The ASEAN Travel Primer

YOUR GUIDE TO THE MOST DIVERSE, BEAUTIFUL AND ENJOYABLE HOLIDAY DESTINATIONS IN THE WORLD

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INTRODUCTION

Have a great holiday in Southeast Asia

Welcome to the ASEAN Travel Primer, your at-a-glance handy guide to the diverse and welcoming holiday destinations of Southeast Asia.

Diversity and unity are two themes running through this booklet. All ten destinations are united in their commitment to welcome the world to their doors. Each country offers a tantalizing array of things to do, sights to see and insights to marvel at. Beaches, mountains, forests, temples, mega-cities, entertainment, shopping and the most varied and compelling dining experiences in the world are just a step away when you have the ASEAN Travel Primer in your hand.

For each destination we recommend practical travel information such as where to go, getting around, climate, eating and shopping tips. Follow our recommendations and the diversity of your travel experience, the ready smiles of the welcome and variety of the destinations will make your next trip to ASEAN – Southeast Asia – the most happily memorable holiday of a life time.

With the cool ASEAN Travel Primer in your pocket, it’s easy to feel the warmth of Southeast Asia. To find out more about traveling in all 10 ASEAN nations, visit www.aseantourism.travel.
Brunei, the second smallest ASEAN nation, is often overlooked as a travel destination. Although oil-rich, it is not an übermodern emirate like Dubai, nor is it an uptight Muslim stronghold like Bahrain. Instead it’s charm lies in its natural surroundings and laid back villages.
WHERE TO?

While in Bandar Seri Begawan (BSB) visit Brunei’s most iconic landmark, The Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque. This magnificent gold domed Mosque was built by the 28th Sultan in 1958. Also visit The Royal Regalia, established in 1992 to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of His Majesty’s accession to the throne and exhibits two elaborately decorated royal carriages used during the Coronation and Silver Jubilee of His Majesty.

Grab a water taxi and cross the river in BSB to visit the wooden stilt-houses of Kampong Ayer, one of the world’s largest floating cities, and be sure to visit the Kampong Ayer Cultural and Tourism Gallery.

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Clara

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GETTING AROUND

Brunei has no railway system, so ground transport around the country is limited to bus, rental car, water taxi, or taxi. Hiring a car in Brunei is cost-effective (petrol is cheap) and the main roads are in good condition. Boats to and from Bandar Seri Begawan to various nearby towns in Borneo operate from the Muara Ferry Terminal (about 25 km northeast of the city). The Brunei-Muara public bus network covers most sights in and around the capital of Bandar Seri Begawan, including the international ferry terminal at Muara.

CLIMATE

Like the rest of Borneo, temperatures consistently fall between 24°C and 31°C, with high humidity year round.

September – January: the wettest months
February – April: the driest months
May – August: the hottest months

EAT LOCALLY

Pick from any of the multitude of fine dining or sumptuous street food options, and enjoy dishes of European, Asian, and Indian origin, as well as international and fusion cuisines. Various rice dishes such as Nasi Katok (a mixture of rice, fried chicken and a sauce called sambal – the signature dish of Bandar Seri Begawan), Nasi Lemak (fragrant coconut rice), Nasi Ayam (chicken rice), satay, and soto (noodle soup), are all available from vendors all over the country as alternative fast foods, especially for those who are on the move. Kueh Melayu is a sweet pancake treat, filled with peanuts, raisins and sugar. Various traditional desserts, and must-try treats, include Kueh Sapit, Kek Batek, Penyaram, Cendol, Ardam, Kueh Jala, Kueh Lenggang, Madu Kesirat, Pulut Panggang and Ambuyat is a sticky ball of flavourless sago starch, similar to tapioca, served with a variety of dips. Smooters are Brunei’s answer to ice cream milkshakes.

SHOP

Dina Arif Gallery in Bandar Seri Begawan exhibits and sells paintings by local artists. Silversmiths and coppersmiths across the country sell a wide range of metallic souvenirs including gongs of all sizes. Jong Sarat, a hand-woven cloth (kain tenunan) made from gold and silver threads, can be found at the Arts and Handicrafts Centre in Kota Batu, as well as various traditional handicraft shops and centers such as Sumbangsih Mulia, as well as at the airport departure hall. S. Aisyah Brunei handbag collections – handmade from kain tenunan (woven cloth), producing a vintage regal chic design that will complement elegant evening and formal attire – are available at the Yayasan Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mall in Bandar Seri Begawan.
CAMBODIA

Recent years have seen Cambodia become a tourism hot spot, but remember that there’s more to the country than just making the pilgrimage to Angkor Wat.
WHERE TO?

