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MAY/JUNE 2009

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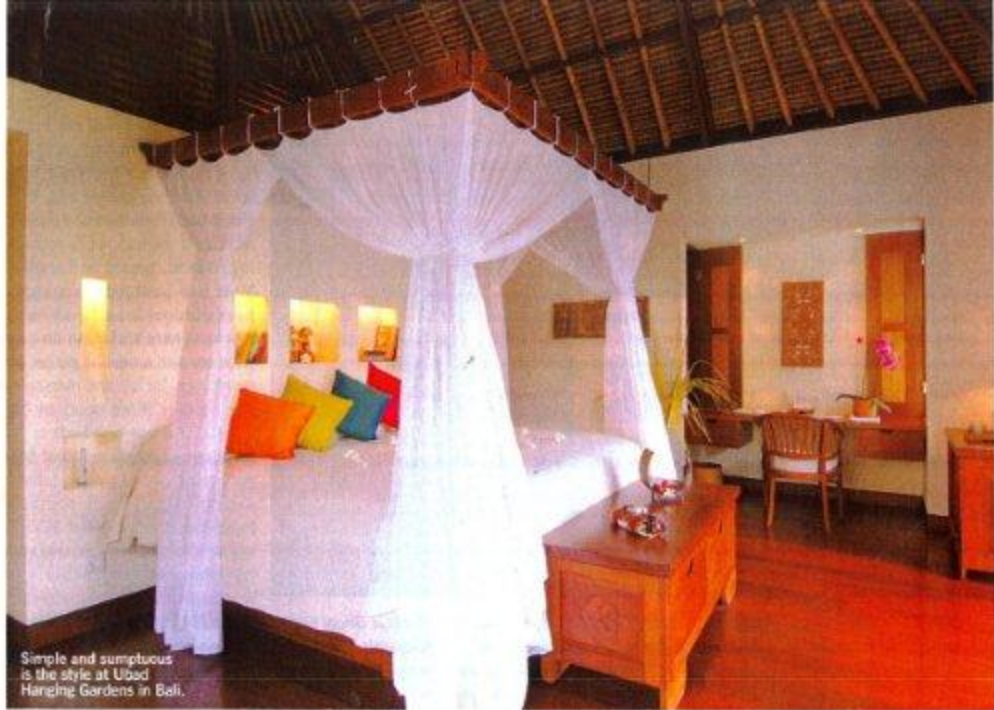
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World-Wide

# Dollar-Friendly Destinations

Diverse spots like Argentina, Bali, Costa Rica and Thailand offer exotic adventures that you can afford to enjoy. by Sandra Ramani

Your private  
pool at the  
Cledi Club  
in Bali



Simple and sumptuous is the style at Ubad Hanging Gardens in Bali.

**T**here's no question that your honeymoon should be a trip of a lifetime—full of luxury, pampering and pretty much whatever else your heart desires. Trouble is, these days it's tough to find a place that offers quite as much bang for the buck as you may wish—and who wants to spend their trip counting every nickel?

Luckily, there are still a few spots on the globe where the dollar stretches. Whether you're looking for a beach hideaway, adventure or the chance to experience a different culture, these four destinations are both picture-perfect and wallet-friendly.

## Costa Rica

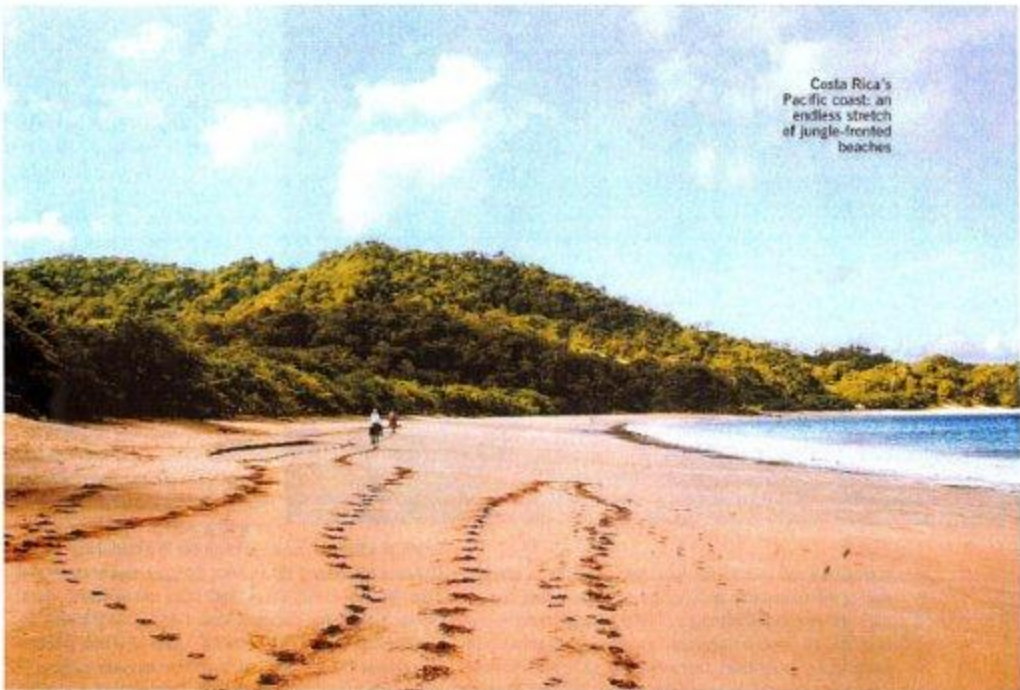
Sandwiched between the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, tropical Costa Rica offers pristine beaches and eco-friendly spas for relaxing, as well as zip lining and volcano hikes for adventure seekers. Plus, the supertush land is a veritable paradise on earth.

