



The ASEAN

Soft Adventure Travel Primer

YOUR GUIDE TO ACTIVE OUTDOOR ADVENTURES
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA



Southeast Asia
feel the warmth



www.aseantourism.travel







●● MAP OF ASEAN

THE PHILIPPINES



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INTRODUCTION ●●

Adventure travel in Southeast Asia has never been better, so dive right in!

Welcome to the ASEAN Soft Adventure Travel Primer, your at-a-glance handy guide to just a few of the diverse and exciting ways you can get even more out of your travels in Southeast Asia. The 10 nations that comprise the ASEAN community offer an astounding wealth of diverse, natural terrain so active outdoor pursuits such as biking, trekking, climbing and camping are gaining increasing popularity in this part of the world. Of course the sheer amount of oceanfront coastline in this hemisphere, combined with the abundance of inland river waterways, means that water-based activities are also a huge draw. So whether it's surfing in Thailand, scuba diving in Malaysia, kayaking in Viet Nam, or kitesurfing in The Philippines, there is lots of wet and wild fun to be had. In addition, plenty of annual running marathons have started up across Southeast Asia, and they not only allow visitors to stay active but also offer a great chance to do some one-of-a-kind sightseeing.

To find out more about soft adventure opportunities all across the 10 ASEAN nations, visit: **www.aseantourism.travel**



●●BIKING & MOTORBIKING

Take a 2-wheeled journey along Southeast Asia's urban and rural roadways - a haven for bicycle and motorcycle adventurers.



Image © Gaid P. Kornsilapa

MYANMAR

● BIKING AROUND MANDALAY

Using the historic town of **Mandalay** as a jumping off point, cyclists can experience a truly "authentic" Myanmar. Discover the city's narrow alleyways and bustling markets, as well as the surrounding temples, rice paddies, and the world's oldest teakwood bridge, a bit further afield. Within the city centre it's a short bike ride to cultural treasures such as the **Shwenandaw Monastery**, the **Kuthodaw Pagoda**, and the outsize Buddha in repose at **Mahamuni Pagoda**. Moving into the countryside the paved roads give way to gravel and mud trails, and the river valley surroundings come into their own, revealing a relaxing, natural panorama. The road to Amarapura takes you across the **U Bein Bridge**, the longest teak bridge in the world, and eventually leads to the former royal capital of **Ava**.

The river valley terrain around Mandalay is easiest to cycle during the cooler and drier months between October and February.

Web Resources:

To find out more, visit Myanmar's Ministry of Hotels and Tourism guide to Mandalay.
www.myanmar-tourism.org





Image © ruben i / Creative Commons

CAMBODIA

● SIEM REAP, ANGKOR WAT AND TONLE SAP

The roads leading out from **Siem Reap** – level, and mostly shaded by trees – are perfect for bicycle journeys. In addition, these numerous accessible trails lead off the well-trodden tourist path and into the heart of the real Cambodia, where travelers can cycle past rice fields, small villages, and Khmer monasteries. From Siem Reap town the main temple ruins of **Angkor Wat** can be easily reached by bike (about a 6 km ride), but it's also worth the longer 12 km cycle to reach the village of **Chong Khneas** on the edge of lake **Tonle Sap**, the country's largest inland body of water. The route to the lake is scenic, if a bit rough, and you'll pass by some beautiful temples along the way including **Wat Althea** and the structures of **Phnom Krom**.

It's not necessary to bring your own bike to Siem Reap as most hotels and hostels provide bicycles for guests. Downtown there are a number of bike rental shops, many offering sturdy mountain bikes.

Web Resources:

To find out more about cycling in Siem Reap, visit the official Cambodia Tourism website.
www.tourismcambodia.org

INDONESIA



Image courtesy of the Indonesia Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy

● KINTAMANI, BALI

The town of **Kintamani** sits at 1,500 m above sea level – making it one of the highest settlements in **Bali** – and it serves as a scenic starting point for epic downhill cycling tours. From the magnificent

volcanic lake of **Mount Batur** everything's downhill (literally), and cyclists can make their way to **Ubud**, the cultural center of the island, or to the rustic town of **Candidasa** in the east. Both routes have been selected to avoid most traffic in Bali, so cyclists will feel safe as they pass by rice fields, art workshops, villages, coffee plantations and temples. Travelers are also encouraged to stop in on the simple Balinese villages and experience local courtesy and culture.

Travel time from Kintamani to Ubud is about 2 to 3 hours, while the trip to Candidasa takes up to 5 hours to complete. Both time estimates are dependent on how many stops cyclists make along the way.

Web Resources:

Find out more by searching "cycling" at: www.indonesia.travel



Image courtesy of the Singapore National Parks Board (NParks)

SINGAPORE

● KETAM MOUNTAIN BIKE PARK, PULAU UBIN

Escape modern Singapore by taking a trip to **Pulau Ubin**, a pristine island oasis that is home to the 45-hectare **Ketam Mountain Bike Park** – an all-weather, manmade cyclist haven containing over 10km of mountain bike paths. Trails here meet 3 out of 5 of the IMBA-recognized difficulty ratings, so the park is great for recreational weekend warriors and hardcore mountain bike enthusiasts alike. Cyclists here can also visit the **Freeride Skills Park** which offers competitive trials that engage riders with a series of obstacles, or the **Dirt Skills Park**, designed to accommodate riders of all skill ranges. You can also choose to follow the gravel roads to reach the more remote areas of the islands, including the 100-hectare **Chek Jawa Wetland**, a great spot to view local bird and marine life.

To get to Pulau Ubin, take a 5-minute “bumboat” ferry from the **Changi Ferry Terminal**.

Web Resources:

Find out more at: www.nparks.gov.sg

LAOS



Image © James Antrobus / Creative Commons

● LUANG NAMTHA, NORTH LAOS

Cyclists should head to the northern end of the country, up to **Luang Namtha** – an area of valleys, rice fields and scenic waterfalls. Visitors here can easily hire a motorbike or a bicycle, and within minutes be visiting the area’s minority villages, nearby forested hills, and other natural wonders. Cyclists can easily

access **Ban Nam Dee**, a Lanten minority village where the locals practice the ancient craft of bamboo paper-making. By bicycle it's also easy to get to the Thai Dam (Black Thai) villages, havens for traditional silk and cotton weaving. To venture further afield hire a motorbike and travel to the **Nam Ha National Biodiversity Conservation Area**, a forest reserve with 2 rivers and ample opportunities for kayaking and rafting. Also nearby is **Muang Sing**, a settlement close to the Chinese border.

The best time to visit is between November and February when the winds are cool and the roads are dry.

Web Resources:

Check out “cycling” on the **Tourism Laos** official website, and visit the **Luang Namtha** official tourism site.

www.tourismloas.org, www.luangnamtha-tourism-laos.org



Image courtesy of Tourism Authority of Thailand, used with permission



THAILAND

● ENCHANTING CHIANG MAI

For bike enthusiasts, the northern Thai city of **Chiang Mai** offers a mountainous surrounding featuring winding bike trails and a favourable climate throughout most of the year. Meanwhile the city itself is brimming with vibrant culture and is very “cycle-centric”. A high-quality velodrome, located in the **700 Year Sports Complex**, caters to the city’s track enthusiasts, while beyond the city limits a selection of undulating mountain trails challenge mountain bikers making their way to **Doi Inthanon** and **Doi Suthep**. The local biking community also hosts regular races and time trials that draw hundreds of enthusiastic challengers, including national teams from all across Southeast Asia. Meanwhile the

Masters Tour of Chiang Mai is the most popular cycle event of the year, and this 4-day race draws the best of the bicycling world.

Chiang Mai has its own international airport, but regular train and bus service from Bangkok is readily available. Cyclists can bring their own bike, but the local bike shops in town offer easy rentals.

