

LEISURE+ADVENTURE

# TRAVEL

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When you take a dip in their lounge pool, you still get a view of the shore, the ocean and the sky



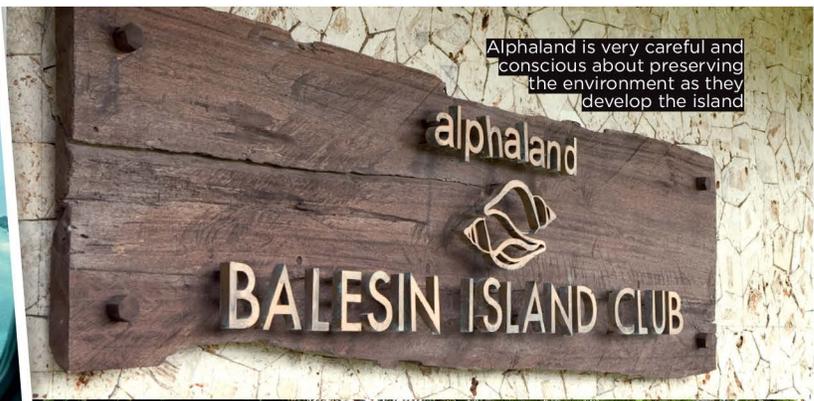
## A LUXURIOUS ISLAND ESCAPE

THIS BEST-KEPT SECRET IS ABOUT TO BECOME THE MOST DESIRED VACATION SPOT IN THE COUNTRY. TAKE A SNEAK PEEK AT **BALESIN ISLAND CLUB**

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PHOTOGRAPHED BY MARK JACOB



The breathtaking view of the island from the plane



Alpha land is very careful and conscious about preserving the environment as they develop the island

**DESPITE HAVING COUNTLESS BEACHES IN THE PHILIPPINES, FINDING THAT ULTIMATE BEACH EXPERIENCE CAN BE DIFFICULT.**

Most popular beaches have been invaded by hordes of tourists and commercial establishments, removing any chance of peace and privacy. On the other hand, beaches that still have their pristine shores are underdeveloped; they're usually difficult to get to and don't have all the modern conveniences that you want for a comfortable stay. I could hardly believe it when I visited Balesin and found that it was the perfect beach—beautiful and secluded, yet with all the modern and lavish comforts I wanted.

Located about 21 kilometers southeast of Polillo Island, Quezon, Balesin is a 500-hectare island known for its virgin white beaches, crystal-clear waters, and lush greenery. Local legends reveal that its name is a combination of the words *balete* (fig trees that proliferate in the island) and *asin* (salt). When the late Trade Undersecretary Ed Tordesillas discovered and bought the island in the 60s, he developed it into a small private resort where lot owners brought family and friends over via private planes. Some owners opened up their lots for rent, and guests drove to Quezon and took the boat to the island. Those who frequented Balesin have fond memories of gallivanting around the island and taking in its unspoiled beauty, and businessman Roberto Ongpin was one of those who had fallen in love with it—so much so that in 2010, he bought the island and, under the management of Alpha land Corp., developed it into an exclusive luxury world-class resort.

The luxurious experience started at Alpha land's private hangar, where we munched on doughnuts and sipped coffee while waiting for our chartered flight. Upon receiving our boarding passes, we got on a brand new Cessna Grand Caravan, and a quick 25 minutes later, we were landing in paradise (faster than a drive to my office in Ortigas from my home). As soon as we hopped off, we were welcomed by the General Manager Wilhelm Bolton. As we happily sipped our welcome



The Banyan Tree Park is a small area where you can appreciate a beautiful, centuries-old *balete* tree