After seeing Angkor Wat, as well as the colossal stone-faces at Bayon, check out the even older Bakong Temple, which predates the main attraction by almost 400 years. From Siem Reap, make a detour to see the floating stilt-village of Kampong Phluk at Tonle Sap Lake (Southeast Asia’s largest freshwater lake). The Hariharalaya Healing Center – 20km from Siem Reap – is a yoga and meditation retreat nestled in the Cambodian countryside featuring incredible vegan food. In Phnom Penh visit the 17th century Emerald Buddha at the Royal Palace, and admire the equally breathtaking Silver Pagoda (which was originally constructed of wood). The infamous Killing Fields are memorialized at Choeung Ek – about 15km from Phnom Penh – where visitors can view around 8,000 skulls, arranged by sex and age, laid out behind a glass panel.

Battambang, in the Northwest, is an amazing preserved French colonial era town. Explore the Cham villages and the sweeping vistas of the surrounding countryside near Kampot. In Sihanoukville, clear waters and beautiful stretches of white sand can be found at Otres Beach, and the privately owned Sokha Beach (day passes available).

Head south to Koh Rong for the turquoise waters of Southwestern Beach, Long Set Beach, and Lazy Beach.

GETTING AROUND

Cambodia has two rail lines with the Phnom Penh Royal Railway Station as its major hub. Coach service between most major destinations is made possible by an ever improving network of buses, while minibuses serve most provincial routes. Longtail rocket boats and other river craft service the Mekong and its many tributaries, shuttling both tourists and locals between major destinations. Inexpensive car and motorcycle rental provide tourists with greater flexibility, and almost all car rental in Cambodia includes a driver.

CLIMATE

Cambodia’s climate is dominated by monsoons and temperature extremes range from 21 to 35 °C.

May – October: rainy season (heaviest in September and October)
November – March: dry season (driest months are January and February)

EAT LOCALLY

Amok (baked fish wrapped in banana leaf with coconut, lemon grass and chilli) is regarded as the national dish of Cambodia. Prahok Jien consists of a pungent fermented fish paste that is fried and then mixed with meat (usually beef or pork), chilli, and served with dips, vegetables and rice. Nom Ban Chok, often called simply Khmer noodles, was originally a regional specialty from the Kampot province. Samlor Machu Siem Reap is a traditional sour soup (samlor), flavoured with bamboo shoots and tiny freshwater shrimp. Sugar-palm, wine, sold in bamboo containers off the back of bicycles, is popular with locals (and some brave tourists), while Angkor is the popular national beer.

SHOP

Phnom Penh’s St 178 is home to a budding gallery scene, featuring the work of local artists. The best silks come from Kompong Cham and Takeo Provinces, but the silk farms in Siem Reap also produce lots of quality material. Woodcarving is a Cambodian specialty, and Betel-nut boxes are readily available, as are hand-carved jewelry boxes inlaid with mother of pearl, lacquer or metalwork.
Indonesia is an extremely large archipelago nation, so even hitting just a handful of island locales is more than some visitors can say they’ve done.
Getting Around

Visitors can arrive in, and depart from, Jakarta by planes, trains, or buses. Commercial flights go through the Soekarno - Hatta International Airport. International ferries connect ports in Indonesia with ports in Malaysia and Singapore, while domestically the Pelni company has giant ferries visiting practically every inhabited island across Indonesia. Ground transportation across Indonesia is comprised of bus, taxi, train, and ojek (motor cycles, where the price of rides to and from your destinations vary depending on the length of the journey and your haggling expertise). In Jakarta, the Transjakarta buses, commonly called “busway”, connect commuters and residents from one end of the city to the other. In Java the andong (or delman), is a large horse-drawn wagon that seats 6, while in West Sumatra, the bendi is a similar horse-drawn vehicle that seats 2 people.

Climate

Being close to the equator makes for an evenly hot climate year-round.

October – April: the wet season (sudden tropical downpours and nonstop rain for days)
May – September: the dry season (drought in some areas)

Where To?