Web Resources:

Discover Thailand’s most bike-friendly city by visiting the Chiang Mai section of the Tourism Authority of Thailand site.

www.tourismthailand.org, masterstourofchiangmai.com

VIET NAM

● NORTH TO SOUTH ON HIGHWAY 1

Highway One – officially National Route 1A – is Viet Nam’s major non-rail land transportation connection, stretching 2,300 km from the China-Vietnam border in the north, to the southernmost province of **Ca Mau**. Since the post-war reunification, cyclists have been able to traverse Highway 1 down the entire length of the country, taking advantage of the highway’s wide shoulders. For avid cyclists this roadway presents unique challenges, including the formidable **Hai Van** mountain pass, but making stops at the beaches of **Nha Trang** in the south, and cycling past the sinuous limestone islands of **Ha Long Bay** in the north, make it all worth the effort. There’s also no shortage of hostels, homestays and hotels along the way, providing no end of detours you can make if you want to stop somewhere and explore.

Heavy traffic in sections of the highway and seasonal bad weather might intimidate some cyclists, but you



Image © Kyle Taylor / Creative Commons

can always do bits of the journey by bus or train, paying a bit extra for bringing along your bike.

Web Resources:

Discover more about Viet Nam’s many bike-friendly destination by visiting the Viet Nam Bike Tours website. www.vietnambiketours.com



●● BOATING & SAILING

Southeast Asia's abundance of undulating rivers and open ocean waters make it a haven for rafters, kayakers, boaters and sailors.



Image courtesy of the Philippines
Department of Tourism

PHILIPPINES

● EXPLORING EL NIDO BY KAYAK

Beach and nature lovers traveling to the region known as **El Nido** will find it on the northeast tip of Palawan Island. Here the pristine blue waters of **Bacuit Bay** and surrounding magnificent limestone outcroppings are truly breathtaking. The area covers more than 450 sq. km, and the 45 tropical islands here are home to caves and lagoons, while the surrounding waters present endless opportunities for kayaking and snorkeling adventures. Tour operators offer relaxed day trips around the many surrounding attractions – such as **Miniloc, Simisu, Lagen, Inabuyan, Matinloc, Tapiutan** and **Snake Islands** – and always include enough time for snorkel sessions in the lagoons and delicious lunches on the beach.

Kayakers can also leave their craft on the shore for a while and head inland to check out each island's inner secrets. On **Pinasil Island** there's the spectacular Cathedral Caves, while a walk through a rock crevice on **Matinloc Island** reveals 'Secret Beach', a limestone sinkhole whose awesome beauty inspired Alex Garland to write his novel *The Beach*. At the end of the day you can end your kayak adventure with a beach picnic dinner at the scenic **7 Commands Point**, where hawksbill turtles, whale sharks, rays, dolphins and dugong are often spotted passing to and fro.

Web Resources:

Visit the *Philippines Department of Tourism* website to find out more about El Nido.
www.itsmorefuninthephilippines.com





Image courtesy of the Singapore Sailing Federation



SINGAPORE

● SAILING ALONG ON MARINA BAY

Although the bustling city centre of Singapore might be the last place one would expect to find a vibrant sailing scene, the **Marina Bay** complex has become a hotspot for tourists, families, adventure seekers, and even lunchtime sailing enthusiasts. It's never been easier to set sail, especially with the 'Step on, Step off' package trips where everything is ready to go – all you need to do is to step on the boat, take off, and once you are done sailing just step off! It's a simple 'Plug and Play' method where you simply plug in the sails and you're off. The route, set against the spectacular hi-tech backdrop that comprises the **Marina Bay Sands**, the **Gardens by the Bay**, the **Singapore Flyer** and the rest of the city skyline, allows boaters to glide gracefully onto the calm waters of this freshwater reservoir and take in the breathtaking skyscrapers of the Central Business District and the glitz and glamour of the Marina Bay Promenade. The S\$226 million reservoir project has been extremely popular since its launch and so pre-booking is required for individuals and families seeking an exciting afternoon of fun in the sun.

Web Resources:

Find out about all the exciting activities at Marina Bay by visiting their official website, and make enquiries and bookings via the Marina Bay Sailing official website.

www.marina-bay.sg

www.marinabaysailing.sg



VIET NAM

Image © Gaid P. Kornsilapa

● KAYAKING ON HA LONG BAY

For hundreds of years the calm waters of **Ha Long Bay**, in Northern Viet Nam, were primarily used as a sheltered cove provided for both storm-weary sailors and pirates on the run. Nowadays boats traveling within the bay do so to show off the area's natural beauty, and visitors can enjoy unparalleled views of thousands of karst limestone islands and islets – in a multitude of different shapes and sizes – jutting out of the beautiful ocean waters. And while many large tour boats just make day trips around a small portion of this massive bay, longer trips (many overnight) allow fearless travelers to disembark the boats and do some exploring. Of course the best way to explore the region is by kayak, because these one- or two-person crafts allow you to get right up close to the rock formations and maybe catch a glimpse of the massive hawks lazily gliding overhead in the thermal air currents.

Kayaks are ideal for going where no large craft can go, and there are many scenic stops that can be made within Ha Long Bay. Natural attractions include caves of all sizes, and lagoons that only a kayak can enter,



Image © Gaid P. Kornsilapa

but there are also entire floating villages – with no shortage of souvenirs for sale – as well as deserted beaches and cliffs for climbing.

Web Resources:

For more on this picturesque national landmark, search for *Ha Long Bay* on the *Viet Nam Tourism* website. www.vietnamtourism.com





INDONESIA



Image courtesy of the Indonesia Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy



Image courtesy of the Indonesia Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy

● THE DOLPHINS OF KILUAN BAY

On the Indonesian island of **Sumatra**, dolphins are a regular, playful presence in **Lampung** at **Kiluan Bay**. The bay is a regular migration stop for spinner and bottle-nosed dolphins, and both species are known to regularly jump out of the water in large groups – an amazing sight to witness. To see these dolphins up close, visitors can hire a boatman riding the traditional Lampung craft known as a *ketinting*. This kind of dugout canoe is used by fishermen all over Indonesia, and the boats are initially carved from a single tree trunk, before being outfitted with engines and bamboo side outriggers called *katir*, which balance the craft.

At 6am the boats set off for a day of dolphin spotting and, as each boat can only seat four to six people, large groups are forced to take more than one boat. After an hour-long commute to the target area it's time to play the waiting game as spotters try to sight pods of dolphin leaping above the waves. The best time to experience this hide-and-seek ritual is during the peak dolphin season between June and July. It's almost guaranteed you'll see a dolphin pod.

