

# DestinAsian

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EXPLORING THE  
FARAWAY  
FAROE ISLANDS

ADVENTURES IN  
KYRGYZSTAN

UNDISCOVERED  
SAUDI ARABIA

*Dreaming  
green*

6 HOTELS FOR THE MINDFUL  
TRAVELER (AND THERE'S MORE WHERE  
THEY COME FROM!)





## Pitch Perfect

Castaway-like seclusion meets five-star comfort on a far-flung Indonesian isle called Moyo.

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**M**oyo Island may not exactly be the middle of nowhere, but it is certainly nowhere adjacent. Home to just four thousand people, it sits like a plug at the neck of the Gulf of Saleh, whose broad, deep waters virtually split the mainland island of Sumbawa in two. To the west across the Flores Sea, the horizon is pricked by the distant cone of Mount Rinjani on Lombok. To the east, hidden from view behind Moyo's thickly forested hills, rises another volcano, Sumbawa's own Mount Tambora, whose global-climate-changing eruption in



1815 — the most powerful volcanic outburst in recorded history — has been linked to everything from Napoleon Bonaparte's defeat at Waterloo to the creation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

Moyo's claim to fame (aside from its prized wild honey) is the presence of Amanwana, one of the most exclusive hideaways in Indonesia. Developed by Aman founder Adrian Zecha in the early 1990s, it was — and in some ways remains — a pioneering property, and not just because of its improbably obscure location. Conceived as a luxury tented camp long before the term “glamping” entered the hospitality lexicon, Amanwana (the name means “peaceful forest” in Sanskrit) was a forerunner of low-impact resort design; I'm told that not a single tree was felled during construction. It also marked the first project by Belgian architect Jean-Michel Gathy, who would go on to design some of the world's finest hotels,

**MOYO MAGIC**  
Clockwise from left: One of Amanwana's beachside tents; a waitress on the terrace of the restaurant; the Mata Jitu Waterfall.



including Amans in Rajasthan, Montenegro, Venice, and (opening soon) New York. Among the earliest VIP guests were David Bowie, Ursula Andress, and Princess Diana, who spent two nights here in 1993 to escape the prying lenses of the paparazzi.

Getting to nowhere, it must be said, takes some effort. With no direct flights from Jakarta (where I live) to Sumbawa, I had to over-night in Bali and lay over in Lombok before finally boarding a private yacht at Sumbawa Besar — the principal town on western Sumbawa's north coast — for the 45-minute boat trip to Amanwana. Almost 24 hours from door to door, and I hadn't even left the country.

But the payoff was immediately apparent when we pulled up to the resort's floating jetty, where a welcoming committee of staff awaited our arrival. Backed by a wall of lush forest, Amanwana is arranged along an inviting crescent of coral sand on the west coast of Moyo. Its grounds encompass 50 hectares of an extensive nature reserve that covers a third of the 360-square-kilometer island (about half the size of Singapore), and so the resort was designed to be as unobtrusive as possible, with just 20 taupe-colored tents tucked above the beach or set back beneath a bower of tropical trees.

“Tent,” admittedly, is something of a misnomer: set on coral-stone podiums, these