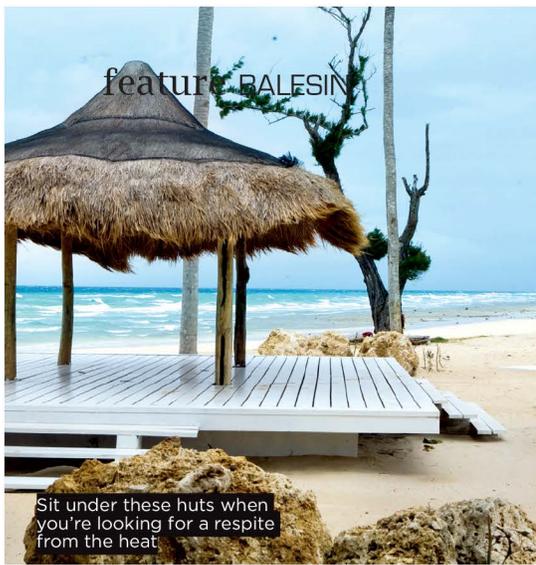
The Balesin Spa's black pool is a different sight, a fantastic contrast to the all-white atmosphere

buko juices, Sports Manager Aly Yulo immediately filled us in on the basic facts about the island.

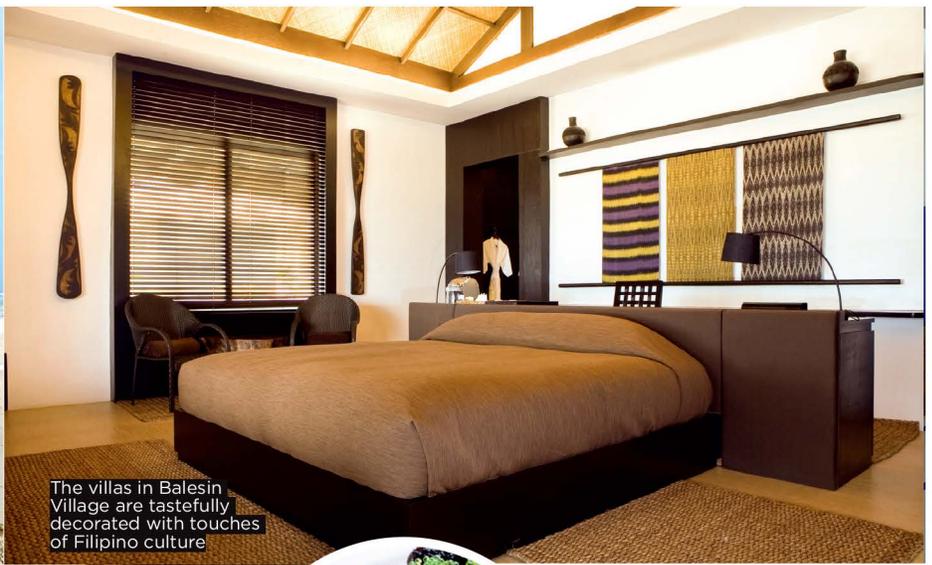
Beyond the island's natural offerings, Balesin Island Club promises a unique resort experience to its members and their guests. The resort is divided into seven themed villages, inspired by some of the world's best destinations (and Mr. Ongpin's favorite vacation spots)—Balesin, Bali, Mykonos, Phuket, St. Tropez, Costa Smeralda, and Costa del Sol. Each village will have 40 villas or suites (all thoughtfully and tastefully designed to fit the theme), a beachfront, and a specialty restaurant. Members can choose to stay in any villa when they use the 14 nights they're entitled to each year, but they're free to explore the

whole island whenever they visit.

Upon arrival, we hopped on an electric powered golf cart (no cars are allowed on the island) and went over to the Clubhouse to check in at Reception. We were handed mobile phones as our Intercom—useful numbers (like Housekeeping, Reception, and Spa) were programmed in for convenience. The Clubhouse is home to several function rooms, like the tabacalera, karaoke rooms, Wii and Playstation rooms, and salons. The three swimming pools—kiddie pool, regular pool, and lounge pool—are all here as well.