Web Resources:

Read the *Indonesia Travel* website's page entitled "*Ketinting: the Unique Traditional Slender Boat of Lampung*".
www.indonesia.travel

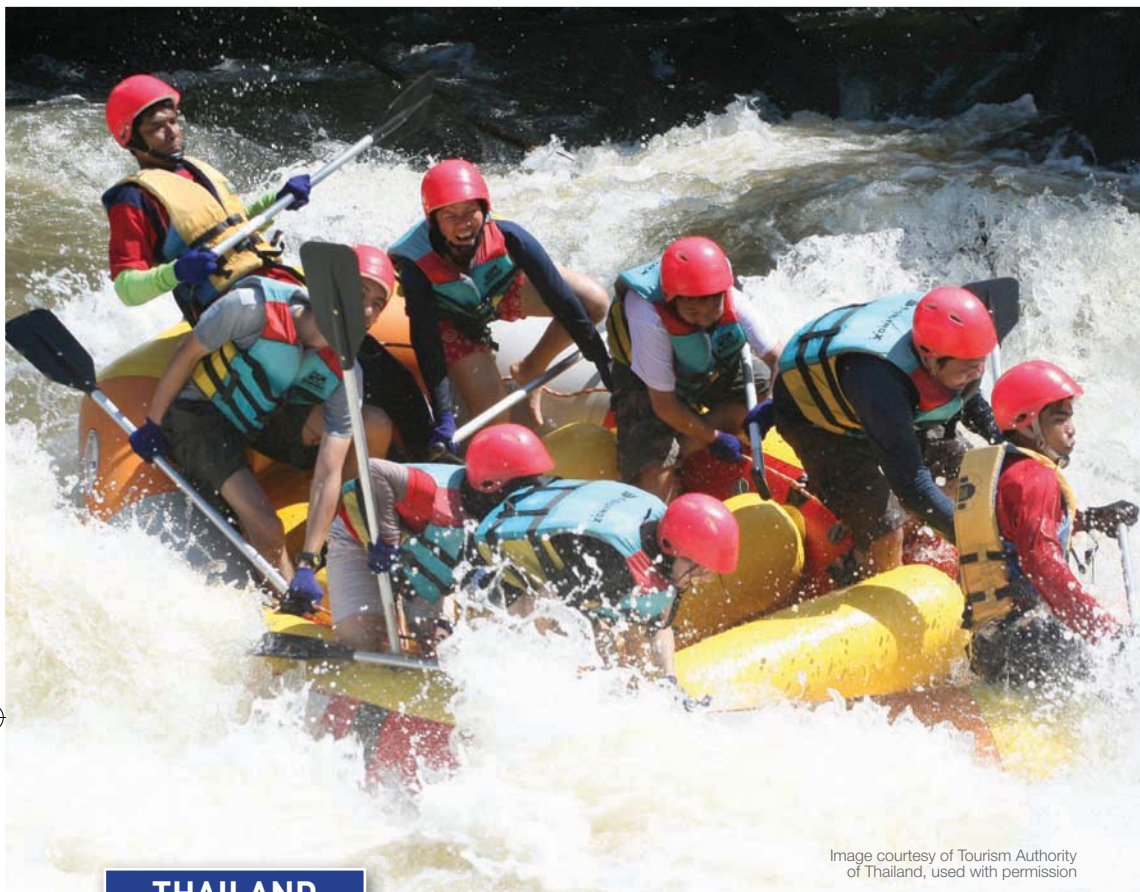


Image courtesy of Tourism Authority of Thailand, used with permission

THAILAND

● RAFTING THE KHEK RIVER

From its source in the **Phetchabun Mountains** in Northern Thailand, the **Khek River** in **Phitsanulok** province travels through a turbulent series of waterfalls and rapids before it empties into the **Nan River**. Rafting season occurs at the height of the rainy season, from June to October, when the water volume rises and the river turns brown from the runoff.

White-water rafting here takes around 3 hours for a distance of 8 km. through the entire 18 exciting rapids with difficulty Levels 1-5. The boat journey starts at Kaeng Tha Kham, small rapids allowing paddlers to practice manoeuvring and navigating the inflatable boat for a while before continuing to the next rapids with increasing levels of difficulty. The best section occurs along the 100 m long Kaeng Yao rapids, the current flows through boulders and ledges, which are submerged under the water in the rainy season. In some parts of the rapid, the water level can be shockingly decreased. The reward is a leisurely float down **Kaeng Thap Khun Tai**, which marks the end of the voyage.

Besides fun, excitement, and challenge, you will see astonishing scenery and lush green trees along the Khek River – one of the best white-water rafting routes in Thailand.

Web Resources:

Find out more about rafting in Khek River, check out adventure.tourismthailand.org.





FISHING ●●

Anglers are bound to get “hooked” on Southeast Asia once they discover the many great sportfishing spots there are to choose from.



Image courtesy of the Indonesia Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy

INDONESIA

● FISHING THE THOUSAND ISLANDS

Located within easy reach of **Jakarta**, and just 45 km north of the Javanese coast, the breathtaking **Thousand Islands** provide a complete change of scenery from the nearby Indonesian capital city, and the clear waters here are home to over 70 coral islands which in turn are home to over 140 species of fish. Anglers looking for good seawater fishing can easily arrange a trip here via the local fastboats and ply the seas off such landmarks as **Puteri Island** and **Pulau Ayer**, looking to snag a barracuda or mackerel on their line before heading back to shore.

Of course coming this far and not setting foot on one of the local islands is a terrible mistake, so be

sure to make an island stop part of your itinerary as well. The more prominent islets here are the place marine tours and zoos, as well as conservation efforts such as turtle breeding programs. Meanwhile **Pulau Pramuka** is where you'll find the **Thousand Islands National Park**, a haven for rare sea species like hawksbill turtles.

Finally, for those who want to stay on dry land, the seaside district in the north of Jakarta has a few fishing facilities of its own. Cast a line off **Pantai Marunda** and you're all set.

Web Resources:

Read the *Indonesia Travel website's official guide*, entitled "*The Thousand Islands: A Sensational Islands Resort*".

www.indonesia.travel

OTHER FISHING HOTSPOTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

THAILAND

PHUKET

Big game sport fishing is huge business on this island in Southern Thailand, where out in the Andaman Sea species such as black marlin, sailfish and king mackerel can be found.

VIET NAM

CON DAO

This island resort area – off the coast to the southeast of Ho Chi Minh City – offers an array of fishing excursions, including tours that teach the art of squid fishing, spearing and traditional Vietnamese cooking.





●● CLIMBING & CAVING

The ins and outs, and ups and downs, of exploring Southeast Asia's amazing network of mountains, cliffs and caves.



Image © Harry Bloom / Creative Commons

LAOS

● KONGLOR CAVE

Enclosed within **Phou Hin Bun National Park** in central Laos, the **Konglor Cave** (Tham Kong Lo) attracts caving enthusiasts eager to see what lies off the beaten track. Visitors to the cave first take a boat ride along a 7 km underground river, drifting past a cavern of massive dimensions. Once inside the main underground chamber – which at its most expansive point rises over 100 m above the underground river and measures 90 m from wall to wall – the gleaming stalactites and stalagmites create an otherworldly atmosphere. After the cave exploration is completed, passengers board the boats again and drift along the river till they emerge into a verdant hidden valley.

To get to Konglor Cave travelers usually venture first to the settlement of **Ban Na Hin**, 283 km south of Vientiane, before heading to the village of **Ban Kong Lo** (another 48 km), which lies near the cave opening. From this village, it's just a leisurely walk through forest to reach the blue lagoon that marks the beginning of the boat trip inside. The dry season between November and April is the best time to visit the cave, even though the river levels are low.

Web Resources:

Visit the official Tourism Laos website and read the section on Konglor Cave.
www.tourismlaos.org





MALAYSIA

● THE CAVES OF GUNUNG MULU

Millions of years of rainfall and runoff have transformed the landscape of **Gunung Mulu** in **Sarawak** into an unforgettable natural attraction. The mountain's foundations contain a wonderland of cave networks, and the massive **Sarawak Chamber** alone measures more than 700 m long, almost 400 m wide, and 70 m in height. Visitors here will also marvel at the massive populations of bats that make their home here, with 12 different species having been recorded. However these highlights are just a sampling of what the area has to offer. Over 290 km of caverns snake through the limestone, resulting in fascinating rock formations including **Racer Cave**, **Black Hands Cave** – whose walls shows prehistoric human hand impressions – and **Deer Cave**, which boasts the world's biggest cave passage.

The caves are open to the public, who are required to register and pay at park headquarters, and hire a guide. The park has 4 “show” caves – with pathways, railings and artificial lighting – but you can also make reservations to enter the “wild” caves as part of a guided adventure tour.

