



Experience Travel *Group*

A guide to Asia



Let's discover Asia together



Guide to Asia

It's never been easier to explore the world and yet it's perhaps never been more difficult to choose where to go. For those wanting something beyond Europe and the Americas, Asia is a fantastic place to travel and the aim of this guide is to empower you with insider knowledge on which country might suit you best.

Asia has inspired some of the world's greatest thinkers for thousands of years. It was a beguiling world to the first western travellers visiting across the colonial period and, to this day, holds mysteries for even the most experienced explorers. Its various countries have very distinctive identities; indeed within each country there is a rich variety of culture, landscape, food and history to be experienced. From the overgrown, magnificent Angkor temples of Cambodia, via the bustling food markets of Vietnam and the lush colonial tea plantations of Sri Lanka, to the prestigious forts of Rajasthan, India – there's an impressive array of places to see.

Here are our 3 key steps to deciding where to go:

STEP 1: DECIDE ON WHAT YOU WANT TO EXPERIENCE

The concept of “pillars” for your holiday – “must-do” experiences that will shape the overall route of your trip – can be a useful tool to help you narrow down your options. Have a look at the list of experiences I've devised on the following page and prioritise your favourites.

If lists aren't your thing, perhaps a more interesting prompt would be to consider any personal angles you have on a particular country. Do you have family that lived in a particular country during the colonial period?

Do you have a favourite book set in Asia? Is there a TV programme you enjoyed that you'd like to follow in the footsteps of? Has a friend recommended a place you should visit? All are perfect places to start when considering a foray into the Asian continent.

STEP 2: FACTOR IN PRACTICAL MATTERS

You may then want to consider practical matters: your preferred travel dates and budget. Asia has a range of climates at different times of the year and it's worth considering this before deciding on a destination.

Asia also offers very good value for money, but do note some countries can be more expensive than others: food and drink in The Maldives, for example, is much more expensive than in India as it all has to be imported by boat. Want to avoid flying? Certain countries offer wonderful train journeys as an alternative. The following pages of this guide go into a little more detail about practical matters concerning destinations in Asia that you may want to consider.



STEP 3: MARRY YOUR DESIRED EXPERIENCES AND PRACTICAL MATTERS

The final step is to find where steps 1 and 2 overlap. On both sides you may have to make compromises, but by bringing the two together you'll have all the ingredients for a holiday of a lifetime.

To introduce myself, my name is Sam and I'm the co-founder of Experience Travel Group. We're a small, London-based travel company specialising in bespoke holidays to Asia and for over 10 years we've developed extensive knowledge and experience in designing trips of a lifetime. We help travellers get away from the tourist traps and under the skin of countries throughout Asia. With a unique range of signature experiences, we let you see the sights with a twist and get off the beaten path while returning to a soft bed at night. It's my pleasure to share my insider knowledge with you and I hope you will find this guide as informative as it is inspiring.

MUST EXPERIENCE:

- ☐ Visiting the shimmering [Taj Mahal](#), India
- ☐ Watching the sunrise at [Angkor Wat](#), Cambodia
- ☐ Climbing [Sigiriya Rock Fortress](#), Sri Lanka
- ☐ Cruising through the karst outcrops of [Halong Bay](#), Vietnam
- ☐ Meeting the [Komodo Dragons](#) in Indonesia
- ☐ Sampling delicious [street food](#) in Vietnam
- ☐ Discovering the temples of [Bagan](#), Myanmar
- ☐ Relaxing on the stunning [beaches](#) of Thailand
- ☐ Seeing the biggest gathering of wild [elephants](#) in the world, Sri Lanka
- ☐ Discovering the floating markets of the [Mekong River](#), Indochina
- ☐ Watching the sunrise over the Hindu temple of [Borobudur](#), Indonesia
- ☐ Finding [orangutans](#) in the 130-million-year-old rainforests of Borneo





SRI LANKA

With its national parks, tea-plant-covered hillsides and ancient architecture, Sri Lanka is a beauty to behold and a wonderful destination for a holiday. What we could tell you about this country could fill a book, but let's just say the sandy beaches, atmospheric ruins, mouthwatering array of curries and verdant rainforests are a good place to start.

TOP 3 EXPERIENCES

- Watch the sunset over tropical jungles from [UNESCO-heritage Sigiriya Rock Fortress](#).
- Explore the historic architecture of the colonial Portuguese fort in [Galle](#).
- Spot elephants and leopards in the less-visited [Wilpattu National Park](#).

