And as if the ocean mirrored the sky, the plankton in the sea glistened like the stars. With the stars above and sea around us reverberating in unison, we sat in awe of the great expanse and the sheer isolation of where we were, on a small island in the great wide universe.

Go to [www.bawahreserve.com](http://www.bawahreserve.com).

**SINGAPORE FLING** Bawah Reserve guests are picked up from Singapore and ferried to a regional airport for the seaplane flight to the island. Boutique travel agency **Travel Associates** (137 071; [www.travelassociates.com](http://www.travelassociates.com)) organised flights for myself and my husband. The transfer to Bawah Reserve takes place in the morning, so to maximise time and restore energy levels it's recommended you stay in Singapore the night before. We chose **Six Senses Duxton** ([www.sixsenses.com](http://www.sixsenses.com)), which, befitting its wellness reputation, offers experiences such as complimentary consultations with a traditional Chinese medical practitioner, natural tonics in the room to aid sleep and to wake up, and a welcome sound bath with a Tibetan singing bowl (which I was initially dubious about, but was quickly won over by the vibrations, which did, indeed, relax me).