

Some personal remarks to the history and the concept of Ciliks Beach Garden

Rüdiger Krechel in December 2019

Since 1983 I have been living temporarily in South East Asia. The fascination of this region, especially Indonesia and Bali, its impressive nature and culture have made me want to have a fixed point here. At the beginning there was no "tourist object" at all. There was a young befriended Balinese family and a sea property, which stimulated the fantasy of the German friend. Slowly the fantasy was spun into a plan and from the middle of the eighties it was implemented together with the Balinese friends. Gradually German and Swiss partners were added, and so the very private beginnings suddenly turned into a small guest resort. For ourselves and for our guests it is supposed to be a beautiful place of peace and relaxation, for our Balinese friends a pleasant workplace and sustainable income.



*Two historical pictures: The beach in front of our property in Air Sanih in 1983
and a ritual Baris dance during a Melis ceremony at the beach in 1995*

What makes this place unique

As a result of the beginnings described above, a style has established itself that breathes more individuality, privacy and family atmosphere than is possible in conventional commercial hotels. The years of partnership with the Balinese friends have led to a close connection between Balinese traditions and lifestyle with Western dreams and desires for a tropical retreat. We, the Western partners, enjoy this during our own annual stays, and we are pleased to see that our guests also appreciate this special quality.

Often our not quite everyday concept leads to misjudgements and misunderstandings, on the side of the Balinese as on the side of the "strangers". While Indonesians first and foremost ask about the number of rooms and houses, and in a kind of belief in size they acknowledge the number of our houses: two villas and one bungalow, with a pitiful smile. Western questioners assume that the German or Swiss counterpart is the owner and «boss» of the complex. On both sides, our CBG project has to be explained again and again, sometimes even more extensively.

We are a community of partners, currently two Balinese families, two German and one Swiss partner. We have all brought something into the community and we continue to do so: The Balinese people provided land first and foremost, their Balinese know-how, their untiring work commitment and their trust in our community. The "foreigners" provided financial investments, their Western know-how, a good portion of idealism and their confidence in the functioning of the community too.



The owners of CBG are our Balinese partners without any ifs or buts. We Westerners are guests and have no intention of owning anything in Bali. But while tourists usually book and pay for their current holiday home, meals and services, we have teamed up with the Balinese friends and invested with foresight and the long term to create something together that was not before: Ciliks Beach Garden.

The benefit: A beautiful place has been created, which the Balinese, we foreign partners and our guests can enjoy equally. The Balinese partners were able to build something that wouldn't have been possible without us. And we, the guests, have reached a quasi family position: we feel familiar and at home when we "come home" to Bali every year. The astonishing fact: This friendly and family-like atmosphere has also been transferred to our guests, as numerous enthusiastic guest comments testify.

And a special feature of our resort is further strengthened: While space is becoming increasingly scarce everywhere in Bali and around it, because more and more houses are being built on ever narrower space, our two villas and the octagon stand in our one and a half hectare beach garden with over 200 metres of ocean front. Such spaciousness and privacy is becoming increasingly rare in Bali.

For our two Balinese partner families and nine other employees and their families, CBG is their life content and economic basis. We have devised a sophisticated system to secure them financially more generously than is usual in the surrounding area. We foreign partners live in "our" houses for a long time every year and feel very comfortable with it. Out of pleasure in the project and friendship with our Balinese partners we continue to provide services and help in management and marketing. This is not a "business" in the usual sense, it is basically an idealistic project, but if it is to be sustainable, the cash must be right.

How it all started

In 1983 I came to Air Sanih for the first time. Along the north coast of Bali I was on my way from Java to Lombok to avoid the south of the island, which was more touristy already at that time, and stayed here unplanned. An idyllic coastal spot and a surprising friendship to Cilik and his family were the reasons.



*Two photos from the eighties and nineties:
Rüdiger and Cilik at Gunung Rinjani in Lombok and the young family: Cening, Cilik and son Jersan*

At that time I worked as a guest lecturer at a state university in Bandung, West Java. I then came back every year during my time in Java and during following work stays in Thailand, Vietnam and China and finally also after my return to my second home of choice, Valais in Switzerland.

The friendship with Cilik, as already mentioned, soon led to the plan to create together a beautiful place where Western desires and dreams and Balinese traditions complement each other. Cilik's house was built, where he lived with his wife Cening, and which became the supply unit of the gradually growing complex.