FOOD TO TRY

- A hopper is a pancake-like dish that was brought over by the Portuguese in the 17th century and is best enjoyed with an egg and spicy sambal.
- *Kottu roti* is fast food at its best. A mix of sir-fried vegetables, egg, spices and chopped up flatbread, it's a delicious dish best eaten with a refreshing cold drink.
- Coconut curries are a staple of Sri Lanka. A typical meal includes six or seven choices of curry with a good serving of rice.

BEACHES TO VISIT

- [Jungle Beach](#), Kuchaveli, for its very private location and beautiful surrounding tropical forest.
- [Uga Bay, Pasikudah](#), boasting golden sands near the undiscovered town of Batticaloa.
- [Turtle Bay, Tangalle](#), offers a long, wide stretch of sand and is stunningly beautiful.

PLACES TO STAY

- [Horathapola Coconut Plantation](#) lets you absorb Sri Lankan culture in a refined setting. A colonial family home, the food here is exquisite and the hotel can arrange a visit to a local rural village.
- [3 Sisters Matara](#) is a sleepy Dutch colonial villa next to the beach on the south coast.
- [Tea Trails](#) consists of five renovated planters' bungalows set in emerald tea plantations with luxurious service and activities galore.



BEST TIMES TO VISIT

Sri Lanka is a year-round destination with **two monsoon seasons** so there is a lot of confusion around when is the best time to visit. The weather doesn't run like clockwork here, and we can always be surprised by the weather in Sri Lanka! However, there will rarely be weather so dramatic that it will stand in the way of a brilliant holiday, with plenty of warm weather and sunshine.



WEATHER

| | JANUARY - APRIL | MAY - MID JULY | MID JULY - SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER - NOVEMBER | DECEMBER |
|----------------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------------|--------------------|----------|
| COLOMBO & WEST COAST | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓ | ✓✓ |
| CULTURAL TRIANGLE | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓ | ✓✓ |
| EAST COAST | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓ | ✓✓ |
| SOUTH COAST | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓ | ✓✓ |
| NORTHERN REGION | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓ | ✓✓ |

GETTING AROUND – HOW IT WORKS

There are lots of ways to get around Sri Lanka. You may want to consider the following options:

| TYPE OF TRANSPORT | PROS | CONS |
|-------------------|--|---|
| BUS | Cheap, frequent, lots of network routes | Crowded, slow, unreliable, uncomfortable, little room for luggage |
| TRAIN | There are good value tickets and journeys are very scenic. First class is very comfortable although second lets you have a better view of surroundings, with opening windows | Infrequent, quite slow, can be crowded in 2nd and 3rd classes, uncomfortable, limited routes through the country. Can, however, tie in well with a driver and guide as a short experience |
| CAR AND DRIVER | Comfortable, flexible, efficient, easy and allows you to stop off and do spontaneous fun things like sample street-side hoppers and fresh coconuts | More expensive than public transport |
| SEAPLANE | Fast, incredible views, comfortable | More expensive than other transport options with limited routes |

See all our Sri Lanka holidays



INDIA

Ancient, wild and colourful India is a place to behold. Too vast and diverse to encapsulate in words, this country needs to be experienced with the senses. Whether breathing in the spice-filled air of the outdoor markets, tasting the myriad flavours of local cuisines or letting the eyes take in the rich green of those famous tea-plant-filled hillsides, a holiday to India is a truly magnificent experience.

TOP 3 EXPERIENCES

- Explore the [villages of the remote Luni River](#) area near Jodhpur on a jeep safari.
- Admire views of the [snow-capped Himalayas](#) while walking in the hills around Almora.
- Search for leopards in [Satpura National Park](#) in less-visited Madhya Pradesh.

FOOD TO TRY

- *Thali*, which isn't a single recipe but a combination of dishes including curries, dahls, steamed rice, pickles, naan and a sweet.
- Stuffed *parathas* are a kind of flatbread filled with a variety of ingredients such as potatoes, cauliflower, paneer or vegetables.
- *Masala dosa* is a type of thin pancake made from rice and white lentils. It's served with potatoes, chutney and fragrant sambar.

BEACHES TO VISIT

- [Neeleshwar beach](#) offers golden sands fringed with tropical palms.
- [Niraamaya beach](#) is secluded and has a private feel. It's a 5-minute drive from the coastal town of Kovalam, which has many bars and shops.
- [Marari beach](#) has a long stretch of sand where travellers can sit back, relax and watch fishermen ground their colourful boats for the day.

PLACES TO STAY

- [Bhainsrorgarh Fort](#), situated in rural Rajasthan, looks down from a high clifftop that juts out over the River Chabal. It's an impressive 18th century fort and staying here is like stepping back in time.
- [Dera Mandara](#) is a tranquil heritage homestay steeped in history. Located in the 'pink city' of Jaipur, it's a wonderful way to get under the surface of life in Rajasthan.
- [Lotus Houseboat](#) is a luxuriously refurbished rice barge that meanders down the quieter waterways of northern Kerala. It's an incredibly relaxing way to absorb South India's laidback culture.