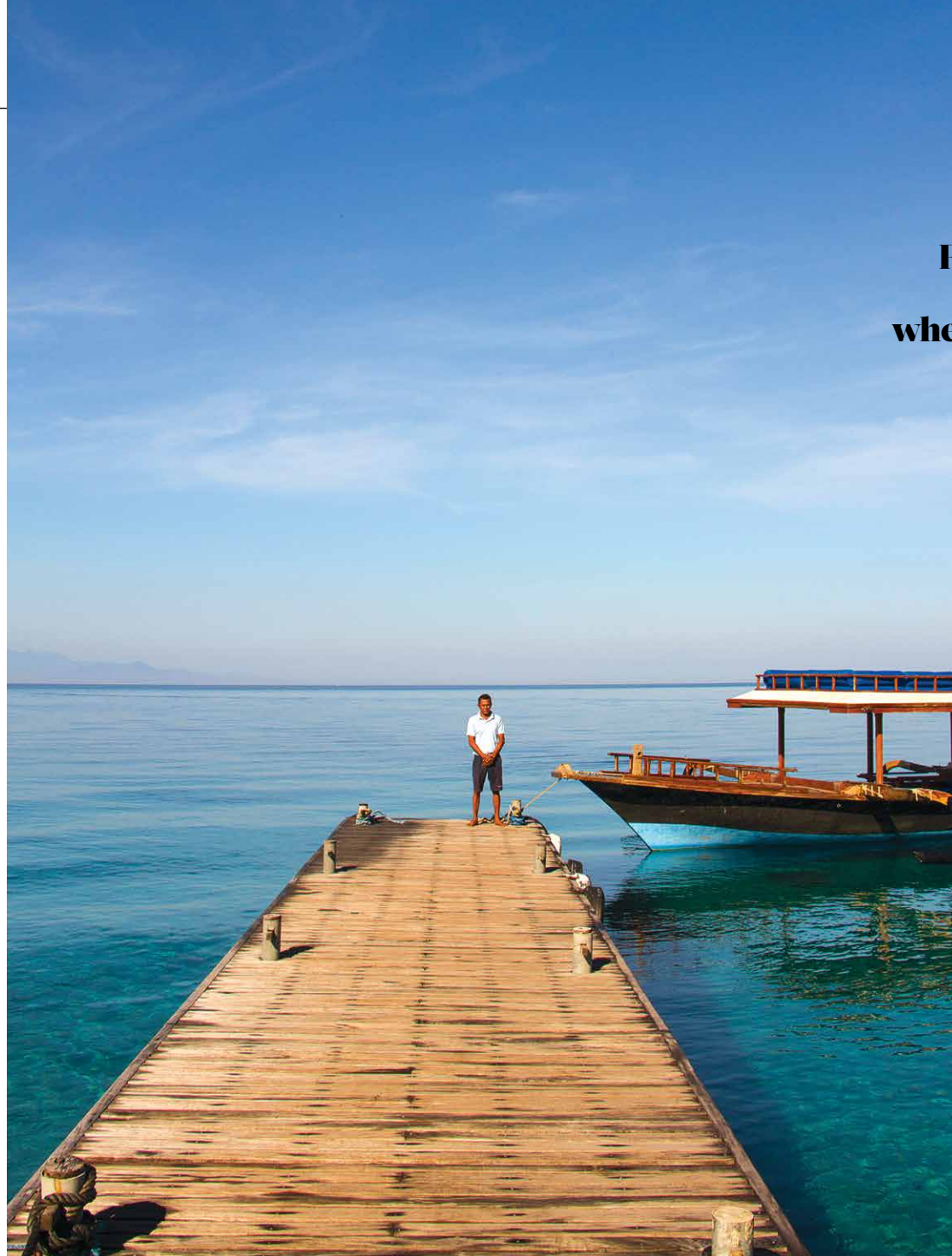


are more like canvas-roofed pavilions with burnished teak floors, wraparound windows, built-in divans, and en-suite bathrooms with double vanities and, curiously, pull-chain toilets. Each is centered on a king-size bed curtained in its own mini-tent of gauzy netting, which is unfurled at turndown. It's like sleeping in a cocoon.

The only sizeable building at Amanwana is the restaurant (named, rather unimaginatively, The Restaurant), an open-air affair bathed in sea breezes and topped by a lofty, bamboo-shingled roof. The menu here is abbreviated but it changes by the day, so you never need to eat the same thing twice. I didn't have a single bad meal, whether it was a complex *gulai kambing* (Indonesian lamb curry) or seared snapper with black pepper and a simple citrus dressing. And that wild honey I mentioned earlier? It turns up in the kitchen's delicious homemade honeycomb ice cream.

Due to the current lack of international guests, only 12 of the 20 tents were operational during my October visit; number 20, where Princess Diana stayed, sat forlorn and empty under a layer of fallen leaves at the far end of the compound. Yet with 10 of the tents occupied, it was almost a full house. My fellow castaways, all from different corners of Indonesia, were all here for the same thing: near seclusion and complete serenity. And with no Jet Skis or beach parties or even TVs to disturb the stillness, they were amply rewarded.

With little else in the way of diversions, the main event here is nature. Apart from its prolific birdlife —



#### BLUE HORIZONS

Clockwise from above: The resort's wooden outrigger awaits at the jetty; inside one of Amanwana's tented suites; chili-garlic prawns with green mango salad.