Jakarta is the capital city, and the center of government, and it acts as the main entrance to the country.
- Bali is one-stop tourist destination for lovers of seaside and mountain vistas, arts and culture, and even religious tours.
- Sumatra boasts the world’s largest crater lake at Danau Toba, but the 6 km wide crater lake and mountain summit views at Gunung Rinjani in Lombok are equally impressive.
- To see orangutan conservation at its finest, visit the Tanjung Puting National Park in Kalimantan, Borneo.
- If the crowds at Bali’s Kuta Beach become too much, the nearby Gili Islands offer the same beach paradise, with a more laid back atmosphere.
- Seek out the Tana Toraja tribe of South Sulawesi to see their unique burial grounds in which crypts are carved into sheer rock faces. Tourists can also attend the funeral festivities (as long as they don’t wear black or red)

Shop

Topeng (carved theatrical masks) can be found throughout the archipelago, the most readily identifiable of which are the ones from Java and Bali. ikat cloths, woven from intricately patterned and painstakingly tie-dyed material, are produced in many regions, most notably in Nusa Tenggara. Tanjung Tunpung in South Sumatra is renowned for its ceremonial Songket sarongs which can take up to a month to make.

Wayang is a traditional Indonesian entertainment that utilizes puppets, operated by “dalang” (puppetmasters). Wayang Kulit (shadow puppets made of cow skin) and Wayang Golek (wooden puppets originating from West Java) make great souvenirs.

Eat Locally

Gado Gado Jakarta is a Betawi original, consisting of boiled vegetables served with a peanut sauce dressing.
Nasi Kuning Yogyakarta consists of Jasmine rice cooked in coconut milk and turmeric.
Rendang Padang – considered ‘The World Most Delectable Food’ by CNNGo – consists of caramelized beef curry, and originates from West Sumatra.
Serabi Bandung is a rice soufflé pancake, served with a coconut milk and brown sugar sauce.
Lumpia Semarang is a Javanese spring roll, made with shrimp and young bamboo shoots.
Bir Pletok Jakarta is a unique and traditional non-alcoholic beverage from Jakarta, made with aromatic herbs.
Bintang is the country’s predominant beer brand.
Although fully landlocked, Laos has much to offer travellers who can live without a beach. The spectacular countryside, charming mountains towns, and networks of interconnecting rivers, are just the start.
Where to?
Although capital city Vientiane is a little sleepy, there’s lots to see including the amazing outdoor Buddha Park. A significant part of Luang Prabang’s old town appeal lies in the many French provincial style houses that remain intact. When in Luang Prabang, visit the Tham Ting Caves – also known as the Buddha Caves – a trip that includes a 25 km scenic river journey. Travel 7.5 kms down the Nam Hin Boun River via the Tham Kong Lo Cave, hidden deep in the Phou Hin Boun wilderness of central Laos. The spectacular limestone karst cliff formations in Vang Vieng are perfect for rock-climbing enthusiasts, but the area also offers rafting down the Nam Xong River, as well as trekking and mountain biking. In Ban Khiet Ngong, take an elephant trek through the forest to visit the enigmatic Phou Asa Temple. Tranquil Champasak is the base for visiting the pre-Angkorian Vat Phou Champasak Complex which consist of Angkor-style temple ruins stepping up the slopes of sacred Phou Pasak.

Getting Around
Laos has a small rail network, but currently it only links with Thailand at the Friendship Bridge in Nong Khai. The bus system in Laos is efficient and extensive, with 3 bus stations in Vientiane, and 2 in Luang Prabang. Even though the once thriving boat service along the Mekong has dwindled, slow boats still travel the river between Huay Xai and Luang Prabang. Light traffic and good roads makes Laos the best country for long-distance cycling in Southeast Asia. Taxis are an option in larger cities like Vientiane and Luang Prabang. Songthaew – bench seat converted pick-up trucks – service rural areas, while the Lot Doi Saan (wooden buses) handle trips over extremely rough road conditions. In towns both small and large, the Jumbo seats around 6 passengers comfortably, while the Saam-laaw (pedicab) and the Tuk-tuk carry smaller groups.

Climate
Along the Mekong temperatures can reach 40°C some months, while lows of 5°C or less have been reached in the country’s mountainous uplands.