Web Resources:

For more information, see *Gunung Mulu Park's official webpage*, or read about *Gunung Mulu on the official Tourism Malaysia website*.
www.mulupark.com
www.tourism.gov.my

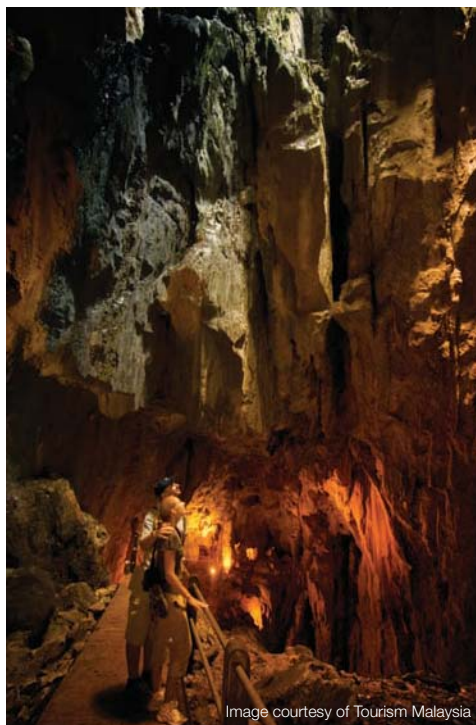


Image courtesy of Tourism Malaysia

PHILIPPINES



Image courtesy of the Philippines Department of Tourism

● PUERTO PRINCESA SUBTERRANEAN RIVER

Beneath the limestone peaks of the **St. Paul's mountain range** in **Puerto Princesa** – on western provincial island of **Palawan** – an underground river travels 8.2 km through a series of massive

cathedral cave interiors, eventually emptying into a picturesque lagoon and out to the sea at **St. Paul's Bay**. Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the river has since become a massive tourism magnet. However reaching and exploring here requires lots of advance planning. From the main city of Puerto Princesa it takes 4 hours to reach **Sabang**, which is where visitor permits are issued at the tourism office.

From here tour operators supply guests with safety gear and illumination, and after a quick speedboat ride – and brief beach crossing – the cave entrance is reached. Visitors then board river boats venture into the cave's visually stunning depths. The giant cathedral interiors reveal intricate limestone formations, while 9 species of bat roost in the vast, dark depths.

Web Resources:

Read the overview of the *Puerto Princesa Underground River on the Philippines Department of Tourism's website*.
www.itsmorefuninthephilippines.com

VIET NAM

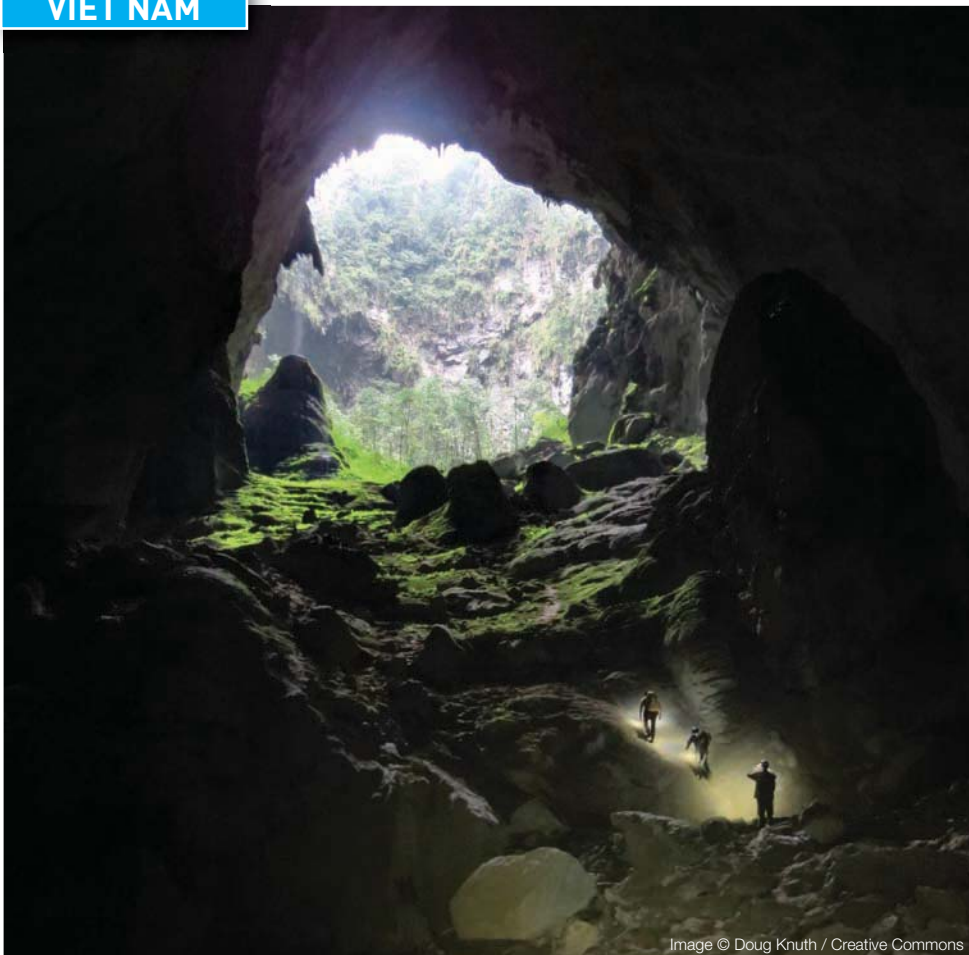


Image © Doug Knuth / Creative Commons

● THE WORLD'S LARGEST CAVE

Viet Nam's limestone terrain is known for its numerous caves, but in 2009 the karst beneath the topsoil of **Quang Binh Province** revealed the biggest surprise of all – a surprise that instantly made waves in the spelunking (cave exploring) community. The discovery of the famed **Son Doong Cave** has stunned geologists, and this subterranean attraction is now officially earned the title of 'the biggest cave known to humanity'. A mere 4.5 km of the cave has been explored so far, and the cave walls have been measured in some sections at over 140 m above the cave floor. In fact everything about this cave is simply gargantuan, with giant stalagmites rising 70 m from the cave floor, gigantic cave pearls the size of baseballs, and a fast-flowing underground river which creates a monstrous reverberating noise through the interior.

Only one tour agency handles trips into Son Doong Cave, although it's booked solid through to 2015 due to the small numbers of tourists that are actually allowed to enter the cave (only 224 per year). The entrance alone requires an 80 m vertical drop in order to reach the first huge passage.