BEST TIMES TO VISIT

India is a vast country with an incredibly varied [weather system](#). At any point in the year there is always somewhere good to travel to, but the weather doesn't work on cue and it can shift and be unpredictable. In general, however, there is one distinct monsoon period from June through to August and, broadly speaking, you can visit most areas from October through to March and have a good chance of decent weather.



WEATHER

| | OCTOBER - MARCH | APRIL - JUNE | JUNE - JULY | AUGUST - SEPTEMBER |
|----------------|-----------------|--------------|-------------|--------------------|
| KERALA | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| MADHYA PRADESH | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| UTTARAKHAND | ✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ |
| RAJASTAN | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ | ✓✓✓ |
| BENGAL | ✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓ | ✓✓ |

GETTING AROUND – HOW IT WORKS

India is famed for its expansive train network, has a growing domestic airline service as well as characterful local ways to get about, from horse-drawn cart to air-conditioned bus.

| TYPE OF TRANSPORT | PROS | CONS |
|------------------------|--|--|
| RICKSHAW | Authentic and cheap | Slow and cannot travel great distances |
| BUS - VARIED QUALITY | Cheap and sometimes air-conditioned | Incredibly crowded, often unsafe driving, sometimes extremely hot and stuffy |
| TRAIN - VARIED QUALITY | Beautiful views and a cultural way to get around | Often late, can be stuffed full of people |
| CAR AND DRIVER | Comfortable, flexible, insightful and safe | More expensive than public transport |
| DOMESTIC FLIGHTS | Fast, timely | Not very cultural |

See all our India holidays



THE MALDIVES

The Maldives has much to offer, but stress relief, luxury and unbelievable scenery come as standard. Crystal clear waters, white sand beaches and some of the world's most unique tropical architecture make the word paradise truly justified.

TOP 3 EXPERIENCES

- Relax on idyllic white sand beaches in a luxury resort, gin and tonic in hand, watching turquoise waves lap at the shore.
- Discover life on the [local islands](#) with beautiful Moroccan-style architecture, pastel-coloured buildings and old mosaic doors.
- Swim with [turtles](#), [manta rays](#) and/or [whale sharks](#) on a snorkelling or diving trip.

FOOD TO TRY

- *Mas huni* is a typical breakfast in The Maldives consisting of tuna, coconut, red onion and mild chilli combined with delicate *roti* flatbread.
- *Fihunu Mas* is a type of barbecued fish flavoured with garlic, cumin, curry leaves and onions. It's a mouthwatering meal with simple ingredients.
- *Mas riha* is a delicious fish and coconut curry eaten with rice and *satani* – a tomato salad. It's incredibly refreshing, light and fragrant.

BEACHES

- Asking for where the best beaches are in The Maldives is like looking for hay in a hay barn: nearly every beach is spectacular. Some resort islands closer to Male have views over the city, which isn't quite the desert island experience certain travellers aspire to. Generally, the resort island beaches are pristine and perfectly maintained, while local beaches are more 'working' in style, with boats and other paraphernalia. Choose your beach depending on what you want to experience.

PLACES TO STAY

- For ultimate luxury, a brilliant place to stay is [Four Seasons Landaa Gihaavaru](#). It boasts some of the biggest overwater villas in the country and top-notch service.
- [Makunudu Island](#) is perfect for travellers wanting to escape the loud discos and canteen-like restaurants that are becoming more prevalent in the resorts. It's back-to-basics barefoot luxury with only 36 beach villas and a quiet restaurant and bar.
- [Rashu Hiyaa](#) in Dhiffushi is a hotel-style guesthouse with very comfortable, spacious rooms, attentive staff and comfortable loungers and parasols on the nearby beach.



BEST TIMES TO VISIT

All year round. When the **rainy season** does come, because the islands are so low lying, rain blows over very quickly so shouldn't affect your experience too much.