September – May: the dry season (May is usually the hottest month)
June – September: the wet season (also known as the “green season”)

Eat Locally
Larb [or laab], is a sour and spicy meat salad made with chicken, beef, duck, fish, pork or mushrooms, and is considered the national dish of Laos. Khao Jii, French bread with coffee for breakfast, is common in Vientiane and Luang Prabang. Khai Phean, a Luang Prabang specialty, consists of dried seasoned river moss. Tam maak Hung is a spicy green papaya salad, served with fermented crab. When it comes to alcoholic beverages, Lao Hai is fermented rice wine, Lao-Lao is rice whiskey, and Beer Lao is the national beer brand.

Shop
The Talat Sao morning market in Vientiane has small shops selling high quality handmade silk scarves and wall hangings. In Luang Prabang the car-free Night Market sees hill-tribe traders selling fabrics, ceramics, lamps, blankets, handicrafts and silk scarves. Laotian coffee, often called Pakxong (as it usually grown around the town of Pakxong on the Boloven Plateau), makes a delicious take home souvenir.
Recently listed by Lonely Planet as a top ten destination for 2014, and with new tourist attractions and 200 events and festivals scheduled for the coming year, Malaysia is a country savvy travellers definitely won't want to miss.
WHERE TO?

The Petronas Towers are a highlight of KL, but don’t miss the beautifully designed Islamic Arts Museum. Dining and entertainment options in KL range from lively Chinatown, to the night market at Jalan Petaling, and the glamour of Asian Heritage Row, Changkat Bukit Bintang, and Jalan Telawi.

The Cameron Highlands are a beautiful area to visit, and include such highlights as Genting and Fraser’s Hill. In Penang there’s plenty to see and do in colonial George Town, as well as Melaka City (both UNESCO World Heritage Cities), or head to the picturesque stretch of small coves and beaches at Batu Ferringhi.

For theme parks visit the Iskandar Development Region (IDR) in Johor, home to Legoland and Hello Kitty Land. Popular dive sites include the islands of Sabah, Terengganu, Tioman, and Pulau Payar, while the beautiful beaches of Cherating, Desaru, and Port Dickson lure sunworshippers.

In Sabah Sarawak, don’t miss the spectacular caves, jungles and mystic rock formations. Known as the jewel of Kedah, Langkawi is part of an archipelago made up of 99 islands and is also popular destination for honeymooners.

GETTING AROUND

The best way to travel between Peninsular Malaysia and Malaysian Borneo is by air, and there are plenty of low-cost airlines servicing domestic routes. For getting around Kuala Lumpur there are plenty of trains - Komuter, LRT, ERL and ETS - as well as car rental services.

Bus companies servicing longer domestic routes include Aeroline and Supernice. In KL the main bus station is Bandar Tasik Selatan (accessible by LRT and KTM lines), and KL Sentral is the main transportation hub for taxis, buses, coaches and trains.

Long distance taxis are a great option for groups, and taxi rates to specific destinations are fixed by the government and posted at taxi stands. Bicycle rickshaws (trishaws) still exist in cities such as George Town and Melaka City, and are tourist attractions unto themselves.

Small towns and villages are serviced by inexpensive public buses, often with tickets purchased from the conductor after boarding. In bigger cities across Malaysian Borneo, taxis, buses and minibuses are available, while in the bush, riverboats and airplanes are the only alternatives.

CLIMATE

Malaysia has a typical tropical climate, and is warm year-round, with temperatures ranging from 21°C to 32°C.

November - February: monsoon season on the east coast of the peninsular Malaysia.

EAT LOCALLY

Nasi Lemak, a fragrant rice dish cooked in coconut milk and pandan leaf, is considered Malaysia’s national dish. Otak-otak, a blend of fish, coconut milk, chili paste, galangal, and herbs wrapped in a banana leaf, is a prime example of the cuisine of the southern state of Peninsula Malaysia. Beef Rendang, or spicy coconut beef, is considered the signature dish of Malaysia. Kway Teow, stir-fried flat noodles with shrimp, chicken, cockles, chives, and soy sauce (sometimes served with duck eggs) is a specialty on the island of Penang.

Teh Tarik (pulled tea) is a popular hot Indian milk tea beverage whose name derives from the process of “stretching” the drink during its preparation.

SHOP

The Kompleks Budaya Kraf in KL sells locally produced batiks, pandanus (woven baskets), and ceramics, and many of the craftsmen and artisans are present there for tourists to meet and see in action. The Royal Selangor Pewter Factory in KL is the leading manufacturer of traditional tankards, as well as other pewter gifts and accessories.

