

## News & Notes From Around the World



### THIS MONTH

The island of Bali, featured on the cover this month, is as welcoming a place as you'll find anywhere on the planet. Western travelers have been finding their own personal paradise there for decades now, enjoying the warm water of its palm-fringed beaches, its forested highland interior, and an overall feeling of contentment that leads visitors, locals, and expats alike to refer to "Bali Magic.."

A caveat: Many of those lucky expats on Bali hail from Australia and New Zealand. Relatively speaking, it's their backyard. Meanwhile, prospective expats from North America have mostly looked to Mexico, Panama, or Caribbean locales as their chosen destination.

But once you get past the, admittedly long, flight time, the easy, affordable living in Southeast Asian destinations is enough to convince most visitors that the effort was well worth it.

And from just over \$400 to fly there, it's no longer an expensive luxury. Turn to page 20 for more details on our favorite Southeast Asian countries.



It's playful, but competitive. Malaysia's dragon boats are a colorful sight.

### Dragon Boating in Penang

This December 8 and 9 in Penang, Malaysia, marks the 39th annual International Dragon Boat Festival. It is held in the waters of the Teluk Bahang dam, a (usually) tranquil locale surrounded by rolling hills and steamy rainforest.

It's not the location for a quiet respite from the city during the Boat Festival, though. The two-day event

attracts competitors from all over the world. This year, 26 international teams will arrive from the far-flung shores of Australia, Brunei, China, Hong Kong, Iran, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, and Thailand. More than 20 Malaysian teams also come to compete for the prize of Rm50,000 (about \$12,000).

Each team has a long, narrow boat with an intricate,

sculpted wooden dragon's head at the front. There are 22 racers per boat, including a sweep who steers the vessel from the back, and a drummer who sits at the front thumping a large round drum to keep the pace of the team. Races vary from 100 to 500 meters (328 to 1,640 feet) and have multiple heats for each length.

Dragon boat racing originated in China over 2,000 years ago. When Chinese settlers came to George Town, Penang, they brought the tradition with them. When the race was first formally organized in Penang in 1934, it was the first time a dragon boat race had ever been held outside China.

It became an international festival in 1979 and is one of the swiftest-growing water sports in the region. Teams practice year-round. And while competition is serious, the atmosphere is playful and festive.—Kirsten Raccuia.

### NOTES FROM OUR EXPAT EDITORS



#### Jessica Ramesch

Most Panamanians don't understand why anybody would get all riled up over life's minor upsets. Ordering a latte and getting a macchiato...having to ask for the check more than once...nobody sweats it here. When made to wait, people don't huff and sigh. They're glad to have a few moments to just sit and rest. What a strange concept...

#### Suzan Haskins

Because it's a city of nearly a million people, randomly crossing paths with resident expats in Mérida, Mexico isn't always easy. One place to find them, though, is at Hennessy's Irish Pub at Paseo de Montejo 486 in the central historic district of the city, roughly across the street from the Casa Gemelas museum.



### NINJA HUNTING

If you feel you can cling to a ceiling with just your fingertips or defeat an armor-clad warrior with no more than agricultural tools, you're ideal ninja material.

Japan's revival of the ancient fighting art includes the Ninja Museum of Igaryu in Iga City, as well as a Ninja Academy. Here fighters can train under the tutelage of Jinichi Kawakami, the country's "last ninja" (who was initiated into the craft at the age of 6). For more on the history and practice of ninjas, see: *Ninja-Official.com*.