Best Business Ventures as a Foreigner in Bali.

☕ Pull up a chair. Here is the playbook I would hand a friend landing in Bali with big plans.

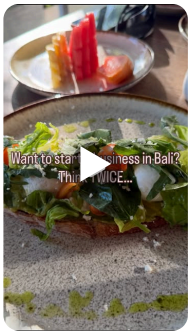
6 min read · Last refreshed 28 October 2026

First, what changed.

In January 2026 the Governor of Bali asked the Minister of Investment to shut the online licensing system (OSS) to new foreign-owned companies (PT PMA) in low-risk fields. His letter says Bali held about 40 percent of all PMA business numbers, and some were used mainly to get residence permits. With the Minister's approval, access closed from May 2026, and in July the province named 18 business fields, including hotels, accommodation, cafés and fitness.

It covers new registrations, in Bali only. Existing companies keep operating and must keep filing investment reports.

highwatermark
@highwater.holly



Watch the reel

The 18 blocked categories, as I posted them on Instagram.

@highwater.holly on Instagram →

See all 18 categories

The rules apply to new PT PMA registrations (foreign-owned companies) in these categories:

- Star-rated hotels
- Budget and non-star hotels
- Other tourist accommodation

- Owned or leased real estate services
- Management and industrial consulting
- Car and vehicle rentals
- Motorcycle and scooter rentals
- Clothing retail
- Textile retail
- Traditional food retail
- Mobile agricultural-food retail
- Traditional medicine shops
- Tailoring and garment services
- Stadium and sports facilities
- Fitness centers and gyms
- Sports activity promotion
- Bars
- Cafés

high water mark
@highwater.holly

This is the list from my reel. Published lists differ slightly, and I did not find the official notice, so check the current list with a licensed advisor. Companies that already hold licenses are reported to keep operating, with more inspections.

The five everyone builds, and why I would not.

Most foreigners land with one of these in mind, and each fails on structure, not effort. For the red ones, new foreign-owned registrations are closed in Bali, and nominee workarounds are barred by Indonesia's Investment Law. Do not go there.

Café or protein bar

Blocked: on the official 18

1. **Economics.** Low-ticket sales against fixed rent, staff and ingredients. You need constant footfall to break even.
2. **No moat.** A menu and an aesthetic can be copied in weeks. The next place can open beside you.

3. **Locked-in cash.** Fit-out and lease are sunk costs in a space you do not own.

Villa

Blocked: on the official 18

1. **Illiquid.** Your capital sits in one building in one place, and you cannot copy it to grow.
2. **Leasehold.** Foreigners cannot hold freehold title (Agrarian Law, Art. 21), so the asset shrinks as the lease runs down.
3. **Middlemen.** Supply is heavy, and managers and booking platforms take a cut of the income.

Pilates studio

Blocked: on the official 18

1. **Capped revenue.** Income is room size times class hours. More money means more rooms.
2. **Key-person risk.** The teachers are the product. They can leave and open next door.
3. **Fixed costs.** Reformers, lease and fit-out are paid before the first client.

Retreats

Blocked: lodging is on the official 18

1. **You are the product.** Revenue stops when you stop, so it does not scale.
2. **Lumpy cash.** Each retreat is a new launch.
3. **Rented margin.** You depend on other people's venues, so the venue owner holds the leverage.

Tours

Not on the 18, but named in the Governor's letter

1. **Platform dependence.** Marketplaces own the customer and take a cut.
2. **Commodity pricing.** Similar tours get undercut on price.
3. **Rules risk.** Travel agencies (KBLI 79121) are named in the Governor's letter among the most-used low-risk codes.

