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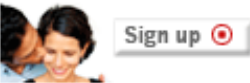
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THE LAND OF ACCLIMATION: Trekking and rafting China's Yunnan Province (PhotoDisc)

CHINA (2006 Winner)

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Hiking and Rafting in Yunnan

Price: \$4,990-\$5,490

Difficulty: Strenuous

The Mekong may be renowned for its starring role in *Apocalypse Now* and as the newest target of China's village-displacing hydroelectric-dam campaign, but it's never been known as a commercial whitewater hot spot—until now. Under the leadership of your veteran guides, kick off the beginning of what may be a Mekong revival: commercial rafting trips on the wilder Class IV-V sections of the upper river. You'll spend the first week acclimatizing to Yunnan's Tibetan culture and altitude, with hikes through the 700,000-acre, bamboo-dense Baima Nature Reserve and a 5,000-foot ascent to the 12,000-foot-high village of Yubong, while sleeping in traditional Tibetan homes. By the second week, drop your raft into the Class IV rapids beneath the flapping prayer flags of Xidang's monastery for six days and 80 miles of gorge-squeezing whitewater bliss.

Outfitter: Mountain Travel Sobek, 888-687-6235, www.mtsobek.com

When to Go: March

INDONESIA (New)

Cycling Remote Bali


Price: \$2,798

Difficulty: Moderate


Though the major Balinese tourist centers on the southern coast may still be reeling from the 2002 and 2005 bombings, the heady scents and lush foliage of the island's secluded interior and northeastern coast remain as untouched as ever. On this eight-day sampler, you'll get the full-immersion tour, biking 12 to 47 miles a day and sleeping in garden and seaside spa resorts at night. Starting inland, in Ubud, pedal to the Pura Taman Ayun, a "floating"




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17th-century royal temple surrounded by a moat, and past acres of hydrangea and clove plantations. When you reach the northern coast and the black sands of Lovina Beach, strip off those Lycra shorts and take a dip in the Bali Sea. Then head east past volcanoes and verdant rice paddies, stopping to snorkel the coral reefs of the Blue Lagoon and dine on fresh coconut rice and rich green curry in the town of Candidasa.

Outfitter: Backroads, 800-462-2848, www.backroads.com

When to Go: October, January-April

MYANMAR (New)

Exploring the Mergui Archipelago

Price: \$3,995-\$4,495

Difficulty: Moderate

The Moken "sea gypsies" who travel the recently opened Mergui Archipelago, an 800-island cluster off the southern coast of Myanmar, are among the few who still practice their traditional nomadic marine life, fishing for sea cucumbers and lobsters and wandering from island to island in hand-built boats. For 12 days you'll emulate this vanishing culture, hopping from the powdery beaches of Clara Island to the stunning old-growth coral of the underwater reef gardens around Hayes Island. Snorkel and dive uninhabited Lampi Island's boulder-strewn seafloor and kayak through the limestone cliffs and tunnels along Horseshoe Island's dramatic coast. Base camp is one of five air-conditioned cabins aboard an 85-foot wooden yacht, where meals are a merging of Moken and Thai flavors, such as fish fresh from the Andaman Sea steamed with coconut and lemongrass.

Outfitter: Wilderness Travel, 800-368-2794, www.wildernesstravel.com

When to Go: November-March

INDIA

Tracking the Snow Leopard

Price: \$3,575

Difficulty: Strenuous

Hidden in the Himalayan high-desert passes of Ladakh are some of the oldest untouched Tibetan monasteries in the world, as well as one of the highest concentrations of the near-mythic snow leopard. For 19 days, play

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Worldwide Deals

Peter Matthiessen under the guidance of the Snow Leopard Conservancy. You'll sleep in tents and mountain farmhouses while trekking and tracking the elusive cats through the 5,000-square-mile Hemis National Park, home to about 170 of the world's last remaining 4,600 to 7,000 snow leopards. Along the way you'll visit the spectacular tenth-century Hemis Monastery, enjoy the view at your 12,500-foot-high Rumbak homestay, and trek to the 16,700-foot-high pass of Kongmaru La. A portion of your trip's fee is donated to the conservancy to help improve conditions for the locals—both human and feline.

Outfitter: KarmaQuest, 650-560-0101, www.karmaquests.com

When to Go: April-October

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