

# Bali Advertiser

ADVERTISING FOR THE EXPATRIATE COMMUNITY

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## Penny Ellis: Spa Educator



Penny Ellis was born in Africa, but grew up on England from age five. After studying hairdressing and beauty at Kirby College in Middlesbrough UK in the 1970s, Penny worked for more than 40 years in consultancy and senior management positions in the spa and wellness industry.

She first owned a chain of upmarket UK spa salons before moving into the training arena as the owner of the International Massage and Beauty Training Academy in the UK. In 1993, Penny relocated to Malaysia, which provided her with her first insights into eastern spa traditions. She joined the Spa Village team on Pankor Laut Island where she quickly embraced Indian Ayurveda rituals, traditional Chinese medicine and Malay/Indonesian health and beauty treatments. In 2006, Penny founded the Bali International Spa Academy (BISA), accredited by the prestigious Confederation of International Beauty Therapy and Cosmetology. Although most of her time is devoted to business operations, her greatest satisfaction is still derived from personal consultations with students and their trainers.

### **What are your hobbies and/or interests?**

In my earlier days, I was a very keen yacht racer and I still love yachts, but more so with the gin & tonic in hand. I adore my two dogs, Max, who I have had from 6 weeks old, and Zero who was a very sick street dog who is now wonderfully healthy. We spend a lot of time on the beach, which keeps my soul firmly attached to the sea, which I fell in love with so many years ago.

### **How do employers assess prospective spa therapists?**

Employers consider the range of therapies which novice therapists have credentials for, as well as the length and depth of their formal studies. In Europe, it's imperative that job candidates have some form of accreditation. The liability for spas is just too great with someone who may have talent, but lacks a valid certificate. I see this happening more and more in Asian countries such as Singapore and Malaysia where spas are increasingly demanding either local or international certification.

### **What advice can you give to a young person who wishes to enter the spa therapy field?**

Research schools carefully to determine what local or international certifications, if any, they provide. Talk to other students currently enrolled to get their feedback. Most importantly, look for a school with passionate and caring educators on their team. You can see it easily in their body language if they are confident and content. Do not be shy to ask about the qualifications their teachers possess.

**In deciding on where to do training, what should prospective students do and not do?**

We have all heard stories of Indonesians working abroad who essentially become indentured students with the employer not delivering on their promises. If the school or agency is offering job placements, check the contract carefully and get a list of previous students who can vouch for their credibility.

**Can a spa therapist make a good living? Are there opportunities for advancement?**

Absolutely yes to both questions! In today's market where demand outstrips supply, clever people can become managers if they aspire to. Today schools are popping up all over the world to try to accommodate this booming industry.

**Would someone who wants to enter the profession need to work as an apprentice for a period of time?**

Like everything in life, people fresh out of college need time to practice. This person would be paid, but at a lower level until their expertise begins to kick in. Our industry is forever changing and even I after all of these years am still learning too.

**If the person has no formal education, is it possible that spas will take them on at novice level and train them in-house?**

Certainly! We did this at Spa Village and I know that large hospitality organizations such as Four Seasons identify staff with the right aptitude and train them in-house. Some of the best therapists have actually started out as gardeners and due to their caring nature have become one of their most sought after therapists.

**If a student wishes to work in a lucrative position onboard a cruise ship or find a well-paying job abroad, what should they be aware of?**

Be sure to use a fully licensed agent with a solid reputation. There are too many people on Bali claiming to be agents who demand a lot of money in exchange for supposedly securing them bonafide jobs. The fees they demand put the entire family at financial risk and all too often the pay they are promised is not delivered.

**With so much growth in the tourism sector, how do you see the future of Bali spas?**

Bali's reputation as "The Spa Capital Of The World" is quite well deserved. However, other destinations are catching up quickly, so it's important that Bali spas continue to nurture and train good therapists. With so many skilled spa workers opting to move abroad, Bali spas will need to work harder to retain them through larger commissions in addition to a reasonable base salary to reflect the increasing cost of living as well as reward loyalty via better health insurance and company subsidized external training to keep them motivated. Like everywhere else in the world, a personal thank you for their contribution to the organization goes a long way to making them feel valued.

**Does this situation apply also to Bali?**

The Balinese are highly regarded worldwide for their magical hands and warm personalities, so are recruited by top-notch spas and cruise ships. In the spas of many European countries and the Middle East you will frequently find Balinese therapists. This overseas demand makes it quite challenging for Bali spas to attract and retain qualified therapists. This means there are very few institutions locally who require any sort of diploma for hiring as the expense to enroll in a spa school is usually financially out of the realm of possibility for the average Balinese. To enable them to recruit talented therapists, higher-class spas on Bali often have their own internal training programs for entry-level staff.

**How can you be contacted?**

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