WEATHER

| | NOVEMBER - MARCH | APRIL | MAY - AUGUST | SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER |
|----------|------------------|-------|--------------|---------------------|
| MALDIVES | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ |

GETTING AROUND – HOW IT WORKS

The Maldives consists of over a thousand islands in the middle of the Indian Ocean. Transport revolves around the water and so can be rather limited to boats and seaplanes. Usually, resorts will handle guests' transport, with private transfers via speedboat or seaplane. For travellers wanting to delve deeper into The Maldives' history and culture with a local island stay, there are more diverse ways of getting about.

| TYPE OF TRANSPORT | PROS | CONS |
|-------------------|---|---|
| PUBLIC BOAT | Authentic and cheap | Sometimes crowded, hot, engines can be very noisy. |
| SPEEDBOAT | Fast, fun and authentic if you book a place on a public speedboat | More expensive than a public boat |
| SEAPLANE | Beautiful views, fast and comfortable | More expensive than a speedboat |
| DOMESTIC FLIGHT | Good views and fast. Usually cheaper than a seaplane | Not particularly glamorous and can be quite expensive |

See all our Maldives holidays



VIETNAM

Fancy a taste of fresh pineapple from a floating market or the breeze on your face as you travel by riverboat? Or would you prefer the vibrant bustle of Ho Chi Minh City and taking in the pagodas nestled amid the skyscrapers? There's something for everyone in this amazingly diverse country.

TOP 3 EXPERIENCES

- Zip through the bustling streets of Vietnam's southern capital Ho Chi Minh on a [Vespa tour](#)
- Cruise through the UNESCO-heritage karst outcrops of [Halong Bay](#) on a luxury junk boat.
- Discover the floating markets of the [Mekong Delta](#) by speedboat.

BEACHES TO VISIT

- [Hoi An](#) boasts pristine white sand beaches with a great location near to UNESCO-heritage Hoi An Old Town. An Bang Beach is a sure winner if you're looking for beautiful views, delicious seafood and a number of low key beach bars.
- [Phu Quoc](#) is an island paradise on the west coast of Vietnam, situated in the gulf of Thailand. It boasts perfect white sand beaches, undisturbed nature and some of the best snorkelling and scuba diving in the country.
- [Six Senses Ninh Van Bay Resort & Spa](#) sits on a dramatic bay with impressive rock formations overlooking the East Vietnam Sea. It's the perfect beach if you're looking for somewhere intimate and truly unique.

FOOD TO TRY

- Fresh prawn summer rolls are arguably Vietnam's most famous dish and consist of translucent pancakes packed with salad leaves, prawns and noodles. Served with a dipping sauce they are light and delicious.
- *Banh mi* is a baguette packed with delicious beef, fresh vegetables and/or omelette served at street stalls. They're a perfect fusion of French and Vietnamese cultures.
- *Banh Khot* is a miniature form of French crepe filled with tiny morsels of prawn and spices. It's a mouthful of deliciousness with a crispy and tender texture.

PLACES TO STAY

- The [Sofitel Legend Metropole](#) in Hanoi is over a hundred years old and a relic of the French colonial administration. The historic wing has rooms that were home to journalists covering the Vietnam War.
- The [Bassac](#) is a lovingly restored rice barge that cruises down the Mekong taking you far away from other tourists. It's a quirky and characterful experience with delicious food served on board.
- In the ancient city of Hue, [La Residence](#) is a beautiful heritage property, once home to the French envoy. In 2005 it was carefully restored into a luxurious boutique hotel and from the top of the building you can see the ancient citadel.



BEST TIMES TO VISIT

Vietnam is long and thin and therefore encompasses various **climates** at various times of the year. It's great for summer holidays on the beach as well as a bit of winter sun.



WEATHER

| | NOVEMBER - MARCH | APRIL | MAY - AUGUST | SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER |
|-----------------|------------------|-------|--------------|---------------------|
| NORTH VIETNAM | ✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ |
| CENTRAL VIETNAM | ✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓ |
| SOUTH VIETNAM | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ |

GETTING AROUND – HOW IT WORKS

Getting to and from the various sites generally means taking flights or overnight trains. Within cities you'll find a huge number of motorbikes and Vespas because of the exorbitant price of cars.

| TYPE OF TRANSPORT | PROS | CONS |
|------------------------|--|---|
| BUS | Authentic and cheap | Sometimes crowded, hot, engines can be very noisy |
| TAXIS | Quick, easy | Risk of being ripped off by dodgy taxi metres |
| PRIVATE DRIVER AND CAR | Comfortable, easy | Higher cost |
| MOTORBIKES OR VARIANTS | Authentic | Can be nerve-wracking for more cautious travellers |
| TRAINS | Some good views, dependent on seating, fast. The famous 'Reunification Express' is a really good way to get a sense of the country and is a fun overnight experience | Not particularly glamorous and cabins are 4-birth, so unless you buy 4 tickets you may have to share sleeping quarters. |
| DOMESTIC FLIGHTS | Fast, efficient and you'll likely be surrounded by Vietnamese travellers, too | More expensive than other options |

See all our Vietnam holidays



CAMBODIA

Cambodia is a country of light and shade, rising out of its bloody history with undoubted resilience and sparkling energy. Grand turreted temples and intricate monuments showcase the formidable talents of the mighty Khmer Empire while elegant bars, modern architecture and the brightness of its people bring us into the present.