EASY SET-UP	SCALABILITY	PROFITABILITY	COMPETITION
cost + barrier	growth without you	margin potential	how built-out

THE FIVE EVERYONE BUILDS

high water mark
@highwater.holly

	EASY SET-UP cost + barrier	SCALABILITY growth without you	PROFITABILITY margin potential	COMPETITION how built-out
Café or protein bar *blocked*	Hard	Low	Low	High
Villa *blocked*	Hard	Low	Medium	High
Pilates studio *blocked*	Medium	Low	Medium	High
Retreats *lodging blocked*	Medium	Low	Medium	High
Tours *check current rules*	Medium	Medium	Low	High
WHAT I WOULD BUILD				
Services for clients abroad *also the zero route*	Easy	Medium	High	Medium
Software for operators *the long game*	Medium	High	High	Low
Content + community *own the audience*	Easy	High	Medium	Medium
Talent + training *overlooked, but needed*	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low

high watermark
@highwater.holly

Green good for you Yellow think it through Red watch out.

My read, not data.

> 💡 **The pattern:** the big five need a place, heavy spend and your presence. The four I like do not.

Start here: find your archetype.

Each is easy to start, can scale, can be profitable, faces less competition, and serves locals and tourists. Four lean on what you know. The fifth starts from zero.

The Specialist

Years in marketing, design, finance, ops or research.

`Services for clients abroad`

The Builder

Technical or AI-fluent, and patient.

`Software for operators`

The Storyteller

Strong opinions and a following.

`Content + community`

The Connector

Hospitality, HR or teaching background.

`Talent + training`

The Fresh Starter

No experience yet, and willing to learn.

`Services, after a skill sprint`

highwatermark @highwater.holly



The Specialist

Venture: services for clients abroad

You have five or more years of a skill companies pay for, in marketing, design, finance, operations or research.

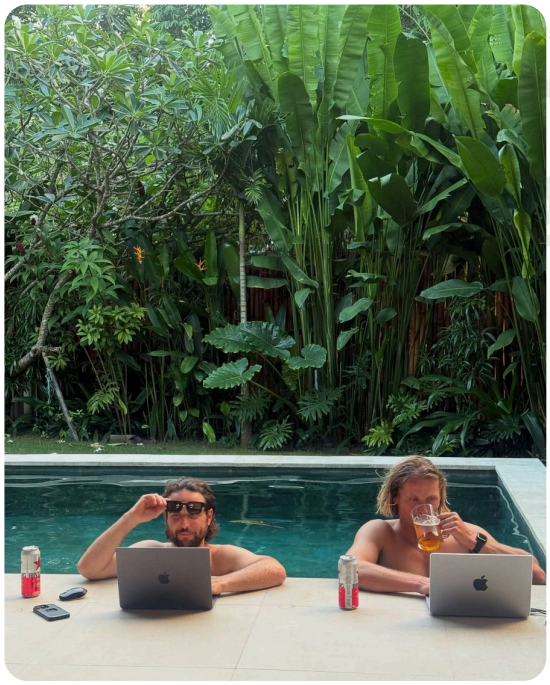
Experience: strong Time: full-time Cost: low

BUILD	PRICE

One buyer, one result, one price. Example: a five-day ads audit. Land three clients first.	Price the result, not hours. Get paid up front.
SCALE Write the playbook, train a team, raise prices.	**EMPLOY** Hospitality-trained Balinese are strong at client service. Pay well and train them.

⚠️ **Stay above board.** Keep your company and clients outside Indonesia. Management consulting is one of the 18 blocked fields for new foreign-owned Bali companies, so do not sell it to Bali businesses through a new PT PMA. The E33G remote worker visa covers work for an employer outside Indonesia, not a local company. Have a licensed advisor confirm.

Water mark highwater holly



The Builder

Venture: software for operators

You build products or direct AI tools, and you enjoy fixing messy systems. Most Bali operators still run on chat threads.

Experience: technical Time: months to revenue

Cost: low to moderate

BUILD Shadow ten operators for two weeks, pick one narrow job, let three use it free, then charge.	**PRICE** Monthly subscription per property. Sell the same thing again and again.
SCALE	**EMPLOY**

Add one nearby workflow for the same buyer, then other markets.	Hire Balinese support and onboarding staff. They know the operators and the language.