Web Resources:

To see about getting on the (long) waiting list to enter Son Doong Cave, visit the official registration page. www.oxalis.com.vn/son-doong-cave

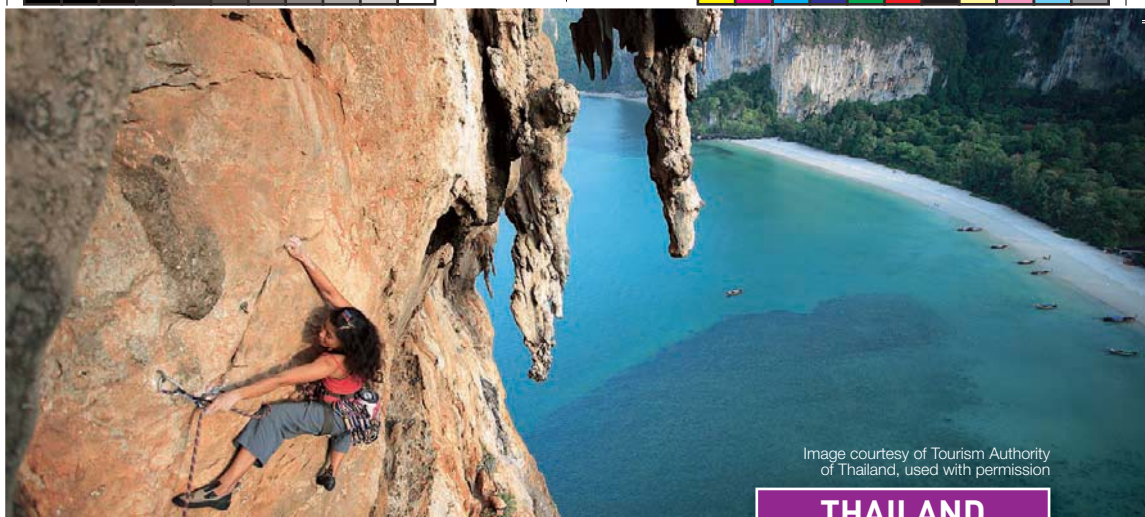


Image courtesy of Tourism Authority of Thailand, used with permission

THAILAND

● RAILAY ROCK CLIMBING

It's no surprise that rock climbers gravitate to Thailand's **Krabi** region, as the limestone cliffs here seem tailor-made for the sport. Hundreds of climbing routes exist on the cliffs along the coast, and on nearby **Railay Peninsula's** surrounding islands rock climbing has become one of the top tourist draws. The climbing crowd tends to congregate primarily on the cliff formations around **Railay Beach**, suitable for novices and experts alike, and **Tonsai**, where the more experienced climbers go for a challenge. Both locations are accessible only by long-tail boat.

Beginner and intermediate climbers have over 700 bolted routes to choose from, with grades ranging from F4 to F8c. Adventurous climbers are also

attracted here by the rocky cliffs that jut out over the sea, permitting ascension without bolts and ropes and the chance to end the climb with a leap into the cool, deep waters below.

The best months for climbing in Krabi occur between November and April, when the rains let up. There are dozens of climbing schools in this region, so if you're new to the sport then try a 3-day introductory course that includes instructors, equipment and insurance.

Web Resources:

Find out more about **Krabi** on the official *Tourism Authority of Thailand* site, and check out *adventure.tourismthailand.org* on rock climbing section.

OTHER CLIMBING & CAVING HOTSPOTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

CAMBODIA

CAVES AT KAMPOT

Just 8 km east of Kampot lies **Phnom Chngouk**, one of Kampot's oldest known cave temples, containing hidden chambers and an ancient red brick Hindu temple resting under a massive rock formation.

SINGAPORE

VIA FERRATA @ ORCHARD CENTRAL MALL

The **Via Ferrata** wall is made up of a fixed-protection climbing wall and path, boasting a well-designed system of cables, staples, ladders and bridges. Find out more at: www.blocx.com

INDONESIA

SUKABUMI

Located on the southern slopes of lush **Mt. Gede-Mt. Pangrango National Park** in West Java, the district of **Sukabumi** is cool and scenic and is a favored area for outbound group activities that include camping, mountain trekking, whitewater rafting, to adventurous caving that descends deep underground into dark cavernous domes with stalagmites and stalagmites.



Image courtesy of the Indonesia Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy



●● DIVING & SNORKELING

In-depth information about exploring Southeast Asia's undersea riches – whether you're a certified diver or a sometime snorkeler.

INDONESIA

● KOMODO ISLAND DIVING

The infamous Komodo Dragon may have brought this Indonesian island group to the world's attention, but the amazing undersea expanse that lies beneath and all around **Komodo Island** deserves equal attention, especially from scuba enthusiasts looking for amazing new opportunities. Divers descending 20 m below the surface will discover colourful corals as well as a massive variety of undersea life, including pygmy seahorses, dolphins, turtles and manta rays. Underwater photographers and expert divers alike will be blown away by the sheer cliff walls of **Batu Bolong** and the gentle, coral-covered slope at **Tatawa Besar**.

The **Komodo National Park's** marine reserve covers over 132,000 hectares of the sea surrounding **Komodo, Rinca, Padar** and other adjacent islands. Beginners should also be warned however that these can be treacherous waters, with strong unpredictable currents.

Web Resources:

*The Indonesia Travel website has a page entitled **Diving Around Komodo Island**, which provides more information on diving providers and transportation.*
www.indonesia.travel

Image courtesy of the Indonesia Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy





BRUNEI



Image courtesy of Brunei Tourism

● WRECK DIVING

The waters off Brunei's coast, near the capital **Bandar Seri Begawan**, are home to about 4,500 hectares of pristine coral reefs. Wreck diving is especially popular here with several sunken vessels – such as the **Cement Wreck**, an old freight ship – lying less than 12 m from the surface. These submerged man-made structures, which include 4 shipwrecks and a few disused oil rigs, have been completely taken over by coral and marine life, providing plenty of attractions for beginners and experienced divers alike. These scuba spots are rich in sea fans, anemones, as well as marine life such as hammerhead sharks, countless groupers, barracuda, jacks and the occasional whale shark.

The reefs are easily accessible from BSB, and visiting during the dry season – between March and October – ensures that the seas will be calmer and the waters less likely to be cloudy from runoff.

Web Resources:

Check out the numerous websites that highlight wreck diving in this region, including the *Brunei Travel Guide*. www.bruneitravelguide.com

VIET NAM



Image © Ilse Reijs and Jan-Noud Hutten / Creative Commons

● HON MUN ISLAND, NHA TRANG

Divers who make their way to **Nha Trang**, located on the beautiful Eastern coast of Central Viet Nam, should make time to stop off at the island of **Hon Mun**. Back in 2003 the area here was set aside as a government protected region, and the more than 350 species of coral and colorful nudibranch have been thriving under the enforced absence of fishermen ever since. These days it's divers, not fishermen, that explore these depths, and they are rewarded with a riot of sea creatures and corals at almost all elevations. The currents here are particularly conducive to coral growth, and larger sea creatures

such as hawksbill turtles and moray eels are easily spotted in the depths.

It's a 40-minute boat ride to Hon Mun from Nha Trang, and there are plenty of dive shops to supply visitors with equipment and/or instruction. The months from February to September provide the best visibility and diving conditions.

Web Resources:

Read about *Hon Mun Island* on *Vietnam Tourism's* official website. www.vietnamtourism.com





Image courtesy of the Myanmar Ministry of Hotels and Tourism

MYANMAR

● DIVING THE MERGUI ARCHIPELAGO

Although they are geographically located in Myanmar, the waters of the **Mergui Archipelago** – a chain of over 800 islands in the **Andaman Sea** – can only be reached by liveaboard dive boats that leave from the nearby Thai ports of **Phuket, Khao Lak** and **Ranong**. The dive sites here have only been open to the international dive community since 1997 so the reefs are still pristine. And with over 36,000 square km of marine territory, much of the area remains unexplored. It requires about 10 days to dive the archipelago's top sites, including mysterious caves, rock walls and massive seamounts and, not

surprisingly, there is an abundance of marine life to see as well.

The liveaboard tours operate from October to May, when water conditions are optimum, and from Thailand the boats stop in Myanmar at **Kaw Thauung** for immigration purposes. Visiting divers must bring passports and a US \$200 visa fee.

Web Resources:

Check out the guide to ecotourism in Myanmar published on the Myanmar Ministry of Hotels and Tourism website.

www.myanmar-tourism.org



Image © chuck.miser (www.ecosea.com) /Creative Commons

CAMBODIA

● SCUBA SCENE IN SIHANOUKVILLE

Cambodia's southern coastline may be small compared to some of its Southeast Asian neighbours, but there's still plenty to see when visiting the

country's diving hub of **Sihanoukville**. This beautiful beachfront resort town is a tourism hub, and the city's many dive centers provide excursions ranging from 2-hour jaunts to **Koh Russei** and **Koh Ta Kiev**, to extended 6-hour trips that journey to outlying, top-flight dive sites such as **Koh Rong Samloem** and **Koh Kon**. Here the coral-encrusted rocks are literally bursting with undersea life, including nudibranch, anemones, and the occasional whitetip shark, while a bit further away diving sites like **Koh Tang** offer excellent visibility even at depths of 30 m.