TOP 3 EXPERIENCES

- Discover the temples of [Angkor](#) at daybreak, when the sky is a beautiful shade of amber pink and the reflections in nearby lakes are stunning.
- Sample [fresh crab and fish](#) in the coastal town of Kep.
- Visit Battambang, a sleepy market town with French colonial architecture and a wonderful river trip to discover the typical Cambodian rural landscape.

FOOD TO TRY

- *Kdam chaa* is a fried crab dish typical of the seaside town of Kep. It is prepared with Kampot pepper and garlic and is perfectly complemented by white sticky rice.
- Fish *amok* is one of the most popular meals in the country and consists of a rich and creamy curry infused with coconut milk, turmeric, lemongrass and ginger. Usually served with rice on banana leaf, each mouthful is melt-in-the-mouth delicious.
- *Lok lak* is a stir-fried dish of beef in a light brown sauce served with green salad. It's a very traditional Khmer dish and every region has its own take on the classic.

BEACHES TO VISIT

- Koh Rong is a beautiful island off Sihanoukville, with white sand beaches, turquoise waters and fantastic snorkelling opportunities.
- Kep beach was frequented by French colonists in the 1900s and has undergone a renaissance in recent years. It's home to a small stretch of beautiful golden sand and there is wonderful seafood in nearby local restaurants.
- Sokha beach near Sihanoukville is mostly owned by the exclusive Sokha Beach Resort and boasts pristine sands, turquoise waters and an incredibly laidback atmosphere.

PLACES TO STAY

- [Phum Baitang](#) is a beautifully designed stilted village with an atmosphere of understated luxury near the temples of Angkor. Set amid traditional rice paddies, it was where Angelina Jolie stayed to research the film *A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers*.
- [4 Rivers Floating Lodge](#) is an idyllic nature lodge set on a bend in a river below the Cardamom Mountains in northern Cambodia. Surrounded by forests and with the beautiful river on the doorstep, there are lots of activities for outdoor enthusiasts.
- [Aqua Mekong](#) is a pioneering luxury cruise offering exclusive experiences that will get you off the beaten track to discover the true backwaters of the Mekong Delta.



BEST TIMES TO VISIT

Cambodia is located in the tropical zone of Southeast Asia and is blessed with a [simple climate](#). A great place to visit all year round, Cambodia is exceptionally beautiful, especially in the wet season.



WEATHER

| | JANUARY - APRIL | MAY - SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER - DECEMBER |
|----------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| CAMBODIA | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓✓ |

GETTING AROUND – HOW IT WORKS

Cambodia is a circular country with the Mekong River carving its way through the east and the impressive Tonle Sap Lake providing various waterways to meander through in the centre. Getting about usually consists of a mixture of short internal flights, river journeys by boat and transport by road.

| TYPE OF TRANSPORT | PROS | CONS |
|----------------------|---|--|
| TUK TUK/MOTORBIKE | Local, good value and breezy | Not particularly comfortable |
| PUBLIC BUS | Cheap | Only useful for urban travel as there are virtually no bus networks outside the cities |
| OUTBOARD WATER TAXIS | Cheap, authentic | Slow and can be noisy – depends on the boat |
| DRIVER AND GUIDE | Fast, totally flexible, insightful | More expensive than other local alternatives |
| BOATS | Relaxed, very comfortable and a good way to see Cambodian culture | Can be more expensive than other modes of transport |
| DOMESTIC FLIGHTS | Fast and efficient | Limited routes |

See all our Cambodia holidays



LAOS

Far from being mainstream, Laos offers a uniquely authentic experience replete with charming people, a fascinating ancient culture and a wonderfully slow lifestyle. The seductive simplicity of its rhythms against the backdrop of a rich, magical landscape makes Laos an utterly beguiling holiday destination.

TOP 3 EXPERIENCES

- [Play petanque](#) with the locals. The classic French game, imported during the Indochine period, is a relaxed way of getting to know Laotians.
- Watch hundreds of monks give alms in [UNESCO-heritage Luang Prabang](#): an awe-inspiring experience.
- Relax in Si Phan Don, known as 4,000 Islands, a place where the Mekong spreads into a wide archipelago and waters slow.

FOOD TO TRY

- *Tam maak* hoong is made from fresh strips of under-ripe papaya and a savoury fish sauce. It's a crunchy and refreshing dish that epitomises Laotian cuisine.
- *Khao ji pate*, or 'baguette pate', is similar to Vietnamese *banh mi* but the Lao version uses watercress, grated carrots and a chili and garlic sauce instead of coriander and pickles. It's a quick meal that can be eaten for breakfast or lunch.
- Beer Lao, while not strictly a meal, is quite possibly one of the best beers in Asia and cannot be missed.

