

# Bali

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Excerpt

BALI IS AN AMAZING ISLAND, RICH IN ART AND CULTURE AND INHABITED BY SOME OF THE MOST WELCOMING PEOPLE IN THE WORLD. An added benefit for U.S. visitors is that a majority of Balinese people can communicate in English, since the island has been hosting Australians for decades.

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"The first thing to keep in mind about Bali is that it's composed of three distinct areas," says **Pallavi Shah**, chairperson of New York City-based Our Personal Guest. "It's worth doing all three—Bali is not a one-hotel destination."

Shah suggests that visitors first stay in the southern part of the island at one of the beach resorts. "Your clients will be tired after their long flight, and this area is relatively close to the airport," says Shah. For security reasons, she recommends booking clients into hotels that are somewhat secluded, such as the Four Seasons Jimbaran Bay, and avoiding the more touristy areas of Kuta and Seminyak.

The Ubud region, located inland, almost in the center of the island, has great shopping, a wide selection of hotels and nightly performances of Balinese traditional dance and music.

The third region is the northeastern part of the island, which is less developed. "They'll have opportunities for sightseeing and experiencing the real village life of Bali," says Shah.

"Think of Bali as a totally different country than Indonesia," says Shah. She notes that it's easier than ever to fly to Bali, with flights from the U.S. via Hong Kong, Thailand and Singapore that don't make a stop in Jakarta.

For all of Bali's appeal, there have been some hurdles to overcome in attracting significant numbers of American visitors—even with minimal stops en route, it's a long haul. My flight from Los Angeles included a six-hour layover in Singapore. When all was said and done, it was close to 30 hours of traveling. Was it worth it? Absolutely. But Bali could be a hard sell to time-pressed vacationers with only a week to spare.

Bali also took a hit in the press in 2002 when a terrorist bomb blast killed more than 200 people, many of them vacationing Australians. After a series of travel warnings were issued by several countries, tourism to Bali decreased by 31 percent. Bali is slowly recovering and staging various initiatives to encourage visitors. Thamrin B. Bachri, the country's director general, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, is bullish about the government's upcoming "Visit Indonesia Year 2008" campaign. Throughout the year, the country will stage 100 events and cultural festivals. It's hoped that the campaign also will stimulate improvements to the country's tourism infrastructure. At September's PATA Travel Mart 2007, held in Bali's Nusa Dua area, Emirsyah Satar, president and CEO of Garuda Indonesia, noted that the airline is looking at possibilities on the West Coast of the U.S.—most likely Los Angeles or San Francisco.

While Bali's strongest markets in the U.S. are dive and surfing, there are numerous opportunities for the upscale leisure traveler. Resorts such as the Four Seasons and COMO Shambhala Estate provide top-flight service away from crowded tourist centers.