Visit Sihanoukville during the June to October diving season to ensure optimum underwater conditions.

Web Resources:

The Cambodia Tourism official website has an entire page dedicated to diving in Sihanoukville.

www.tourismcambodia.org



Image courtesy of Tourism Malaysia

MALAYSIA

● UNDERWATER TREASURES OF SIPADAN ISLAND

The scuba diving mecca known as **Sipadan Island**, near **Sabah**, is one of Southeast Asia's premier dive spots. Only 120 visiting permits are issued each day, and dives are permitted only between 8am and 3pm. However these restrictions ensure that the pristine quality of the reefs will be maintained, and once divers make it past these obstacles they'll be rewarded with challenging dive terrain and access to an underwater treasure trove of over 3,000 fish species and 300 hard and soft coral species. The 12 area dive sites include popular spots such as **White-Tip Avenue** (abundance of reef sharks), **Turtle Cavern**, and **Barracuda Point**.

The waters offer a visibility of 20 m or more year-round, with a maximum of 50 m during the dry season (March to October). Visitors usually choose to stay at the resorts in the nearby settlements of **Mabul**, **Kapalai**, and **Semporna**.

Web Resources:

Both the official *Tourism Malaysia* site, and the official *Sabah Tourism* site have information regarding booking dive trips to this region.

www.tourism.gov.my

www.sabahtourism.com



THAILAND



● THE SIMILAN ISLANDS

Thailand's renowned **Similan Islands** are located within a 13,000 hectare national park reserve, about 100 km northwest of **Phuket**. Favourite dive sites include **Koh Similan** with its unspoiled corals and bizarre rock formations, and the deep gorges of **Koh Bangu** that are swarming with colourful fish. Regarded as one of the world's top 10 dive sites, the wonders of this undersea world defy description, boasting over 500 species of both hard and soft coral, as well as creatures like the guitar ray, whale shark, hawksbill turtle and leopard shark.

Diving conditions here are good year-round, with mild currents and visibility between 20 to 30 m. However the Similans are only accessible by boat, so the local diving season occurs between October and May. Liveaboard tours include 4 day trips from **Khao Lak** or **Phuket**, but some shorter overnight trips and day trips are also available.

Web Resources:

Visit the *Tourism Authority of Thailand* website to find out more on scuba diving in Similan National Park.
www.tourismthailand.org



Image courtesy of the Philippines
Department of Tourism

PHILIPPINES

● THE WONDERS OF TUBBATAHA REEF

One of the most precious natural treasures in The Philippines is the difficult to reach **Tubbataha Reef**. Set in the middle of the **Sulu Sea**, about 150 km east of **Puerto Princesa**, this reef is part of a marine protected area. The north atoll is the largest section of the reef, while the south atoll is home to the **Tubbataha Lighthouse** and the popular **Jessie Beazley** reef is roughly 20 km north of these 2 atolls. Serving as a home and feeding ground for sea turtles and reef fish, this destination is a scuba diver's paradise. The diving season lasts only 3 months however – from mid-March to mid-June – but this short tourist season help keep the park's coral healthy.

There are no accommodations in the area so visitors arrange trips via dive operators based in Puerto Princesa. These liveaboards set sail in the evening and reach the park the next morning.

Web Resources:

Find out more on the official Tubbataha Reef webpage.
www.tubbatahareef.org

OTHER DIVING & SNORKELING HOTSPOTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

SINGAPORE

DIVE WITH THE SHARKS @ UNDERWATER WORLD SINGAPORE

Whether you're scuba certified or not, as long as you're 12 years of age or older you can 'swim with the sharks' at **Underwater World**, located on Singapore's **Sentosa Island**. The 90-minute experience will get you suited up, familiar with breathing underwater, and then allow you half an hour underwater time with a horde of sharks and eagle rays.
www.underwaterworld.com.sg

SNORKEL OVER RAINBOW REEFS @ RESORTS WORLD SENTOSA SINGAPORE ADVENTURE COVE WATERPARK

The promise of snorkeling over rainbow reefs is made real at **Resorts World Sentosa Singapore Adventure Cove Waterpark**. This aquatic adventure park provides an enclosed space for snorkelers to glide lazily over colourful coral reefs and say hello to thousands of friendly fish and dozens of friendly rays.
www.rwsentosa.com



●● ENDURANCE EVENTS

Physically fit travelers who want to overlap their visit with an event or challenge that will push them to the limit can find lots in Southeast Asia – whether racing over flat roads or scaling the tallest mountains.



Image courtesy of the Ministry of Tourism of Cambodia, used with permission.

CAMBODIA

● ANGKOR EMPIRE MARATHON

The **Angkor Empire Full Marathon**, a race that begins and ends in front of Angkor Wat's central sanctuary, doubles as a scenic tour of the world famous Angkor temples and even winds its way through the Siem Reap area, past **Banteay Kdei**, **Banteay Srei**, **Bayon**, **Ta Prohm**, and numerous Khmer traditional villages. The marathon offers a unique opportunity to get up close and personal with these ancient temple structures, and apart

from the 42 km main marathon there is also a 21 km half-marathon, a 10 km Road Race, and a 3 km Family Run.

The race is usually held in August, but check the website for exact dates. The competition is also fully certified by both the International Association of Athletics Federations and the Association of International Marathons and Distance Races.

Web Resources:

Visit the official Angkor Empire Marathon website.
www.angkorempiremarathon.org



INDONESIA

Image courtesy of the Indonesia Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy

● COLOURFUL JAKARTA MARATHON

Indonesia's capital city of Jakarta displays a decidedly festive side during the annual Jakarta Marathon when approximately 15,000 runners descend on

the city. The fun-filled race begins and ends at the southwest gate of the National Monument in the city center, and winds through **Pluit** and **Bung Karno Stadium**, passing landmarks like the **Istiqlal Mosque**, **Fatahillah Square**, and the **Hotel Indonesia** roundabout along the way. In addition to the full marathon, shorter race categories are also open including a 21 k half-marathon, as well as 10 km and 5 km road races. Colourful art, music and cultural exhibitions also take place in conjunction with the running competition.

Top competitors contend for substantial cash prizes, and the race usually takes place in October (check the website for exact dates).

Web Resources:

Indonesia Travel has a page about the Jakarta Marathon on their official website.
www.indonesia.travel



LAOS

● LUANG PRABANG HALF MARATHON

The **Luang Prabang Half Marathon** is part sporting competition, part charity event, and part sightseeing tour of one of the nation's most impressive cities. The race accepts no more than 500 competitors, and the route travels past the **Mekong** and **Nam Khan** rivers, as well as some of the city's most notable landmarks. The laid-back, community feel of **Luang Prabang** will enchant racers as they encounter locals cheering them on, and vendors selling local specialties throughout and after the race. Top competitors compete for no prize money at all, as the entrance fee and all other proceeds go to charity.

The race takes place on the morning immediately following the end of Buddhist Lent – usually in October – and apart from the 21 km half-marathon, 7 km and 14 km race categories are also available.