BEACH ALTERNATIVES

- Being landlocked, Laos has no 'true' beaches to offer, but it does offer some stunning alternatives. 4,000 Islands is a stretch of the Mekong where the waters spread, leaving lots of island formations with sandy shores for travellers to relax on.

PLACES TO STAY

- [Kamu Lodge](#) is a beautiful eco lodge in a remote area on the banks of the Mekong River. With accommodation in luxury safari tents, it's the perfect base for outdoor adventures.
- [Belmond La Residence Pho Vao](#) is a sublime boutique hotel in Luang Prabang. With two infinity pools overlooking lush forests, it's a peaceful and private place to stay.
- [Sala Done Khone](#) is a village-style hotel on the island of Done Khone in 4,000 Islands. With waterfalls, riverside beaches and French colonial relics nearby, it's an incredible place in which to relax.



BEST TIMES TO VISIT

Laos has a laid-back **climate** with no coastline to bring in troublesome storms. The weather here is largely affected by altitude and topography, with a cooler mountainous north and steamier delta-plain south.



WEATHER

| | NOVEMBER - MARCH | APRIL - SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER - NOVEMBER |
|------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| LAOS | ✓✓✓ | ✓ | ✓✓ |

GETTING AROUND – HOW IT WORKS

Laos is a landlocked country, with the mighty Mekong River carving its way through the north of the country. Transport usually requires a mixture of flights, boats and short car transfers.

| TYPE OF TRANSPORT | PROS | CONS |
|-------------------|---|---|
| PUBLIC BUS | Adventurous and cheap | Inconvenient departure times with risk of breakdowns and sometimes no air-con |
| DRIVER | Safe, comfortable and flexible | More expensive than local transport |
| BOAT | Relaxed, comfortable and a good way to view Laotian culture | More expensive than other forms of transport |
| DOMESTIC FLIGHTS | Fast and efficient with a good network | More expensive than other forms of transport |

See all our Laos holidays



INDONESIA

Indonesia consists of over 13,000 diverse islands spreading from the Malay Peninsula to the border of Papua New Guinea. With these islands comes a dizzying range of languages, culture and scenery, making it a stunningly beautiful archipelago with an amazing array of holiday experiences.

TOP 3 EXPERIENCES

- Watch the sunrise over [Borobudur](#), a Buddhist temple built in 750–850 AD that is surrounded by volcanic peaks and lush forests.
- Spot dragons in [Komodo National Park](#). The largest lizard in the world, the Komodo Dragon has a reputation for its venomous bite; what's less well known is its love of sunbathing.
- Climb [Mount Bromo](#), an easier feat than you might think! With jeeps available to take you up to a short walk from the crater, it'll be a talking point for years to come.

FOOD TO TRY

- *Nasi goreng* is a signature dish and consists of stir-fried rice with a freshly fried egg on top. Prawns, chicken and vegetables are usually added to the rice.
- Satay consists of tender skewered meat in a delicious peanut sauce. Light and packed full of flavour, it's a wonderful side dish.
- *Gado-gado* is a healthy combination of assorted vegetables, including pak choi, cabbage, spinach, bean sprouts, green beans and carrots, covered in a mouthwatering peanut sauce.

BEACHES

- [Pink beach](#) on Flores is an incredible rose colour due to its coral sands. With amazing snorkelling opportunities it's an amazing beach experience.
- [Jeeva Beloom](#)'s beach in Lombok is essentially private – attached to the eco lodge and a stone's throw from the villas. The snorkelling offshore is fantastic and it's a wonderfully secluded experience.
- Gangaa Island is an off-the-beaten-track beach with some of the best diving and snorkelling in the whole of Indonesia. It's incredibly hidden with only one resort on the island and a sleepy village.

PLACES TO STAY

- [MesaStila](#) on Java is a working coffee plantation with 27 villas spread throughout the grounds. It has an atmosphere of understated luxury with views over mountains and forests.
- [Nihiwatu Resort](#) on Sumba Island is stunningly situated on a cliff edge overlooking the sea. A luxury resort with a conscience, it's a fabulous place for surfing or just relaxing with a cocktail.
- [Mutiar Laut](#) is an elegant 39-metre yacht cruising through the deep blue waters of eastern Indonesia, including visits to Komodo and Flores.



BEST TIMES TO VISIT

The scattered archipelago nation understandably has quite a broad range of [weather patterns](#), but generally it's dry and sunny from May to October, making it a perfect summer getaway destination.