Pottery from the states of Sarawak and Perak, recognizable by its size and unique tribal markings, makes a highly prized memento. Malaysia is known for its excellent shopping and the BB-KLCC precinct in KL is the place to go for high-end brands, and one-of-a-kind street fashions.
Ruyard Kipling once wrote about Burma (as it was called then): “It is quite unlike any place you know about”. His words still ring true, even to this day.
WHERE TO?

The jaw-dropping Shwedagon Pagoda, in the main commercial city of Yangon, is the symbolic icon of Myanmar and really can’t be overlooked. The water-bound temples, shore-bound markets, and floating gardens of Inle Lake make it a must-see destination.

For an evening of culture, visit the Mintha Theater in Mandalay, and catch an acclaimed traditional folk dance performance. More than 2,000 Buddhist temples, dating back to between the 11th and 13th centuries, are scattered across the plains of Bagan; accessible by car, bike, or try a hot-air balloon overhead tour (only available in the peak season).

The colossal ‘Golden Rock’ or Kyaiktiyo Pagoda is one of the country’s most important religious pilgrimage sites, and the arduous climb is rewarded by spectacular scenic vistas.

The modest Yadana Labamuni Hsutaungpye Paya, or ‘Snake Pagoda’, in Paleik is home to 3 giant pythons that are bathed and fed regularly.

Ngapali Beach is the perfect getaway for sunbathers, snorkelers and swimmers who just want to relax.

GETTING AROUND

Myanmar’s network of trains services huge regions of the country, including an express line connecting Mandalay with both Bagan and Yangon. Private companies operate Myanmar’s extensive bus network, which includes everything from luxury express coaches to mini 32-seaters.

Riverboats and government ferries service the almost 5,000 kms of the country’s navigable waterways.

In big cities, such as Yangon, Mandalay, and Pathein, public buses take regular routes along the main avenues. Cities and small towns have a variety of local transport including bicycle rickshaws (trishaws), vintage taxis, and Thoun Bein (3-wheelers similar to Thailand’s tuk-tuks).

Bicycles rentals are readily available in popular tourist hotspots. Small towns rely heavily on horse carts, ox carts, and trishaws as primary modes of local transport.

CLIMATE

Myanmar enjoys a varied climate temperature-wise, with hotspots reaching 35°C or more, and elevated cooler regions experiencing temps of 15°C or less. Annual monsoon rains can make some roads impassable (especially in the delta region).

May – September: the rainy season
December – February: the dry season
March - April, and October - November: shoulder seasons

EAT LOCALLY

Mohinga. Myanmar’s unofficial national dish, consists of rice vermicelli in fish broth, served with boiled eggs, fried fish cake (nga hpe) and fritters (akyaw). Shwe Yin Aye, the country’s national dessert, consists of agar jelly, tapioca and sago, in coconut milk.

Meeshay, a Mandalay favourite, combines rice noodles, pork and/or chicken, bean sprouts, and rice flour fritters, and comes garnished with onions, garlic, coriander, and pickled daikon/mustard greens.

Kew soi Dok, popular in Yangon, sees noodles in tamarind sauce tossed with cucumbers, potatoes, dried shrimp, and served with cabbage and garlic chips.

Htamin Jin, an example of Shan cuisine, is fresh or fermented rice – kneaded with boiled fish – combined with tomato paste, mashed potatoes and garlic.

Toddy Juice (made from fermented palm sugar) is popular in central Myanmar, and Shwe Lain Maw (Golden Orange) is a potent orange-infused alcohol from the Shan State. Meanwhile Myanmar Beer is the national beer brand.

SHOP

If you can afford it, Myanmar’s famous gemstones – rubies, diamonds, cat’s eyes, emeralds, topaz and pearls – are available from numerous dealers (Yangon has many licensed shops). Myanmar puppets, elaborately costumed and bejeweled, are growing in popularity as souvenirs. Amarapura in Mandalay is the home of first class luxurious Myanmar silks. Textiles, especially the tapestries from the Chin State, are particularly stunning, and at Inle Lake, fabrics woven from lotus fiber are readily available.
Flights here generally touch down in the cities of Manila or Cebu, but the many islands, coves, and small towns of the Philippines draw their fair share of travelers as well.
WHERE TO?