Web Resources:

Visit the official website for information, registration and exact dates.

www.luangprabanghalfmarathon.com



MALAYSIA

● THE KINABALU CLIMBATHON

The sport of 'sky-running' may not be familiar to everyone, but enthusiasts of the sport rate the **Kinabalu Climbathon** in **Sabah**, as one of the major events of the calendar year. This extreme sport is defined as mountain running above 2,000 m, where the incline exceeds 30%, which makes **Mount Kinabalu** prime territory for this kind of competition. The main Summit Race covers 33 km, beginning at the **Kinabalu Park** entrance, continuing up to the summit at 4,100 m, and back down to **Kundasang Town**, and contestants must be able to make it to

the summit in at least 3 hours to qualify. Meanwhile, amateurs are invited to take the less challenging 23 km Adventure Race that only goes halfway up the mountain.

The event usually takes place in mid-October, but check the website for exact dates.

Web Resources:

Register for the races by visiting the *Kinabalu Climbathon* webpage, and visit *Sabah Tourism* for additional information.

www.climbathon.my

www.sabah tourism.com





MYANMAR



Image courtesy of the Myanmar Ministry of Hotels and Tourism

● BAGAN TEMPLE MARATHON

This scenic marathon winds through thousands of temples and pagodas, alternating with pristine views of the Myanmar countryside. Using the historic **Htilominlo Temple** as the start and finish point, runners of the **Bagan Temple Marathon** proceed through paved roads and dirt trails, touring much of **Bagan** and surrounding towns in the process. And unlike overcrowded marathons that take place in vast urban locales, runners in this competition will travel down charming village roads that wind through a countryside littered with 13th-century

pagodas and stupas. The race begins at 6am – as the midday heat and humidity builds up fast this time of year – and runners are reminding to always keep proper hydration in mind.

The competition usually takes in November, and entrants can choose to run the full 42 km marathon, or the shorter 21 km half marathon.

Web Resources:

For registration details and exact dates, visit their *marathon's official website*.

www.bagan-temple-marathon.com

Image courtesy of the Philippines Department of Tourism



PHILIPPINES

● MOUNT APO BOULDER FACE CHALLENGE

Every summer, the highest peak in The Philippines – **Mt. Apo** in **Davao del Sur** – challenges extreme sports enthusiasts to a treacherous 120 km race up the menacing boulder face in an attempt to reach the peak and return within a 24 hour time period. The Boulder Face Challenge requires competitors to bike to the **Tibolo-Kapatagan Junction**, trek up to the **Mt. Apo Summit** campsite, tube down the **Sibulan River** and run through a busy national highway back to the **Sta. Cruz Municipal Plaza** – all in one day! This government sponsored annual race is also part of the **Pista sa Kinaiyahan** (Feast of Nature), held every April, and there's even an eco-tourism slant to the event that includes a clean-up of the trails by climbers from all over the Philippines.

Web Resources:

Visit the official Mount Apo Boulder Face Challenge webpage for more information.
www.boulderface.com

SINGAPORE

● SINGAPORE STANDARD CHARTERED MARATHON

Singapore's marquee running event includes races for individuals, teams, wheelchair-bound participants, and even kids, making it a truly inclusive celebration of sport. However, running the **Singapore Standard Chartered Marathon** is still a significant challenge, as those vying for the US \$50,000 top prize must contend with over 50,000 like-minded competitors. This annual event is held on the first Sunday of December, and runners who go the full 42.2 km to the finish line will be rewarded with a virtual Singapore sightseeing tour, on a route that travels past **Orchard Road**, the **Istana**, **Clarke Quay**, **East Coast Park** and **Marina Bay**. And although Singapore is famous for stifling, year-round humidity, that really just adds to the challenge. They don't call it 'endurance sports' for nothing.

Web Resources:

For more information and registration details, visit the Singapore Standard Chartered Marathon's official webpage. www.marathonsingapore.com



Image courtesy of the Running Society

THAILAND

● MUAY THAI CHALLENGE

Thai boxing, or **Muay Thai**, has a great historical significance in Thailand, but for some it isn't enough to simply watch the sport in its native land – they've got to master it as well. As such, there are a large number of Muay Thai camps that cater to trainees from outside the country, the most popular being found in areas like **Bangkok**, **Phuket**, **Khao Lak** and **Chiang Mai**. All provide professional-level facilities and champion trainers, and though the training can last for as little as 2 weeks, committed students often stay for months or even years.

Extended training immerses athletes into the Muay Thai way of life, but be aware that the training can be intense, gruelling, and even bloody.

Web Resources:

The official Tourism Authority of Thailand website features information on several Muay Thai camps that accept foreign trainees, as well as information about the World Wai Kru Muay Thai Ceremony held every March in Ayutthaya. www.tourismthailand.org



Image courtesy of Tourism Authority of Thailand, used with permission



●● PARASAILING, PARAGLIDING & KITESURFING

Even without a pilot's licence you can still take to the skies of Southeast Asia via parasailing, paragliding and kitesurfing.



MALAYSIA

Image courtesy of Tourism Malaysia

● KISS THE SKY IN BUKIT JUGRA

The scenic hilltop known as **Bukit Jugra**, in the Malaysian state of **Selangor**, is just a 90-minute drive from **Kuala Lumpur**. It sits at an elevation of about 350 m above sea level, and from this vantage point visitors to **Flight Park @ Jugra** are invited to strap themselves to a winglike parachute contraptions called paragliders and leap into the void. The adventure begins once you strap yourself into the apparatus, where you will ride in tandem with a trained instructor. With favorable winds, you might find yourself gliding up to an altitude of 900 m, enjoying unparalleled views of the countryside,

including the **Langat River** and the **Straits of Malacca**. The excitement lasts just 15 to 20 minutes, and before you know it you'll be floating gently back to earth.

Like all paragliding experiences, availability depends on the weather being good, and the management will cease paragliding activities if the forecast takes a turn for the worse.

Web Resources:

To book a flight call +60 (0)14-718-7826, or find them on Facebook by searching Jugra Flight Park, Banting.





Image courtesy of the Philippines Department of Tourism

PHILIPPINES

● KITESURFING IN BORACAY

Kitesurfing is a sport that depends on consistent wind, and plenty of it, and that's the reason why kitesurfers from all over the globe head to **Boracay Island**, off the northwestern tip of **Panay Island**. In addition to great beaches and an exciting party scene, Boracay also happens to play host to some high-profile international kitesurfing events and competitions. On the eastern side of the island lies **Bulabog Beach**, which is tailor-made for the sport. Beginners looking for instruction will find dozens of kitesurfing schools in the vicinity. Lessons usually last 3 hours, and prices include rental of appropriate equipment and safety gear. After that it's just a matter of diving in and letting the boisterous breezes do their thing.

Bulabog's waters are best between November and April when the moderate trade winds blow, the perfect time for beginners to learn to control the wind.

Web Resources:

Read the Philippines Department of Tourism's overview of kitesurfing in Boracay.
www.itsmorefuninthephilippines.com

OTHER PARASAILING AND WINDSURFING HOTSPOTS

IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

VIET NAM

PARASAILING IN MUI NE

Already one of the most beautiful beaches in Viet Nam, **Mui Ne** is also a haven for sea sports such as windsurfing and parasailing, especially come the end of March, when weather becomes warmer.

THAILAND

PARASAILING IN HUA HIN

Although the beaches of **Hua Hin** are best known as places of rest and relaxation, windsurfing, kitesurfing and especially parasailing have become popular recreational activities in this area.

INDONESIA

PARAGLIDING DOWN SCENIC TEA PLANTATIONS FROM PUNCAK : "THE PEAK" NEAR BOGOR

From Puncak you have a grand panoramic view on the valleys below with mountain peaks on the side. And what can be a more thrilling experience with your adrenaline rising than majestically gliding down amidst this grand panorama.