Sit under these huts when you're looking for a respite from the heat



The villas in Balesin Village are tastefully decorated with touches of Filipino culture

Balesin, the first village to be completed, is inspired by the beauty of the Philippine islands. A deep, dark wood bed frame, ikat wall hangings, a beautifully-woven nipa ceiling—there were thoughtful Filipino accents everywhere in the villa, but everything looked modern, stylish, and absolutely luxurious. The room had a king-sized bed with a 10-inch thick, downfeather mattress, 600-thread count cotton sheets, a coffee machine with coffee and tea pods, a fully-stocked bathroom with indoor and outdoor showers, an iPod docking station, and a flat screen TV with cable. The villa has its own expansive patio with a large day bed and a small Jacuzzi. The beautiful beach is too close to resist. Before long, I was walking barefoot on the fine sand of Balesin. It's unbelievably immaculate—no throng of rowdy beach-goers, no vendors of island hopping packages or banana boat rides, no rows of sari-sari stores. Just pure shores, majestic blue waters, and a seemingly endless sky. Balesin's white shore is 7.3 kilometer long, even longer than Boracay's 4 kilometer-long White Beach, and aside from a few trees and loungers, there was nothing to see but sand.

Instead of bulldozing through the island, Alphaland has made a very conscious decision to develop only a small part—just 10%. Balesin Island Club was designed to be in perfect harmony with the environment. For example, structures are built around the balet and banyan trees that have been there for years. Roads are not made with concrete; instead, the dirt paths are neatly paved, looking more natural and rustic. It goes through great lengths to keep the island pristine through sustainable means as well. Their 1.5-kilometer runway is used to collect rainwater to be used on the island.

After touring the developments around the island, we headed back to the



Not only does Chef Edu-San make incredibly delicious sushi, he's also warm, friendly and entertaining



Delicious Dragon Maki

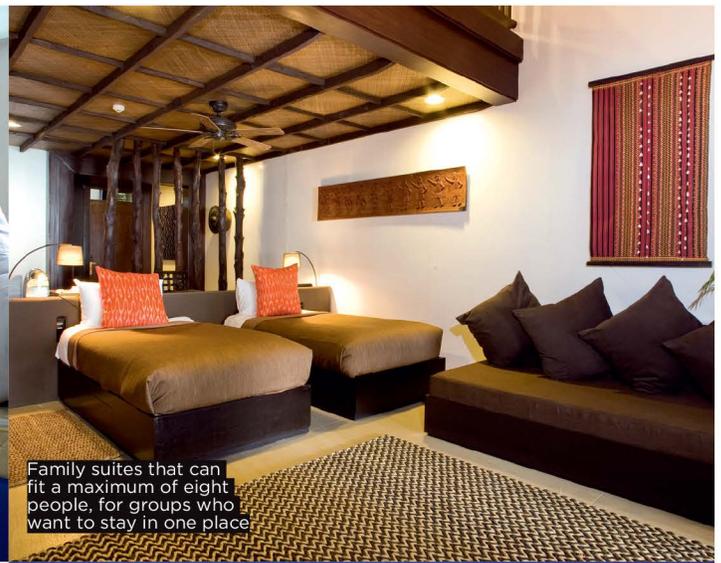


Clubhouse for lunch. While the resort doesn't have a Japanese village, it does have a quaint Japanese restaurant named Sakura where resident chef Edu-San personally prepares unbelievably tasty meals. We started with fresh sashimi—big, fat, juicy slices of the morning's catch—and dragon maki. He then ushered us to the teppanyaki table, where he made a funny and flamboyant show out of preparing fried rice, sea bass (in foil), scallops, and angus beef. After a scoop of green tea ice cream for dessert, I practically had to be rolled out of the room. Wilhelm assured me that all the restaurants in Balesin will have chefs as talented as Chef Edu-San and will create delicious menus for their respective cuisines. You know that saying that Filipinos

eat six times a day? Well, we can literally have six different cuisines in a single day! Aside from delectable meals, Balesin also offers a range of excellent activities. Their massive sports center is near completion, and it will have tennis courts, basketball courts, badminton courts, a gym, and yoga facilities. Currently, guests can engage in their choice of water sports, from kayaking to wakeboarding to surfing. If you prefer to stay on land, you can ride horses in their equestrian center, shoot arrows at their archery range, and play paintball. For something more leisurely, go to the Balesin Spa, an all-white sanctuary where you can get relaxing massages and treatments in one of the 10 individual spa suites. At the end of the day, the deserted beach fronting the Balesin Village beckoned me, still the most



