



Coastal Kitchen

Bali's newest restaurant is a celebration of local seafood and salt.

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It's the ultimate holiday dining scene: cool white interiors give way to blue sky and blue sea on a deck that appears to float above the crashing surf. Waves pound onto the beach, the ocean adding its voice to our conversation.

'The sea is the best companion,' says the hotel's assistant director of operations, Guillermo Varela Mata, who steers us unerringly through the menu at Seasalt, the newest restaurant in Bali's already laden larder of stellar eateries. Set in the chic five-star surrounds of Alila Seminyak, the reimagined restaurant is inspired by its location: local seafood and salt harvested from Bali's shores are the heroes of the menu.

Heading the open kitchen is East Malaysian chef Vivian Vitalis, whose path to one of Asia's hottest dining precincts has included stints at Malaysia's luxury Pangkor Laut resort and Kuala Lumpur's go-to Japanese fine dining restaurant Gonbei.

Indonesian elements make a welcome appearance, from the plantain married with pork belly to Javanese crackers: repeyek, which give a salad its crunch, or the cocktail inspired by the street food favourite, rujak, a fruit-and-vegetable salad tossed with tamarind, palm sugar and chilli. Salt is the key: we taste a crust of sweet togarashi salt here, a rim of charcoal salt there, a dusting of sweet cinnamon salt for a twisted aftertaste.

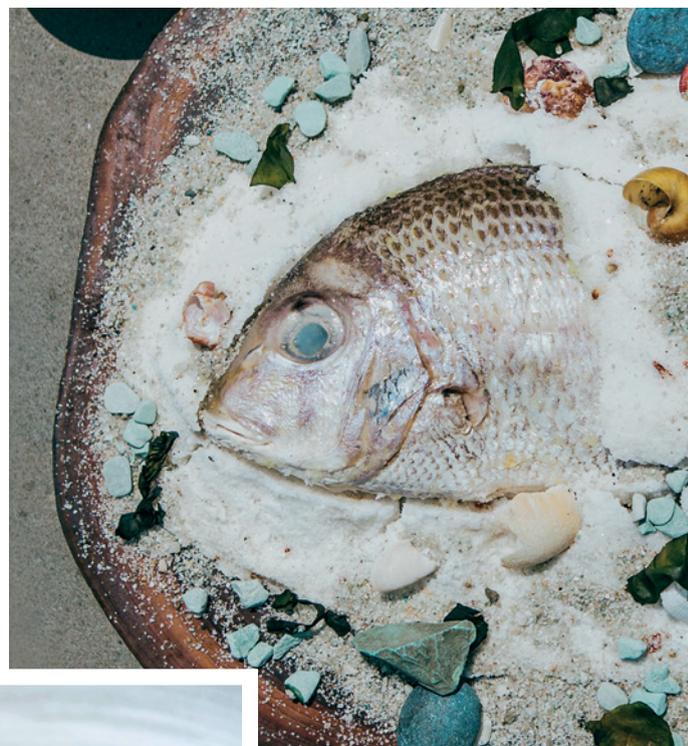
While the focus is fresh seafood with a Japanese flavour, Seasalt's staff are at pains to explain that this is not a fusion Japanese menu, but Japanese ingredients blended with the island's best offerings, grouped into salads or raw; vegetables and seafood, and served on ceramic dishes handmade in Bali for the Indonesian hotel group.

Take the blue swimmer crab, served with the Japanese egg custard chawanmushi. It is beautiful, it is delicate –

and its life on the table is short-lived. Or the vivid Kyoto hummus, blending edamame, broccoli, avocado and romaine with moshio salt derived from seaweed.

The meal is designed to be built around a constant flow of small dishes that beg to be shared: the restaurant's signature dish is the white snapper which comes to the table whole, baked in a salt crust and garnished with tiny shells. It is served with five small salads, or 'seasides', including a dashi butter lemon sauce that makes the snapper sing of the seas. The last dish of our savoury courses is a miso-honey roasted butterfish served over carrot purée, with pickled carrots and a citrus reduction. It's the only warm dish, and is a nourishing, comforting and slightly sweet segue into dessert.

The desserts manage to blend Seasalt's faintly healthy vibe with a let's-indulge-we're-on-holiday kick; the signature dessert of creamy matcha namelaka is



FROM TOP, CLOCKWISE
 Seasalt (beachfront) at Alila Seminyak hotel;
 House-baked sourdough with nori butter;
 Seasalt's signature dish: Whole White Snapper
 baked in a salt crust; Rosemary Ginger
 Margarita; Yuzu-cured Spanish Mackerel with
 ponzu dressing
OPPOSITE
 On-trend dessert:
 matcha namelaka

paired with red bean ice-cream and green-tea cake. However, in my book, the winner is the vivid passion cream, coco crumble and a coconut milk sorbet: a tropical island on a plate.

In the balmy heat, fragile dishes melt quickly, so there's no option but to eat and enjoy the desserts or watch their inevitable destruction by the elements.

Such lunches require post-prandial promenading, and the beach obliges. A quick skip down the steps from Seasalt and you're on a ribbon of sand that runs up the south-west coast of the island, from Kuta to the surf beaches of Batu Bolong and beyond. The connection with the sea and salt is complete.

GETTING THERE

Seasalt Restaurant at:

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seasaltseminyak.com

