



## Hot start to the year

Goodbye to Bloomberg's prophecies of eternal darkness and recession, goodbye to scaremongering reportage of minor stock market jitters, goodbye investors "sitting it out" and a hearty hello to 2012.

I decided to spend the bland gap between Christmas and New Year on the Gilis – a group of three postcard-perfect tropical islands off the coast of Lombok (about a two-hour boat ride from Bali). I had planned the ultimate challenge for myself after accidentally and completely abandoning any remaining trace of a work/life balance for most of 2011. I had planned to leave my cellphone *and* my blackberry at home. I knew it wouldn't be easy and I was anxiously anticipating a tough first few days as I endured my self-inflicted cold turkey – night sweats, panic attacks, disorientation, feelings of nervousness and insecurity. The longest I had gone without my blackberry *ever* was for about 30 minutes over a lunch in Hong Kong, so five days was going to be nothing short of tortuous.

I decided if I really needed to, I would get my "fix" at the island's one and only internet café. You see the appeal of Gili Meno, the middle of the three islands and arguably the most beautiful, is that there is precious little to do. Simplicity rules – unspoilt white sandy beaches, crystal clear turquoise waters, a few bars and restaurants

scattered around serving barbecued seafood and cold beers – what more do you need?

At the end of day one, nicely bronzed, chilled and only suffering from sporadic moments of post-blackberry trauma, I popped into the not very salubrious internet café with a warm sense of déjà vu. It felt like stepping back in time to my backpacking days only this time I wasn't planning to hook up with some dudes I had met on a death defying minibus journey in Western Sumatra, I was checking in on the serious business of, well, my business.

Expecting a few spam emails, the odd belated Happy Xmas circular and a handful of cursory admin queries, I was positively shocked to find an inbox bursting at the seams with enquiries, leads, requests for viewings and requests to purchase. That evening, I was in my new "office" until midnight. The following day sadly took the same pattern and believe me, an eight-hour stint on a rickety plastic chair with an internet connection that would have frustrated a tortoise, seated in front of the only computer equipped with a microphone

(which meant endless rounds of Dutch tourists talking loudly to their mums and dads on skype) does not a holiday make. I knew it was getting really serious when the young boy working in the café stopped people from sitting at "my desk" when I popped out for lunch.

But I must confess it wasn't all work and no play – in and around my toiling as part of my quest for a semblance of a work/life balance I still managed to go snorkeling, read the latest Sophie Kinsella (I'd love to fib and say it was Kafka or Dostoyevsky but I am not nearly so highbrow these days), got rather merry on some dubious palm wine with my new island friends and enjoy some brilliantly relaxing afternoons on the beach. Nonetheless I am happy to say that those sessions in my little office/café paid off – since Boxing Day we have taken reservations on a stunning penthouse, three beachfront villas at well over a million dollars each, four one bedroom apartments and seven studios, all on Koh Samui, not to mention two luxury ocean view apartments in Boracay, a US\$12million private island in Palawan, two beautiful villas in my own Bali project and a gorgeous resort villa on Gili Meno... so I think it is fair to say that this was a pretty hot start to the year.

My prediction for 2012? Investors will no longer be sitting on the fence waiting for the world to end and, like me, are bored and fatigued by negative financial news. They are simply going to get on with it – and that means buying professionally managed real estate that makes investment sense, from reputable developers, in high demand locations that they can also enjoy from time to time.



**Claire Brown**

formed Claire Brown Realty in 2004 having worked for various developers across South East Asia. Her roles included sales and marketing, project management, construction planning and consultancy. As well as running the business, Claire is also developing her own project in Bali, a luxury villa and spa retreat in the beautiful and somewhat undiscovered province of Tabanan. She enjoys travel, food and wine, interior design and shopping – in no particular order.  
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