WEATHER

| | JANUARY - APRIL | MAY - SEPTEMBER | OCTOBER - DECEMBER |
|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| INDONESIA | ✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ |

GETTING AROUND – HOW IT WORKS

Indonesia is composed of thousands of islands of varying sizes; getting about is a story of trains, planes and automobiles.

| TYPE OF TRANSPORT | PROS | CONS |
|--------------------|--|--|
| OJEK (MOTORCYCLES) | Very authentic and cheap | Not particularly safe over long distances and not very comfortable |
| PUBLIC BUS | Cheap | Usually limited to cities except on Java, mixed quality |
| TRAIN | Cover ground very fast and quite comfortable | Good value although you don't get to stop off often and see the country |
| DRIVER | Comfortable and speedy | More expensive than local transport |
| BOAT | Authentic, very comfortable and you can reach places other tourists cannot | More expensive than other forms of transport |
| DOMESTIC FLIGHTS | Fast and efficient | More expensive than other forms of transport and some airlines are not EU approved |

See all our Indonesia holidays



BORNEO

Home to the oldest rainforest in Southeast Asia, Borneo is the lush natural jewel of the region. While a magnificent place for a holiday, the island remains relatively unexplored by tourists, allowing the rich array of jungle-dwelling creatures to thrive.

TOP 3 EXPERIENCES

- Spot orangutans as well as other endangered wild animals like the clouded leopard and Bornean elephants in Borneo's [130-million-year-old rainforests](#).
- Explore some of the world's biggest caves in [Mulu National Park](#). One is so big St Paul's Cathedral could fit into it five times.
- Watch the sunrise at the top of [Mount Kinabalu](#). The views are spectacular and you can see the Philippines on a clear day.

FOOD TO TRY

- *Sarawak laksa* is a soupy rice noodle dish usually made with prawns in a thick coconut broth. Served with crunchy beansprouts and sometimes with shredded chicken, it's the state staple.
- *Kolo Mee* is a typical breakfast in Malaysian Borneo, and combines light egg noodles with barbecued pork.
- *Ayam Pansuh* is a traditional Iban dish made with chopped chicken, mushrooms, lemongrass and tapioca leaves cooked inside bamboo over an open fire.

BEACHES

- [Pantai Dalit beach](#), Sabah, is surrounded by 400 acres of lush tropical vegetation, making it the perfect location for beach and nature lovers.
- [Tunku Abdul Rahman National Park](#) boasts some stunning beaches with accompanying resorts. Experience turquoise waters, golden sands and surrounding lush tropical forests.
- [Tanjung Aru beach](#) is situated in a very local area, with few tourists and a great variety of restaurants and food stalls in the evenings.

PLACES TO STAY

- [Borneo Rainforest Lodge](#) in Danum Valley is brilliantly located for spotting wild orangutans, silver leaf monkeys, gibbons and a plethora of birdlife.
- [Mulu Marriott](#) is a first class resort in the heart of the jungle, near the magnificent Mulu caves. It is sensitively designed to blend seamlessly into its lush forest surroundings.
- [Gaya Island Resort](#) is a luxurious and relaxing beach resort on the stunning shores of Pulau Gaya, off Kota Kinabalu.



BEST TIMES TO VISIT

Borneo has a **tropical climate** with year-round warmth and humidity (temperatures average 27–32°C). It is a large island and therefore can have many different weather pockets at one given time. If you are prepared to see some rain, you can enjoy Borneo at any time of year.



WEATHER

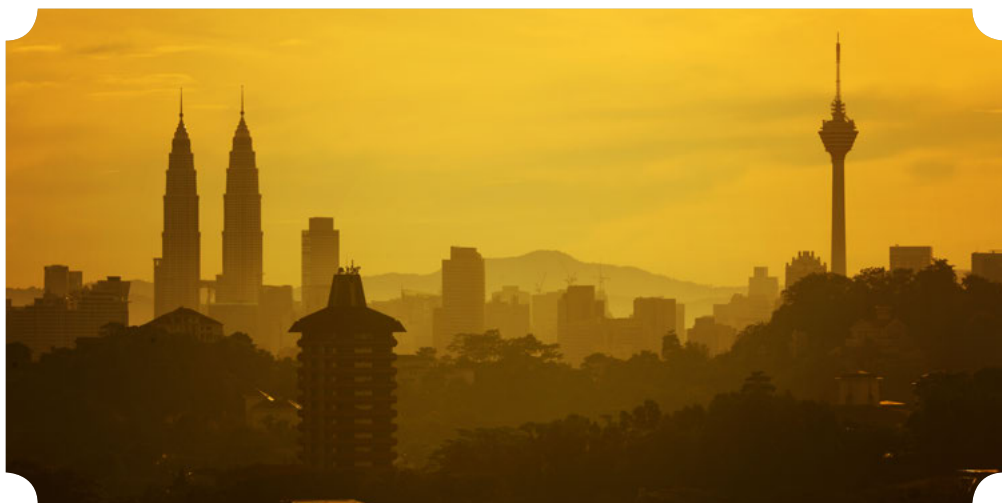
| | JANUARY – FEBRUARY | MARCH – APRIL | MAY – AUGUST | SEPTEMBER – OCTOBER | NOVEMBER – DECEMBER |
|--------|--------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| BORNEO | ✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ |