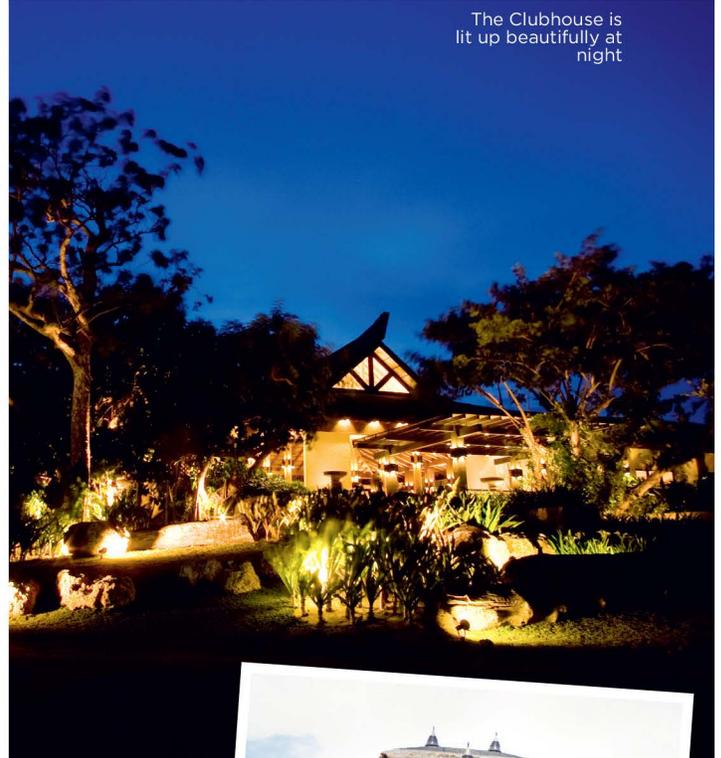
A preview of what the rooms in Mykonos will look like



Family suites that can fit a maximum of eight people, for groups who want to stay in one place



Except for a few loungers, the beach looks absolutely natural and pristine



The Clubhouse is lit up beautifully at night

enchanting part of the island. This was where I spent the rest of the vacation, sprawled languidly on a lounge and reading contentedly. My eyes kept drifting back to the sea and the beach around me, taking in the incredible view. It was like I had stumbled upon a secret island paradise, and every time I looked around I felt the thrill and exhilaration, as well as grateful happiness, of knowing about it.

Imagine how much more incredible the experience will be when all the villages are finished! More than being the perfect island hideaway, Balesin Island Club will also allow people to travel to different countries in a single day, on a single island.

Bali will be a tropical hideaway with natural elements tastefully weaved in; a number of

villas will be built over water, and landscapes around the village will be shaped like the rice paddies of Ubud.

Phuket has a unique position of having the Pacific Ocean on one side and Lamon Bay on the other, and is touted to be the most private of all the villages. It will even have its own private cove, where guests can surf and boogie board.

Mykonos will be a vision of blue and white, with villas separated by narrow alleys and winding passages, just like villages in Greece. The two final villages have suites in a hotel-type structure for members who don't want to walk far distances. St. Tropez recreates the sunny and beautiful atmosphere found in the South of France while Costa Smeralda



Warung, found in Bali Village, serves delicious Indonesian fare

is inspired by the hotel Cala di Volpe in the coastal village of Sardinia in Italy. The resort is scheduled to complete construction by the end of this year, and by that time, it will be hard to keep this island a secret any longer.

For more information on Balesin Island Club, visit <a href="http://balesin.com">balesin.com</a> or email <a href="mailto:sales@alphaland.com.ph">sales@alphaland.com.ph</a>