

# Ubud & Around



A dancer moves her arm just so and 300 pairs of entranced eyes follow the exact movement. A gamelan player hits a melodic riff and 300 pairs of feet tap along with it. The Legong goes into its second hour as the bumblebee dance unfolds with its sprightly flair and 300 butts forget they're still stuck in rickety plastic chairs.

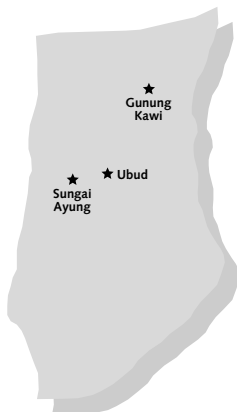
So another dance performance works its magic on a crowd in Ubud, the town where all that is magical about Bali is combined in one easy-to-love package. From nightly cultural performances on stages humble and grand to museums filled with works by artists whose creativity flowered here and to the unbelievably green rice fields that spill down myriad hillsides to rushing rivers below, Ubud is a feast for the soul.

Somehow as its popularity has grown, Ubud has stayed true to itself. Lavish hotels, stylish cafés and smart boutiques may jostle for room on its streets but it still stays humble. Generations of enchanted travellers treading its lanes still make friends with the locals they meet and many end up staying in one of the countless homestays, becoming part of the rhythm of family life as offerings are made and ceremonies planned.

Ubud, which today is really a collection of villages, runs like rivulets up and down the hills of this part of Bali. Explore the region and you'll find artisans, ancient monuments and a chance to find your own inner Bali.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Feeling the vibe of a traditional **dance performance** (p195)
- Making new friends and whiling away the hours at a **funky Ubud café** (p191)
- Exploring the green jungle and white water of the **Sungai Ayung valley** (p182)
- Discovering your own hidden talents through an **art or cooking course** (p183)
- Making like Indiana Jones at the towering ancient wonders at **Gunung Kawi** (p201)



# UBUD

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Ubud is culture, yes. It's also home to good restaurants, cafés and streets of shops, many selling goods from the region's artisans. There's somewhere to stay for every budget, and no matter what the price you can enjoy lodgings that reflect the local Zeitgeist: artful, creative and serene.

The weather is slightly cooler but much wetter than the south; expect it to rain at any time. At night mountain breezes make air-con unnecessary and let you hear the symphony of frogs, bugs and distant gamelan practices echoing over the rice fields.

Spend a few days in Ubud to appreciate it properly. It's one of those places where days can become weeks and weeks become months, as the noticeable expat community demonstrates.

For details on routes and sights to Ubud from South Bali, see the section South of Ubud, p203.

## HISTORY

Late in the 19th century, Cokorda Gede Agung Sukawati established a branch of the Sukawati royal family in Ubud and began a series of alliances and confrontations with neighbouring kingdoms. In 1900, with the kingdom of Gianyar, Ubud became (at its own request) a Dutch protectorate and was able to concentrate on its religious and cultural life.

The Cokorda's descendants encouraged Western artists and intellectuals to visit the area in the 1930s, most notably Walter Spies, Colin McPhee and Rudolf Bonnet. They provided an enormous stimulus to local art, introduced new ideas and techniques, and began a process of displaying and promoting Balinese culture worldwide. As mass tourism arrived in Bali, Ubud became an attraction not for beaches or bars, but for the arts.

In 2008 Ubud showed off both its considerable artistic and monetary prowess with a royal cremation ceremony that was the largest seen on the island for decades. It drew 100,000 spectators and included a funeral tower almost 30m tall.

## ORIENTATION

The once small village of Ubud has expanded to encompass its neighbours – Campuan, Penestanan, Padangtegal, Peliatan and Pengosekan are all part of what we see as Ubud today. The centre of town is the junction of Monkey Forest Rd and Jl Raya Ubud, where the bustling market and bemo (small minibus) stops are found, as well as Ubud Palace and the main temple, Pura Desa Ubud. Monkey Forest Rd (officially Jl Wanara Wana, but always known by its unofficial name) runs south to Sacred Monkey Forest Sanctuary and is lined with shops, hotels and restaurants.

Jl Raya Ubud ('Ubud Main Rd' – often Jl Raya for short) is the main east–west road. In the east, a mix of cheap accommodation, idiosyncratic shops and little cafés gives Jl

### UBUD IN...

#### One Day

Stroll the streets of Ubud, enjoying the galleries and sampling the fine cuisine. Try to get out on one of the short nearby walks through the verdant rice fields. Go to an evening dance performance at the **Ubud Palace** (p176).

#### Three Days

Take longer walks in the countryside, especially the **Campuan Ridge** (p181) and **Sayan Valley** (p182). Visit the **Museum Puri Lukisan** (p176), **Neka Art Museum** (p176) and **ARMA** (Agung Rai Museum of Art; p177). Attend **dance performances** (p195) not just in Ubud, but also in the nearby villages. Indulge at a local **spa** (p180). Drop by the **market** (p196) in the morning.

#### One Week or More

Do everything we've listed but take time to simply chill out. Get in tune with Ubud's rhythm. Take naps, read books, wander about. Think about a **course** (p183) in Balinese culture. Compare and choose your favourite café, get out to craft villages and ancient sites.