

# The Mother of All Festivals

THROUGHOUT THE YEAR, EACH OF BALI'S TEMPLES CELEBRATES its *odalan*, or anniversary. That adds up to a lot of festivals for spirited travelers to choose from, considering that the island has tens of thousands of temples. But it's the celebration at Pura Besakih, known as the "mother temple," that will likely produce the best memories for you. Every April, Balinese families honor their largest temple by climbing through air heavy with incense and humming with ancient prayers to give thanks for a prosperous life. Besakih, a lava-rock sanctuary, is built on the lush, green slopes of Bali's mighty, 10,000-foot-high Mount Agung volcano, which erupted in 1963. Mysteriously, the volcano's fiery river parted and flowed around the temple. Maybe it was luck. Or maybe it had something to do with the offerings locals and travelers bestow at the mountainside shrines. Walk alongside women balancing woven baskets of fruit and flowers on their heads and listen to the haunting, gong-like sounds of the *gamelan* (a traditional Balinese orchestra), and you may feel like other mystical forces were at work in sparing the millennium-old temple.

To join the celebration, stay in the town of Ubud in Bali's southeast interior and make a scenic drive through the rice



paddies to the temple. Don a sarong and, if you're a man, a traditional *udeng* head wrap. Then you can follow your guide through shrines dedicated to the Hindu trinity of Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma. Choose one of the deities and say a prayer that the Mount Agung volcano stays quiet. — MICHAEL FRANCO

CHECK the temple's dance schedule with your hotel in Ubud. The *kecak* dance features fire-walking and rhythmic chanting by dozens of bare-chested Balinese men. PAY a modest fee at the entrance to help with the temple's upkeep. LEARN more at [balitourismboard.org](http://balitourismboard.org)