**Where to Stay:** Still relatively undeveloped, the province of Guanacaste in the northwest features endless miles of sandy beaches, top-notch surfing and snorkeling, plus a volcano area with noted hot springs. (Major airlines like

Delta, American and Continental service this region with daily direct flights to Liberia International Airport.) Located in the north of the province, near the Santa Rosa and Guanacaste National Parks, **Recreo** is a villa community-cum-resort spread out over 70 hilly acres. Rental rates for one of the individually designed villas (the one-bedroom option is best suited to honeymooners) include premium drinks, all meals prepared by your own chef, an electric golf cart, a goodie bag stocked with organic products, resort activities and daily maid service. Round-trip transportation from →



An easy, breezy day for a massage at the Harmony Hotel in Costa Rica.



Costa Rica's  
Pacific coast: an  
endless stretch  
of jungle-fronted  
beaches

vide you with a caravan bursting with inner tubes, rafts, kayaks, beach chairs and anything else you might need for a day at the shore. At Harmony, Playa Guiones is scattered with uniquely hued rocks and shells and fronted by ideal surfing waves; surf lessons with local teachers can be scheduled at the front desk.

Feeling a bit more active? Both hotels can arrange zip line outings, national park tours, horseback riding (Recreo has its own small stable) and hikes to cloud forests and volcanoes. Recreo's supersize full-day excursion package includes kayaking, river rafting, a trip to the Rincon volcano and a mud bath in the hot springs. Harmony guests interested in conservation and eco issues—big themes in Costa Rica—will enjoy the organic coffee plantation tour.

**At Night:** Begin the evening with in-villa massages at Recreo (one-hour massages start at \$25 per person) or a couple's treatment at Harmony's all-natural healing center, where the services incorporate fresh ingredients like papaya, banana and locally harvested loofah. Sunset drinks can be enjoyed at Recreo's Mountaintop Cantina (first drink is on the house). Both properties can arrange private poolside candlelight-diners. After hours at Recreo are

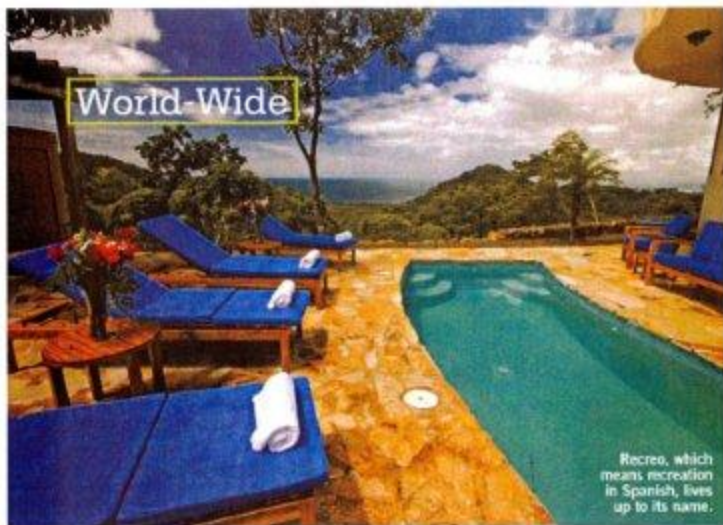
pretty quiet—villas are equipped with DVD players, satellite TV and board games. At Harmony, guests can walk to nearby cafés and bars (a beer will run you about \$1.50).