⚠️ **Stay above board.** Software is not on the 18, but some codes may be classed low-risk, and those are closed to new foreign companies in Bali. Before you register, ask a licensed advisor to confirm the exact code, its risk level and where the company can sit. Put local staff on proper contracts.



The Storyteller

Venture: content + community

You have strong opinions on a narrow topic, and people already listen. The audience should be yours, not a platform's.

Experience: a point of view Time: slow build Cost: low

BUILD Publish weekly on one topic you know better than most, then turn repliers into a paid circle.	**PRICE** Memberships, clearly labeled sponsors, paid guides and events. Trust is the product.
SCALE Hire an editor, add events, open a second topic.	**EMPLOY** Hire local editors and creators and share the upside.

⚠️ **Stay above board.** Content is not blocked, but income must be declared and your visa has to allow the work. Label sponsors and get permission before filming people. Go narrow. Ask

an advisor how to structure the income.



The Connector

Venture: talent + training

You come from hospitality, HR or teaching, and you like seeing people grow. Hotels and restaurants need trained staff and few can find them. Overlooked, but needed.

Experience: hospitality, HR, teaching Time: part-time to start

Cost: low

highwater mark
@highwater.holly

BUILD	PRICE
Ask ten operators which skill gap hurts most, then run a four-week pilot with one employer paying up front.	Charge employers per trained or placed person, then sell seats by subscription.
SCALE	**EMPLOY**
Repeat for other roles and other islands.	Locals are the customer, the instructor and the pipeline. It is built most around them.

⚠️ **Stay above board.** Training may need its own license, and working locally needs the right work permit. Start by partnering with a licensed Indonesian training provider, and have an advisor confirm before you charge anyone.



The Fresh Starter

Venture: services, after a skill sprint

You have no business background yet, and that is fine. You learn fast and want to start from zero. Pick a skill clients already pay for, learn it, then sell it.

Experience: none needed Time: 90 days to learn

Cost: lowest

high water mark
@highwater.holly

BUILD	PRICE
Choose one learnable skill, such as video editing, bookkeeping support or AI workflow setup, and spend 90 days learning it.	A few discounted pilots for a portfolio, then raise your price on proof.
SCALE	**EMPLOY**
Package one offer, document it, and hire a trained local assistant.	Learn alongside a Bali operator, then hire from the same pool.

⚠️ **Stay above board.** Serve clients abroad. A tourist visa does not allow work, and working for or selling to Bali businesses needs a work permit or a licensed company. The Essential Bali Visa Guide covers it.

The paperwork bit.

A tourist visa does not let you run a business, and enforcement is rising. The right visa depends on where your company and clients sit. The Essential Bali Visa Guide has the details.

Sources and dates

Government documents

- Bali Provincial Government: Governor Koster limits OSS access for PMA, announced 22 July 2026, published 24 July. The list of 18 fields, and the Minister's approval.
- Governor of Bali, letter no. B.27.000/642/PM/DPMPTSP to the Minister of Investment and Downstreaming, 28 January 2026 (PDF hosted by the Buleleng regency investment office). The request, rationale and most-used codes.

News reports

- ANTARA Bali (Indonesian), 23 July 2026. The 18 fields with KBLI codes.
- ANTARA News (English), 23 July 2026. The Governor on the closure since the third week of May.
- Xinhua, 23 July 2026.
- @highwater.holly reel on the 18 blocked categories, 2026.

Law and commentary

- Hukumonline: nominee arrangements under Law 25 of 2007 on Investment, Article 33. Commentary on the statute.
- Law 5 of 1960 (Basic Agrarian Law), Article 21, text reproduced by Pasal.id. Official text is at peraturan.bpk.go.id.
- EY tax alert: Indonesia implements new visa for remote workers (E33G), 2024. Check the official immigration portal, evisa.imigrasi.go.id, for current terms.

I did not find a published ministerial regulation or the Minister's approval letter, so the closure rests on the Governor's letter and the province's announcement. Ratings in the chart are my opinion, not data. Have a licensed advisor confirm before you file or spend anything.

high water mark
@highwater.holly