

LAKEVIEW

Graeme MacRae revisits a long lost friend.

BACK in 1977, on our first visit to Bali and following the advice of *Lonely Planet's* very first guidebook, my wife and I took the slow bus up the Tampaksiring road to the crater of Mt. Batur. We arrived eventually at Penelokan and checked into the only available accommodation – a cluster of ramshackle wooden shacks hanging off a precipitous cliff. It was called Lakeview Lodge and that seemed an understatement: what it overlooked was one of the most memorable views in the world: the great crescent-shaped lake, the jagged rim of the crater, the fields of black lava and the volcano within the volcano, then at night the lights of the villages below and the full moon rising over it all. Our host was a woman small of stature but large of presence and when she heard we were from New Zealand, she tried to explain, between her minimal English and our even more minimal Indonesian, that there was a family connection of some kind. When we left, she gave us a small, crudely carved, but powerful garuda mask, which hangs over our front door to this day.

Years later, when we lived in Ubud in the early 1990s, Lakeview had grown into a series of windowless Indonesian-hotel-style brick and tile rooms, but fortunately strung along a terrace with the view still intact. The beds were damp and lumpy and water felt like ice, but it was worth it for the full moons. It was there that we got to know Wayan Armawa, the son of our previous host – doctor, raconteur and well-known

identity in the Ubud scene of that time. The mysterious New Zealand connection turned out to be that he was the (by then ex-) husband of Sarita Newson (long-term resident of Sanur, but known to many Bud readers as the founder/owner/editor of Saritaksu Editions). Armawa was a free spirit, but also a wise and generous one and he was the first Balinese to invite me to join him working in a temple and to show me how to do it. It was with him also that we found ourselves one cold misty midnight, watching a *wayang kulit* performance outside Pura Tuluk Bui, all sitting on the main road and reluctantly moving to let the occasional vehicle past. This was how Batur became the sacred centre of that personal Bali most of us have.

During the 1990s, Lakeview became the lunch stop of choice for the big tour buses, and they upgraded their restaurant to meet this market as well as the growing market for receptions and other events. Later they invested heavily in a parking area for the buses with a new accommodation and restaurant building along the edge – a cliff of black volcanic stone that seems part of the crater rim itself. The renovations were completed a few days before the first Bali bomb. With the downturn in tourism, the next few years were not easy, and the move upmarket called for a sophistication of management and marketing that was not easy to meet from local resources. Reviewers tended to rate the views more highly than the facilities and management.

Meanwhile, Armawa and Sarita's family were growing up,

*Rooms with a view, by
Pierluigi Balducci.*





moving effortlessly between their education and work in New Zealand and holidays and family in Bali, and then also travelling much further afield. They are now cosmopolitan professionals who could live anywhere in the world, but gradually, one-by-one, they have all been drawn back to Bali, and to the mountain home of their ancestors. Recently the eldest son, Kadek Adidharma, has taken over as general manager of Lakeview and has begun a radical transformation of the hotel. Last week we decided to see for ourselves.

We took the Tegallalang-Pujung road, a comfortable hour by motorbike, past the woodcarving shops, then steadily climbing (with a stop at Tegalsuci to put on more clothing) above the irrigation zone, into mountain horticulture territory with the last kilometre lined with stalls with spectacular displays of multicoloured fruit. At the rim of the crater, the pay-to-enter roadblock is not the friendliest of welcomes, but the amount is not excessive and hopefully some of it is put to good use.

We arrived late afternoon, in time for excellent local coffee on the balcony, with the lake and the villages of Buahan and Trunyan glowing far below in the setting sun. At this hour the restaurant was still busy with day visitors but they soon left and we had the place to ourselves apart from a Dutch couple. As the mist began rolling in, over the rim and down into the crater, we moved to our room a couple of levels down the cliff-face.

The layout is standard international hotel style, but the

materials and furnishings are not: light golden sandstone walls with flooring and furniture of dark hardwood: huge comfortable bed and chairs, with more wardrobes and cabinets than you need. They have seen some use, but with solid natural materials of this quality it doesn't matter. The bathroom opens into the room (and the view), the shower has a welcome non-slip pebble floor, hot water means hot and exhaust fans are coming soon. The complimentary water and tea, soap and toothbrush are nice touches.

But the highlight is the far wall – all glass – with the volcano filling most of the view. It opens onto a balcony – just big enough for two chairs, where you can watch the world inside the crater and whatever is happening in the sky above it, at any hour of day or night.

As night fell, so did the temperature, so we moved back upstairs to the dining/lounge/restaurant area (Danu Lounge) which is lined with brilliant painting/batik from a recent exhibition. Somebody lit a fire in the big open fireplace (in-house New Zealand expertise). Mulled wine appeared from somewhere – sweet and spicy but not too much so. Soon we were warm inside and out and should we be tired of the tropics, it would be easy to imagine ourselves in the European alps. Visiting family members came and went. The Dutch couple joined us briefly by the fire, then ate quietly by themselves. We were not very hungry, so we dined lightly on grilled fish from

the lake and local (semi-organic) vegetables. The menu looks extensive though and they are constantly inventing new local specialties, including a gourmet chicken-curry bubur (rice porridge), Kintamani Sunrise (a white wine spritzer with tamarillo liqueur) and home-made jams and marmalades.

Back in our room we had no need for the TV (we presume it works), because the rising moon on the volcano filled the glass wall. The double glass doors were surprisingly effective in cutting the sound of the trucks grinding their way up the hill with loads of rock and gravel destined for building sites on the coast (you get used to it after a while anyway). The bed was comfortable and warm and the only thing that stopped us sleeping was the moonlight.

In the morning, I joined Kadek for the morning yoga class as the sun rose (professional teachers of both yoga and tai chi are in the pipeline). For breakfast you can choose *nasi goreng* or black rice pudding in the buffet restaurant where the bus tours eat, or European style in the new restaurant. We chose