GETTING AROUND – HOW IT WORKS

Borneo is dominated by the largest rainforest in Southeast Asia and, despite having some well-developed urban hubs, getting around the various regions usually requires some long journeys by car or short domestic flights.

| TYPE OF TRANSPORT | PROS | CONS |
|-------------------|--|--|
| BUS | Cheap | Slow and sometimes unreliable |
| DRIVER | Comfortable and speedy | More expensive than local transport |
| BOAT | Inexpensive with some beautiful views over the coast | Can be slow and noisy |
| DOMESTIC FLIGHTS | Time-efficient and essential for accessing remoter areas | More expensive than other forms of transport |

See all our Borneo holidays



MALAYSIA

Blessed with paradise beaches and exceptional biodiversity, Malaysia's key geographic location along a historic trading route means that it has also reaped the rewards of cultural influences from all over the world. The result is unique and exceptionally delicious food and striking architecture that reflects a fascinating multicultural society.

TOP 3 EXPERIENCES

- Explore [Penang's Georgetown](#) with its delicious street food, British colonial and Chinese architecture and extraordinary street art.
- Stroll through the tea plantations of Malaysia's [Cameron Highlands](#) where the air is clear, the temperatures markedly cooler and the history intrigues.
- Relax on the stunning rainforest-fringed beaches of [Langkawi](#), close to the Thai-Malay border.

FOOD TO TRY

- *Roti canai* is an Indian-style flatbread served with delicious curries on the side.
- *Teh tarik* is strictly speaking a drink – pulled tea, to be exact – and the brewing process is an incredible spectacle to behold. The server must pour it back and forth (across an impressive distance) to give it its characteristic frothy texture.
- *Char kway teow* is a national favourite made with flat rice noodles, prawns, beansprouts eggs and pork.

BEACHES

- [Tioman Island](#) offers stunning white sand beaches, snorkelling opportunities through beautiful reefs and is only a short domestic flight from Kuala Lumpur.
- With warm waters, stunning surrounding tropical forests and soft sand, [Langkawi Island](#) offers wonderful beaches.
- Tanjong Jara is a lovely long beach on the east coast of Malaysia. It's very laid-back without too many tourists and a good choice of seaside resorts to stay in.

PLACES TO STAY

- The opulent home of 'Asia's Rockefeller', the 19th century trading mogul Cheong Fatt Tze, The [Blue Mansion](#) is now a boutique hotel with wonderful food.
- [Japamala Resort](#) is a stunning series of luxury treehouses nestled in a tropical jungle looking out on the South China Sea.
- [The Datai](#) is a tropical paradise just an hour's flight from Kuala Lumpur. With a beautiful beach, delicious dining options and a fantastic resident naturalist dubbed "the Attenborough of Malaysia", stopping here is an incredible experience.



BEST TIMES TO VISIT

Malaysia is a year-round destination with distinctive weather patterns on the west and east coasts. It's hot and humid year round with a wet season on the east coast from November to February and on the west coast from April until October.



WEATHER

| | JANUARY - FEBRUARY | MARCH - APRIL | MAY - AUGUST | SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER | NOVEMBER - DECEMBER |
|------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| EAST COAST | ✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ |
| WEST COAST | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓✓ |

GETTING AROUND – HOW IT WORKS

Malaysia is vying for status as a “developed” country like its affluent neighbour Singapore. Its transport network is remarkably good and getting around is easy, certainly compared to other Southeast Asian countries.

| TYPE OF TRANSPORT | PROS | CONS |
|-------------------|---|--|
| BUS | Cheap and reliable | Slow, noisy, sometimes crowded and complicated to buy a ticket |
| TRAIN | Inexpensive and insightful, particularly for colonial train enthusiasts | Surprisingly slow and can be busy |
| DRIVER | Comfortable and speedy | More expensive than local transport |
| FERRIES | Inexpensive | Loud, noisy, slow and can be rather boring |
| DOMESTIC FLIGHTS | Time-efficient and essential for accessing remoter areas | More expensive than other forms of transport |

[See all our Malaysia holidays](#)

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