

# HOUSE & GARDEN

September  
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## THE GREAT ESCAPE

SUN-SOAKED HOUSES IN  
UMBRIA, MALTA, NORMANDY  
AND THE BASQUE COUNTRY

*Celebrate summer*  
SEASONAL ITALIAN RECIPES  
**PLUS** THE REINVENTION OF  
COWLEY MANOR HOTEL



# Remote possibilities

ARTA GHANBARI leaves busy Bali behind and heads to the beautifully untouched island of Sumba in East Indonesia, where a new resort is offering a more connected and immersive travel experience

PHOTOGRAPHS **ERIC MARTIN**

Every airport carries its own sense of place and its own distinct scent, which can hit you the moment that you leave the plane and arrive on unfamiliar territory. In Bali, from where I had just caught a flight to Sumba in East Indonesia, the sweet fragrance of frangipani is what greets you as you walk through the long terminal. In Sumba, however, it is the scent of the low-growing mangroves that surround the landing strip, sweating under the sun. In fact, there is hardly a terminal – only a single luggage carousel in a dishevelled waiting room, before you are through the doors and into Sumba.

Instantly, I notice the stark contrast to Bali's tourist-laden towns like Canggu and Seminyak, and feel that I am not one among many to have arrived on this unfiltered, remote island. Driving out of the capital Tambolaka towards Kodi in the west, we pass a huddle of men standing beside their motorbikes on the side of the road, hands coolly resting on the arm's-length machetes strapped to their waists. Further along one of the rare paved roads, signs of life are few and far between – just the odd thatched roof or grazing horse poking out of the foliage. I am told that the road is new and that the previous one would sometimes be completely submerged after heavy rain, resulting in this part of the island being cut off.

It is in this unlikely, out-of-the-way part of the world that a Parisian couple decided to trade in their jobs to become first-time hoteliers. Cap Karoso has been a six-year dream in the making for Evguenia and Fabrice Ivara, who finally saw their ambitions come to fruition in April, not without a few testing moments, including navigating investors, a global pandemic and welcoming their first-born. 'I thought, I have a dream, I don't think it exists anywhere else and I want to do it,' says Evguenia, who previously worked in marketing for LVMH's champagne brands.

The idea to open a hotel here first struck during an underwhelming holiday in Bali back in 2016, when fellow guests at Evguenia and Fabrice's hotel in Seminyak mentioned that they had heard some land had become available on Sumba. It was during a subsequent trip that they visited the island to see it for

themselves. 'Bali used to be a harmonious place, but now there is such a disconnect between the locals and the expats. Travelling so far from Europe to a place that was more noisy and polluted than Paris was odd. Bali feels more shallow somehow,' says Evguenia of the striking contrast with Sumba – a place that exudes a spirit of adventure and lessons to be taken home.

From the entrance, Cap Karoso's cluster of low-lying, Brutalist structures descends towards a perfect beach, under the camouflage of green roofs that blend with the landscape. The 47 rooms and 20 villas – some sea-facing, others within the gardens – feel unmistakably European but relevant to their surroundings. Teak furniture sourced from Central Java has been upholstered in Pierre Frey fabrics, while Italian travertine quarried near Siena appears on the four monolithic blocks that make up the reception area, referencing the milky cliffs nearby. A handful of local craftspeople were commissioned over the course of three years to painstakingly create the ikat textiles, wooden carvings and ceramics that decorate the public spaces and the rooms.

At the centre are five *uma mbatangu* (peaked houses) typical of Sumba, which rise above all else and house the spa. The island's vernacular towering roofs sometimes reach up to 25 metres high and are believed by the native Marapu people to host the spirits of their ancestors. Their heritage is visible all over Sumba and the few villages close by in Kodi give an insight into their distinct beliefs and traditions. The typical *uma mbatangu* is constructed of three levels of bamboo with an *alang-alang* thatched roof. The

ground floor is for livestock, the first floor for the family and the top floor for the ancestors. The dead lead the living and death is viewed fluidly rather than with fear. Megalithic carved tombstones are lined up in front of houses like a reality check, providing a constant reminder of one's mortality. Here, however, it does not appear to be morbid, but rather very freeing.

'Many of the people in Kodi have not even been to Tambolaka,' says Evguenia. 'They cannot imagine how and why we have come all the way from Europe.'

The couple have spent the past six years building connections with the local villages: Ratenggaro, which unravels onto a beautiful strip of beach; Buku Bani, which has just 50 residents; and Waikaroko, where visitors are still a rarity.

Despite communication being limited to facial expressions and gestures (most of the people here do not speak Indonesian, but their own dialect), as I sit in the living space of the house belonging to Markus, a villager in his seventies, with roaming pigs and chickens visible between gaps in the bamboo floor, I have an overwhelming feeling that, despite all our differences, we are not dissimilar. We are all here because we were born and we shall all leave one day, loving, mourning and hopefully learning in between. It is in places like these, far from reach, that you can feel it most □

**WAYS AND MEANS** *Arta Ghanbari visited Sumba with Turquoise Holidays (020 7147 7087; [turquoiseholidays.co.uk](http://turquoiseholidays.co.uk)), which offers a seven-night holiday at Cap Karoso from £2,415 per person, based on two sharing a Studio Room, B&B, including international and domestic flights and all transfers.*

## Cap Karoso's cluster of low-lying, Brutalist structures descends to a perfect beach

**TOP ROW FROM LEFT** Cap Karoso's Beach Club bar. *Uma mbatangu* houses in Ratenggaro village. A serene living space in one of the villas. **MIDDLE ROW** The infinity pool. Evguenia and Fabrice Ivara. Waikaroko village. **BOTTOM ROW** This bedroom at the resort features a carved wall panel crafted by locals. The Beach Club. A fisherman in Ratenggaro