While spending a day or two in historic Manila, don’t overlook the more modern Makati shopping mecca, which is also home to dozens of great wining and dining spots ● Make a stop at the visually stunning ancient rice terraces of Banaue, known locally as “the eighth wonder of the world” ● In Cordillera make the trip to Sagada to take in the cool mountain climate and to see the famous hanging coffins (a traditional way of burying corpses that is still utilized) ● South of Cebu City the dive colony of Moalboal lies just across the strait from Negros, and the exciting nightlife of Dumaguete ● In Coron the attraction for scuba divers is wreck diving, but land lovers can make a trek to the Maquinit Hot Springs (5km east of town) ● The long strip of an island known as Palawan is home to not only the chilled out beach town of Puerto Princesa, but also the distinctive St Paul Subterranean River National Park ● The party beaches of Boracay never lose their charm (or their tourists) ● Heading much further south, try some white water rafting and cave exploring along the Cagayan De Oro River in Cagayan De Oro

GETTING AROUND

The only provincial train service from Metro Manila goes to the southernmost area of Luzon, in the Bicol region ● Boat travel ranges from luxury catamarans to fastcraft ferries, to economy pumpboats (bangka) 2Go Travel operates many routes ● Air travel is a great way to see the length and breadth of the country, and domestic carrier Philippine Airlines services most popular destinations ● In Manila the public transportation system includes three Light Rail Transit Systems in some parts of the city, but Manila is also famed for its inexpensive taxis ● Jeepneys – halfway between a jeep and a bus – are used as local transport in most towns for local and also for long distance runs, while the Tricycle – the Philippine rickshaw – consists of a passenger cab bolted to a motorbike, and is great for short trips

CLIMATE

The Philippines enjoys a humid, tropical and sub-tropical (in some areas) climate, where January is the coolest month in most places, and April is the hottest.

September – May: the dry season (typhoon off-season)
June – September: the wet season.

EAT LOCALLY

Adobo, consisting of pork and/or chicken stewed in vinegar and garlic, is considered the country’s national dish ● Sinigang na Hipon, another national favourite, is a tamarind-flavoured sour soup dish with shrimp ● Lechon, an important dish at many festive occasions, is suckling pig slowly roasted over live coals and simmered with a mixture of vinegar, sugar and herbs ● In Pampanga local specialties include Tocino (honey cured pork) and Sisig (a famous bar chow made from pork) ● Laing, or taro leaves simmered in spiced coconut milk, is a favoured dish in Bicolano cuisine ● San Miguel is the most popular commercial beer brand, while lambanog (coconut wine) and tuba (palm wine) are 2 of the most popular home-brews

SHOP

An intricate hand-embroidered barong (formal shirt/blouse) can be bought at special outlets, as well as many malls, across Manila ● Colourful mats made of tikog, available in the provinces of Samar and Leyte, can sometimes be cheaper when bought directly from the mat weavers themselves ● The tubao, a colourful handkerchief made by the Manobos and other indigenous peoples in Mindanao, can be used as a turban or head covering
SINGAPORE

Although compact in size - it’s the smallest of the 10 ASEAN nations - there is still a great deal to see and do in Singapore, and visiting www.yoursingapore.com is a fantastic way to plan your travels.
**Getting Around**

Singapore’s transportation system is clean, efficient, reliable, and well-connected, all of which makes getting around the island very easy. The island’s buses, taxis and Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) can take visitors virtually everywhere. For a nostalgic travel mode, hop onto a Trishaw (pedal rickshaw), which are a rarity these days but can still be spotted around the city. As a cruise hub in the region, a large number of international cruise lines sail out of Singapore, servicing neighbouring countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Myanmar.

**Climate**

Singapore has a tropical rainforest climate with no distinctive seasons. Temperatures range from 22 to 35°C. April and May are the hottest months, with the wetter monsoon season from November to January.

**Where To?**

The River Safari, Singapore Zoo and Night Safari are must see attractions, clustered around Mandai, which offer visitors a one-stop wildlife and nature experience. Themed attractions, such as Universal Studios Singapore, Marine Life Park, Singapore Flyer and Sentosa Island are great all-in-one family hotspots which offer something for everyone. The 2 world-class integrated resorts of Marina Bay Sands and Resorts World Sentosa, house an amazing array of shopping, dining, and lifestyle outlets, as well as entertaining theme parks and theatres. Nature lovers should take a walk through Singapore Botanic Gardens right in the heart of the city, or explore the Gardens by the Bay, a 101 hectare award-winning horticultural display, housing over 250,000 rare plants and trees. Explore a part of Singapore where time has stood still by visiting Pulau Ubin, a small island situated off the north east coast of the main island. Visits to Little India, Chinatown, Kampong Glam, Joo Chiat and Katong are a must for lovers of history, culture and heritage. Orchard Road, the city’s main shopping, dining and entertainment belt, makes a glitzy fun-filled excursion by day or by night.