## Floating over the nocturnal reef, I felt a twinge of voyeuristic shame whenever the beam of my flashlight fell across a slumbering fish.

black-naped fruit doves, pygmy woodpeckers, yellow-crested cockatoos, and blue-tailed bee-eaters are just a few of the avian species that inhabit the island's forests — Moyo is home to wild boar and graceful rusa deer, which are often spotted wandering the resort's grounds. I saw no deer during my stay, but I did see monkeys. Lots and lots of monkeys. Crab-eating macaques, to be precise. I've encountered plenty of these creatures before on trips in Southeast Asia, and I have always considered them a nuisance. And even here, it should be said, diners at the restaurant must be wary lest a monkey makes off with their meal. But on unspoiled Moyo, where I almost felt as if I were intruding and where, after months of pandemic-induced solitude, I'm happy for any sort of company — I find them quite charming. I take to sitting outside my tent on a rattan-backed campaign chair, watching my frisky simian neighbors race up and down the trunks of tamarind trees, trampoline off the canvas canopies, take turns grooming one another, and, well, just monkey around. Who needs TV?

One morning I set off with a guide for a trek along the ridgeline behind the resort. Accompanying us was a tech consultant from Lombok and his mother, who told me they were on a mission to stay at all five Aman properties in Indonesia. Amanwana was the last on the list, and they reckoned it was their favorite. Mind you, this was before our guide took a wrong turn and lost his bearings amid a tangle of vegetation, obliging us to bushwhack our way across a gully in order to find the track again. By the time we reached trail's end at a rocky promontory called Crocodile Head, what was supposed to have been an hour's hike had stretched out to three. But no worries. Admiring the views even as we tended to our thorn-scratched ankles, we all agreed, to the guide's visible relief, that it had been a terrific adventure. Back at the resort, my new pals from Lombok elected to extend their stay by a day.

I joined another excursion the next morning to visit a waterfall in the island's jungly interior. Along for the trip was Michel Bachmann, the resort's manager, who met me at the jetty for the boat ride up the coast to Labuhan Aji, the largest of Moyo's two main villages. Our craft was a traditionally designed wooden outrigger tricked out with cushioned benches and a mattress-topped canopy, which made for a pleasant 30-minute cruise. Back on dry land, we strolled through Labuhan Aji to where our next conveyance awaited: a roofless army-green Toyota jeep of uncertain vintage. One of just a few vehicles on the island, it took us bouncing along a

rocky dirt track that led four kilometers inland past sesame fields and cashew orchards and dense stands of bamboo. Sitting in the front, Michel yelled out "Duck!" at every low-hanging branch or "Hang on!" whenever the jeep plunged into a yawning pothole. Sciatica sufferers would be advised to skip the experience.

But again, the payoff was worth it. Called Mata Jitu, the waterfall is gorgeous: a silky spring-fed cascade that drops seven meters into a series of tiered limestone pools whose perfectly sculpted edges — the product of thousands of years of fine calcium deposits — look almost man-made. "It's the real deal," Michel assured me as we dipped our feet in the jade-colored water. "Beautiful, no?" Yes — and all the more so because we had it to ourselves.

The scenery below the waves is even more compelling. The entire coastline of Moyo is a marine conservation area, and the turquoise bay fronting Amanwana is particularly rich with life. Hawksbill and green turtles come to lay eggs on beaches around the island between December and April; at a hatchery area near the resort's dive center, rescued eggs that have been dug up by villagers are reburied, giving them a second lease on life.

There are several dive sites within easy reach of shore, and a few more farther out. Yuda, the resort's lanky dive instructor, took me out to the house reef, just a short swim from the jetty. It did not disappoint. There were corals of every description, gorgonian fans, and giant sponges; puffer fish and parrotfish and blue-spotted rays — a Technicolor aquascape. Later that evening, we returned for a night snorkel. It was an oddly intimate experience, floating over the nocturnal reef, and I felt a twinge of voyeuristic shame whenever the beam of my flashlight fell across a slumbering fish. When I switched the light off, I found myself surrounded by a veritable constellation of bioluminescence.

On my last night at Amanwana, long after the embers of a bonfire lit for our beachside barbecue had died down, I strolled to the end of the jetty to watch the stars. Out here in the middle of nowhere on the cusp of Sumbawa's rainy season, the sky was wondrously clear and dark, the silence almost intense. Was it too late, I wondered as I followed the sandy path back to my tent, to extend my own stay by another night? ●  
*aman.com; doubles from US\$1,550, including meals.*