**Side Trip:** Hop on Recreo's daylong excursion to nearby Nicaragua. The adventure includes transport to the border (about 30 minutes away) and visa fees, plus a guided tour of beautiful Spanish colonial towns like Rivas and Granada. Meals at local restaurants are also included. You'll get to feed the monkeys at Lake Nicaragua, check out the view from above a volcano and shop for coffee and handicrafts at the Indian Market (excursions are \$90 per person). →



The Harmony Hotel,  
Nosara Costa Rica

## World-Wide



Recreo, which means recreation in Spanish, lives up to its name.

### Bali

It may be small in size, but Bali's got character in spades. Part of the Indonesian archipelago, this accessible, fragrant-scented island manages to offer something for everyone. It's all at your fingertips: sugar-sand beaches and party spots, great food, fascinating historic and cultural sites and a thriving arts and crafts scene. You can also find stylish accommodations and luxury perks (hello, two-hour massages!) for very reasonable rates.

**Where to Stay:** Skip the endless spring break of Kuta Beach for the inland town Ubud, considered the island's artistic and spiritual center. Surrounded by rice paddies and dotted with stone statues of the Hindu elephant god Ganesha, **The Chedi Club at Tanah Gajah's** 20 Balinese-style villas all have private pools or spa treatment areas, plus private butlers. Even better, rates include scores of extras like daily breakfast, round-trip airport transfers, shuttles to and from the Ubud town center, daily laundry service, a complimentary minibar and afternoon snacks. The spa suite rate also includes one daily 90-minute in-room spa treatment per guest! (rates for one-bedroom pool and spa suites start at \$560 a night; ghmhotels.com).

Located a little farther outside of town, **Ubud Hanging Gardens** is a unique, 38-suite hotel nestled among the rice terraces overlooking the Ayung River. A funicular manned by a uniformed attendant whisks guests up and down the steep hillside property, transporting you from your suite (with its own private terrace and infinity plunge pool) to the French-Asian restaurant, spa and the gardens, which are lush with durian, bamboo and fragrant orchids. Complimentary shuttle service to town is avail-

able hourly, and private dinners in a nearby temple—illuminated by blazing tiki torches—can be arranged upon request (rates for pool villas start at \$337 a night and include breakfast, afternoon tea and a 30-minute-morning massage; ubudhanginggardens.com).

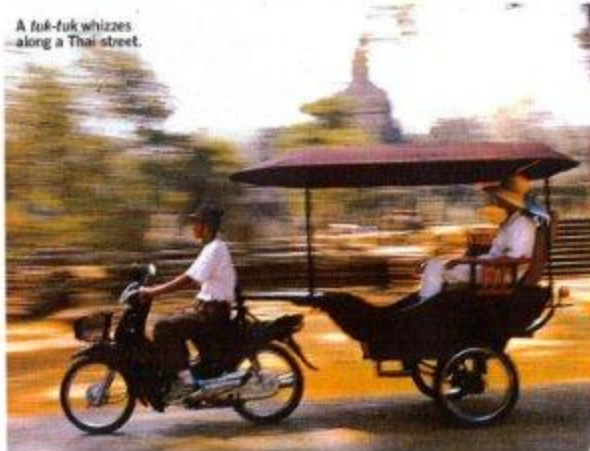
**By Day:** Thanks to the island's compact size, it's easy to explore various parts of Bali from your base. Both hotels can arrange guided activities like a sunrise hike or a bike ride up the Batur Volcano and rafting down the Ayung River. Outfitter Waka Land Cruise's day tour offers a glimpse into local life with visits to a working stone quarry and a village bathing spring,

lunch in a treetop restaurant and tea in a traditional home. Or hire a taxi (about \$8 an hour, \$45 per day) to check out sites like the Monkey Forest Sanctuary and Besakih, a temple set high on the slopes of Mount Agung. At the well-run Elephant Safari Park, 20 minutes north of Ubud, you can ride one of the 27 rescued Sumatran elephants through the jungle. Haggling at the Ubud crafts market is a must: Once you've snagged a few sarongs and woven bags, unwind with a one-hour couple's massage at Spa Hati followed by a jacuzzi and steam bath. It will set you back just \$22—no bargaining required (spahati.com).

**At Night:** At Ubud Palace, don't miss a traditional legong performance, when dancers interpret Hindu mythology from the epic poems *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*, accompanied by live musicians and singers. Tickets (about \$5) are available up until the evening performance time. Later, dine at Mozaic, considered one of the top restaurants in Southeast Asia. Chef-owner Chris Salans, who's trained with boldface names like Thomas Keller of French Laundry in northern California, offers a six-course

Continued on page 326

A tuk-tuk whizzes along a Thai street.



PHOTOGRAPHY: (TOP) COURTESY OF RECREO; (BOTTOM) ANDREW SPOFFORD