**Eat Locally**

Hainanese Chicken Rice (slow poached chicken with fragrant rice) is often known as Singapore’s national dish. Chilli Crab (crabs cooked in a tangy chilli-tomato based sauce with eggs) is a must-try dish when in Singapore and best eaten with Mantou (fried bun). Roti Prata is an Indian dish, similar to a flatbread, which can be eaten with curry or sugar. Satay, a Malay and Indonesian dish of grilled meat on skewers, served with a peanut dipping sauce, is an island-wide favourite. The Singapore Sling is a cocktail created at the Long Bar, in the Raffles Hotel, and is Singapore’s nationally renowned drink. In addition to ethnic favourites, eating locally in Singapore also means exploring the city’s ultra-chic fine dining scene, which includes many Michelin starred restaurants and chefs.

**Shop**

Shopping is an obsession in Singapore, and some of the best-known places for retail therapy include The Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands, boutiques and malls (including ION, Paragon, Ngee Ann City) along Orchard Road, or quaint finds at Haji Lane. Quirky, Singapore keepsakes (anything featuring the Merlion symbol, or t-shirts sporting funny Singlish words or phrases), or featured gifts from local museums, all make great souvenirs. Local food pastes and sauces – such as Prima Taste – are great gifts for aspiring chefs on your gift list.
The Kingdom of Thailand offers visitors a range of unique experiences, and even though the more well-known travel spots see the majority of tourists, there’s always more to discover all across this fascinating country.
Thai cuisine offers a diverse blend of delicious foods. Thais share meals (eating family style), and rice is the main component of each meal, usually consumed with other supplements such as soups, curries and stir fries. Phat Thai, a mix of spicy stir-fried rice noodles with eggs, peanuts and bean sprouts (prepared with shrimp, chicken, or tofu), is undoubtedly the nation’s favorite dish. Tom Yum Kung, a spicy and sour prawn soup (also made with chicken), is synonymous with Bangkok. Massaman Curry, voted the top dish on CNNGo’s 2011 poll of the world’s 50 most delicious foods, contains beef or chicken (not pork), coconut milk, cinnamon, and tamarind sauce. Khao soi, a northern Thai specialty (particularly in Chiang Mai) consists of flat egg noodles served in a curry broth with meat (chicken, pork, or beef), and topped with crispy fried noodles.

Thailand has 3 national beer brands – Singha, Leo, and Chang – as well as several local craft beers, such as Phuket Beer. Local whiskies (which more resemble sugarcane molasses-based rum) are also popular, with Sangsom and Mekong being the leading brands.

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Viet Nam is a very large country, with many different geographic regions, and anyone planning a visit here should bear in mind that there’s more to see than just Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.
WHERE TO?

Getting lost in the winding narrow streets of Hanoi’s Old Quarter is a must for any visitor to Viet Nam’s capital city. Although the glamour and nightlife of Ho Chi Minh City is enticing, there’s also plenty sobering war monuments serving as reminders of the country’s turbulent past. Fresh mountain air is reason enough for making a trip to Dalat, which enjoys year-round cool weather, or Sapa in the north, home to a variety of local hill tribe populations. Exploring ancient caves, and kayaking past towering limestone cliffs, makes a trip to Ha Long Bay an amazing excursion. Nha Trang and Mui Ne beaches offer sun-worshippers a chance to do some sunning, swimming and maybe even a little kite-surfing.

GETTING AROUND

Viet Nam’s state-owned railway system, Vietnam Railways, runs along the coast between HCMC and Hanoi, and links the capital with Hai Phong and northern towns. Viet Nam has an extensive network of inexpensive buses that reach the far-flung corners of the country, but travelling from Hanoi to HCMC is not advisable as it is just too far [take the train or book a domestic airline flight instead]. The best way to get around Hanoi and HCMC is by taxi, motocycle taxi, public bus or the slow moving Cyclo (a 3-wheel rickshaw style bicycle cart).

CLIMATE

The climate of Viet Nam is varied, with high temperatures year-round in southern and central Viet Nam, and a definite cooler season in the north.