Villa West was the first house to be rented to colleagues and acquaintances and later to other guests too. Slowly the garden formed into a well-kept palm and beach park.

And our guests became more numerous. Among them Dr. Oldenbruch and his wife, who joined our "project of the beautiful place" after several holidays. The Villa Ost was built. And economic reason found its way into our project, which until then had been completely improvised and spontaneous. With a double plot of land, two villas and its own Gamelan orchestra CBG "consolidated" and quickly became known among insiders as a particularly beautiful and well-kept resting place on Bali's north coast.

"The real gem in the area" the *"Rough Guide to Bali"* wrote already in 1994. In the same year the *"Fodors Guide to Bali and Lombok"* praised us next to a few selected accommodations in North Bali. Since then you can find recommended descriptions in almost all Bali travel guides: *"The Lonely Planet"*, Peter Rumps *"Travel Know-How"*, *"Footprint Handbooks"*, Hans Hoefers *"The APA-Guide"*, Stefan Looses *"Bali und Lombok"*, *"The Online Travel Guide to Bali"* and many more. Since 2002 we are listed in the excellent Bali maps of the Nelles publishing house Munich and the *"Insight Guides"*, 2009 a volume of Polyglott *"APA Style Bali"* even included us in its list of the "TOP-TEN" accommodations in Bali, and since 2016 we were awarded several times with the *"Certificate of Excellence"* due to the numerous enthusiastic guest evaluations at *Tripadvisor*.

The above expansion pattern was repeated: a guest of several years, Inge Croè, fell in love with our place, which, like all earthly paradises, of course has its scratches, and decided to participate in our project: Two other houses were built on the neighbouring plot to the west: the Octagon and the Lumbung. A little smaller and closer together, but in a similar architectural style and with the same guest service as the two larger Villas, but with a new ownership structure, as the Balinese Gede Putu family was included as further partners. After 18 years of good cooperation, this connection is dissolved in the end of 2019, because Putu's son built a third house on the already narrower western property and wants to manage it on his own together with the two bungalows.



CBG: The "kampung" of our Balinese partners and the spacious beach garden of our guest villas

The Oldenbruch couple, who could no longer travel due to their age, were replaced at the beginning of 2012 by the young Swiss Zbinden family with their children. For a number of years now Bettina Bergmann has taken the place of Inge Croè, who is meanwhile also struggling with long journeys due to her age.

Bettina has updated our internet presence and our ageing website with great energy and also takes care of our guest contacts. Since 2015 Ciliks son Jersan has been responsible for the management of Ciliks Beach Garden. From June 2020, a new Octagon will be added to the east of our property, so that we can offer a slightly smaller house again in addition to the two larger villas. Changes and rejuvenations will continue. They are a prerequisite for a further sustainable development.

You will quickly feel the special: Already when you arrive at Ciliks Beach Garden and enter the part from the entrance where the Balinese partner families live and from where our guests and we are looked after; when you then walk through the extensive palm garden, pass our freshwater pool, and enter the individually designed and furnished houses, which are located at generous intervals. Finally, during your stay, whether at a table tennis match with Balinese partners, while watching in the kitchen, on the boat trip with one of our outrigger boats, while dreaming in the garden or relaxing in the very private and personal atmosphere of your house with jazz or classical music. You have not landed in one of the usual commercial "holiday cottages" or Bungalow Hotels, but you have arrived at an individual and personal place. And we hope that you will enjoy it as much as we do!

First of all, with this facility we have realized our own dreams, we have created something that we like ourselves and from which we assume that others must also like it. Furthermore, we try to realize a tourism concept which should reduce unavoidable negative effects of tourism, which considers the interests of the Balinese people and should favour a development that is as sustainable as possible. Finally, in addition to recreation and relaxation, we would also like to offer our guests foreign cultural experiences, if they so wish. Our considerations are explained by a few examples.

Sustainability towards nature and the social environment

This effort began even before the construction of the first house, when we, together with some villagers, worked to preserve and protect the coastline, which was severely endangered by erosion and years of sand mining. In the meantime, a balance seems to have been achieved: through a strict and largely enforced ban on commercial mining of sand and pebbles, through the construction of a stable protective wall and through a revival of traditional use structures of coastal properties, favoured by the meanwhile larger number of private, small holiday resorts in the area. Even in the wider area, there are no large hotels, but only manageable private resorts and restaurants, all committed to sustainable development.