April – June: usually the quietest months but expect hot, humid weather across the whole country (except for the mountainous areas)
July – October: violent and unpredictable typhoons affect much of central and northern Vietnam
October – March: the weather is dry and a little bit cooler

EAT LOCALLY

Pho Bo, or beef noodle soup, is typically served in bowls, garnished with spring onion, and is considered the national dish of Viet Nam. Banh Mi Kep Thit is a Vietnamese baguette sandwich, served with a mix of paté, mayonnaise, cold cuts, jalapeños, pickled daikon, carrot, and cucumber. Bun Thit Nuong, or grilled pork with rice vermicelli, is an extremely popular dish, and each region and restaurant has its own unique recipe.

Ca Phe Da is a mix of finely ground Vietnamese dark roast coffee (brewed with a drip filter) and sweetened condensed milk, stirred and served hot, or poured over ice.

Bia Hoi, is a draught beer – made daily – available on street corners throughout the country. Among Viet Nam’s name brand beers, Saigon Do is popular in the south, Bia Hanoi is popular in the north, and Bia 333 is the choice in much of the central region.

Snake Wine is an exotic Vietnamese alcohol produced by infusing whole poisonous snakes (and occasionally scorpions) in rice wine or grain alcohol.

SHOP

Traditional wood-carved items (usually made from cinnamon or camphor wood), and lacquerware items decorated with mother-of-pearl inlay, make great parting gifts. In Ho Chi Minh City, Lotus and Dogma are 2 stores that are goldmines for vintage propaganda posters from the 60s and 70s. On historical Hang Bac Street in Hanoi, silver goods for sale are still produced using secret methods that have been passed down through generations.

Hang Gai Street, also in Hanoi, is a silk shopper’s paradise, with shimmering scarves and stoles, finely tailored men’s and women’s clothes, heavily embroidered and sequined evening gowns, and beautiful handbags.

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www.tourismmalaysia.gov.my
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www.myanmartourism.org

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www.tourism.gov.ph
www.itsmorefuninthephilippines.com

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Helpful facts and figures, from across the 10 ASEAN nations, to help equip travelers arriving in the region.

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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Official Name</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Capital</th>
<th>Languages</th>
<th>Religions</th>
<th>Currency</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BRUNEI DARUSSALAM</td>
<td>Negara Brunei Darussalam</td>
<td>5,765 km²</td>
<td>393,162</td>
<td>Bandar Seri Begawan</td>
<td>Malay, English, Chinese</td>
<td>Islam, Buddhism, Christianity</td>
<td>Brunei Dollar (BND)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAMBODIA</td>
<td>The Kingdom of Cambodia</td>
<td>181,035 km²</td>
<td>14 Million</td>
<td>Phnom Penh</td>
<td>Khmer is the official language, however English is widely spoken and understood</td>
<td>Theravada Buddhism</td>
<td>Riel (KHR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALAYSIA</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>329,847 km²</td>
<td>27,000,000</td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur</td>
<td>Bahasa Melayu, English, Chinese Dialects, Other Regional Dialects</td>
<td>Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Taoism, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Others</td>
<td>Ringgit Malaysia (MYR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYANMAR</td>
<td>The Republic of the Union of Myanmar</td>
<td>676,577 km²</td>
<td>60 Millions</td>
<td>Nay Pyi Taw</td>
<td>Burmese, however English is widely spoken and understood</td>
<td>Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Some Animism</td>
<td>Kyat (MMK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIET NAM</td>
<td>Socialist Republic of Vietnam</td>
<td>331,211.6 km²</td>
<td>88,772,900</td>
<td>Hanoi</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>Diverse Mix of Major Religions</td>
<td>Dong (VND)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE PHILIPPINES</td>
<td>Republic of the Philippines</td>
<td>300,000 km²</td>
<td>98,580,949</td>
<td>Manila</td>
<td>Filipino (Based on Tagalog), English, 8 Major Dialects and Other Regional Dialects</td>
<td>Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Buddhism</td>
<td>Philippine Peso (PHP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SINGAPORE</td>
<td>Republic of Singapore</td>
<td>715.1 km²</td>
<td>5,312,400</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>English, Mandarin, Malay, Tamil</td>
<td>Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Taoism</td>
<td>Singapore Dollar (SGD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THAILAND</td>
<td>Kingdom of Thailand</td>
<td>513,115 km²</td>
<td>67.4 million</td>
<td>Bangkok</td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Others</td>
<td>Thai Baht (THB)</td>
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