CBG - The Villa East in the early evening from the pavilion and the very personal designed interior of Villa West

In the construction and maintenance of our houses, we principally engage craftsmen from the village and only use local raw materials and supplies. In addition, we have been striving for energy savings and an environmentally friendly waste disposal for many years. We avoid plastic bottles, plastic bags and all disposable materials. And we try to keep groundwater pollution to a minimum.

As already described, the plant is a cooperation between Balinese, German and Swiss partners. The profit from the lettings is first and foremost used to economically secure the Balinese partner- and employee families and to maintain the facility. In addition to the Balinese partners, we offer nine Balinese permanent and two temporary employees from the direct vicinity a job and thus economic security for them and their families. We provide our employees with child benefit, training allowances, health insurance and old-age provision, which is rather unusual in Indonesian context.

While the planning and construction of the plant was already a cooperative process in which Pak Cilik assumed a large part of the responsibility, we now share the responsibility for the maintenance and further development of the plant - always with the possibility of consulting and advising against each other.

This constant dialogue between traditional Balinese thinking and Western desires and standards is clearly visible in CBG. Sometimes it is a lengthy and tedious process, but it creates a motivation in everyone in the interest of the whole, which leads to a special atmosphere and to different results than a hierarchically western-led system.

The close ties between Pak Cilik's family and the village community have not been disturbed by his commitment to the "foreigners", although there are always some envious people. In spring of 2004 and again in 2008 Pak Cilik was elected 'Kelian Desa Adat', the head of the village ritual community. This is within the Balinese village structures, the 'Desa Adat', an extremely honourable and responsible function, which Pak Cilik gave up after two four-year terms of office in 2012 to devote himself again with full force to the care of our guests. Since 2015 his son Jersan, who graduated in Tourism Management in Denpasar, has taken over our management with young energy, and Pak Cilik has been elected Kelian Desa Adat in Air Sanih for the third time.

A mayor gain: a wide range of cultural experience opportunities

For many years the gamelan players of the village practiced traditional Balinese music on our premises on a set of instruments financed by Oldenbruch. Recently, however, for practical reasons, they started training in the community hall of the village. On Sundays the children of the village practice traditional dances and gamelan music at the suggestion of Pak Cilik.



CBG - a dancer at an evening performance and the



Gamelang group of the village in our garden

Nyoman, our service manager and boat leader, is also the leader of the village's Gamelan group. Several of our staff members are members of the Gamelan Orchestra and one brother of Nyoman is Dalang, the shadow playmaster of the village. Upon request, musicians and dancers can perform in front of the ocean backdrop of our beach garden and show their skills in evening performances.

Members of the village community are to be found daily in the houses of our Balinese partners, who are closely involved in the daily Balinese village life in addition to their functions for our resort. This also creates contact opportunities for our guests. Every day you can watch the wives of our partners preparing artistic offerings. At your request, Cilik can take you to his parents' homestead or to the sacrificial and cleansing ceremonies of the family or the village. And our manager Jersan is meanwhile Pemangku and performs priest functions in the village.

The still relatively small number of tourists in northern Bali, apart from the regions of Lovina, Tulamben and Amed, means that rituals and ceremonies in northern Bali are less influenced by tourism than in southern and central Bali.

As a CBG guest you can be absolutely private in your home, in the Balés, on the terraces and in your large beach garden. You don't need to see any other tourists for days, even weeks, and you can enjoy your peace and quiet. However, if you wish, there are also contact possibilities to facilitate individual encounters and contacts with the village population.

You will find suggestions in a folder in your house, which among other things lists possible activities and experiences that can bring you closer to the unique and special Balinese culture and the still magnificent tropical nature and landscape of the island.



**A man from the village harvests coconuts - not exactly easy
And our freshwater swimming pool not only for days with strong surf**

The extent to which you will engage with such opportunities, or whether you prefer a more secluded, tranquil relaxation time, depends solely on your wishes and preferences. Massage and yoga invite you to relax. And if waves and currents are too strong, dive into our freshwater pool, where you can also meet the guests of the other houses, have a drink together or enjoy a snack.

With Ciliks Beach Garden we try to create a synthesis of Bali-Hindu tradition and Western expectations and aesthetic demands.

Enjoy the familiar, but also get involved with the unknown! This will intensify your experience, and with a little luck a "just" exotic holiday will become a culturally enriching experience that will broaden your perception.