BRUNEI

SERASA WATERSPORTS COMPLEX

The lively **Serasa Beach** – a mere 10-minute drive from **Muara** – is home to the **Serasa Watersports Complex**, providing amazing facilities for water sports such as windsurfing.



●● HIKING & CAMPING

Take on some of Southeast Asia's wildest and most untamed trails, and spend the night if possible.

BRUNEI



Image courtesy of Brunei Tourism

● ULU TEMBURONG PARK HIKING TRAILS

At **Ulu Temburong National Park** tourists are usually taken on carefully guided tours and only see a fraction of the over 500 sq. km park, but even then it's still possible to see a riotous assortment of jungle life. The undisputed tour highlight is the 60 m high canopy walkway, accessible from ground level via 20 ladders, which provides a bird's-eye view of the arboreal wildlife and the aged dipterocarp trees that make up the thick rainforest canopy. Those who wish to stay in the park overnight can do so at the **Ulu Ulu Temburong Resort** and from here you can pursue various jungle trails, some of which end at waterfalls deep in the forest (so bring a swimsuit).

Getting to the park and the resort is part of the adventure, and includes taking a water taxi from **Bandar Seri Bagawan** to the town of **Bangar**, then driving to **Batang Duri** where a longboat then travels 12 km along the **Temburong River**.

Web Resources:

Find out more by visiting the Ulu Ulu Temburong Resort online.
www.ululuresort.com



CAMBODIA

● TREKKING VIRACHEY NATIONAL PARK

The **Virachey National Park**, which occupies over 3,300 sq. km of protected area in **Stung Treng** and **Rattanak Kiri** provinces, protects some of Cambodia's last pristine rainforests. As the largest of Cambodia's 7 national parks, this reserve is home to native species such as Asian elephants, sun bears, Sambar deer and great hornbills. Trekking is a great low-impact way to see this natural environment, and tours can be organized from the park's eco-tourism information center in **Ban Lung**. Guided tours take between 2 and 8 days to complete, depending on the package, and experienced English-speaking guides take hikers past natural features such as the **Phnom Veal Thom** grasslands and the **Chour Preah** rapids. Visitors are also invited to explore the local culture with visits to tribal villages on the park borders.

Ban Lung is a 12-hour bus ride from Phnom Penh, and the park itself lies 50 km from the town. It can be a long journey when rains affect the roads.



Image © Lukas Bergstrom / Creative Commons

Web Resources:

The Cambodia Tourism official website has a section dedicated to Virachey National Park and its community-based ecotourism initiative.
www.tourismcambodia.org

Image courtesy of the Indonesia Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy



INDONESIA

● IJEN CRATER

Ijen Plateau, also known as “**Kawah Ijen**” is highly recommended to mountain buffs and hikers. The plateau was at one time a huge active crater, 134 sq km in area. Today, Ijen is a quiet but active volcano, and the landscape is dominated by the volcanic cones of **Ijen** (2,368 m asl) and **Merapi** (2,800 m asl) on the northeastern edge of the Plateau, and **Raung** (3,332 m asl) on the southwest corner.

The magnificent turquoise sulfur lake of Kawah Ijen lies at 2148 m above sea level and is surrounded by the volcano's sheer crater walls. The vent is a source of sulfur and collectors work here, making the trek up to the crater and down to the lake every day. Sulfur collectors hike up in the morning and return around 1 pm when the clouds roll in. They carry shoulder basket of pure sulfur from a quarry on the lakes edge under the shadow of the sheer walls of the crater. The mineral at Kawah Ijen is purer and is worth commercial exploitation despite the horrendous labor involved: Javas homegrown sulfur is a natural source of sulfuric acid, in great demand in the oil-refining business and in the production of fertilizers.

Web Resources:

See Indonesia Travel's official webpage on hiking and camping
www.indonesia.travel



LAOS

Image © Fraser Reid/
Creative Commons



countryside. Trekkers who venture onto the paths that wind through the countryside will chance upon villages populated by the region's 3 main ethnic communities – the Hmong in the highlands, the Khmu in the middle heights, and the Lao at the lowlands. For multi-day treks, visitors have the opportunity to stay at one of these ethnic villages and experience life like a local. Key natural landmarks along the trekking trails include the **Mekong** and **Ou** rivers, the **Kwang Si Waterfall**, and the **Pak Ou, Tam Ting** caves.

The safest trekking is during the dry season, between November and April, though the first few months of the wet season, between May and July, usually just entail light evening rains that don't affect the overall experience.

● TREKKING IN LUANG PRABANG

The historic city of **Luang Prabang** may be the most visited tourist destination in Laos, but tourists who only stop to see the colonial architecture are missing out on the exquisite beauty of the surrounding

Web Resources:

Find out more by visiting *Tourism Laos' official webpage on trekking in Luang Prabang.*
www.tourismlaos.org

MALAYSIA



Image courtesy of Tourism Malaysia

● HIKING THROUGH TAMAN NEGARA

Founded in 1938 and covering an area of over 4,300 sq. km, **Taman Negara** is one Malaysia's biggest national parks. Its boundaries encircle what remains of the world's oldest tropical forest, a 130-million-year-old arboreal sprawl at the foot of the **Titiwangsa Mountains**. Several endangered animal species also make this park their home, including the Sumatran rhinoceros, the Asian elephant and the Malayan tiger. A series of jungle trails emanate from the park's headquarters, and treks of up to 9 days are available – working through forests and up **Gunung Tahan**, the highest point in Peninsular Malaysia (almost 2,200 m above sea level). The length of trek depends on your

appetite for adventure, and overnight jungle treks spend an evening in **Elephant Cave**.

From Kuala Lumpur, Taman Negara can be reached by a series of train or bus rides, before a boat takes travelers down the river to the park headquarters at Kampung Kuala Tahan.

Web Resources:

For details how to get to *Taman Negara*, and how to book a trekking expedition, visit the official websites of *Taman Negara* and *Tourism Malaysia*.
www.taman-negara.com
www.tourism.gov.my



Image © Gaid P. Kornsilapa



MYANMAR

● FROM KALAW TO INLE LAKE

The hiking trails from the hill station of **Kalaw** to **Inle Lake** vary in length, but all of them offer an unforgettable countryside experience as trekkers pass through farmlands that used to grow opium but now specialize in cash crops like cabbage, potato and canola. On the way you'll explore villages occupied by the Taung Yo, Danu, Palaung and Pa-O native tribespeople, and you'll even spend the night at one of these authentic Myanmar homes. Throughout the journey the landscape changes, as forested ridges and gently sloping valleys give way to vegetable farms and hilly terrain, finally culminating at the waters of Inle Lake. The short 2-day treks take the most direct but least scenic path, while the 5-day tour covers more of the surrounding countryside.

Once at Inle Lake, you can take the ever-popular boat tour that makes the rounds of the shoreside villages, or you can stay on dry land and rent a bicycle to meander through the area's quiet rural roads.

Web Resources:

Read the overview of the Inle Lake region on the Myanmar Ministry of Hotels and Tourism website.
www.myanmar-tourism.org



PHILIPPINES

● THE MOUNTAINS OF SAGADA

Hiking through **Sagada** means traveling through the remote **Cordillera Mountains**, but that same isolation is what has so successfully preserved the indigenous culture of the peoples here. From the tourism office in town visitors can book starter sight-seeing tours that include taking a dip in **Bokong Falls**, making a hike to **Echo Valley** to see the hanging coffins, or taking in the breathtaking view of rice terraces from the **Mt. Kiltapan** viewpoint. However, if you're feeling extremely adventurous, there's itineraries that will have you wading through rice paddies to marvel at the **Bomod-ok Falls**, gazing at the grand rock formations inside **Sumaguing Cave**, exploring the caverns of the **Sumaguing-Lumiang Cave Connection**, and enjoying a picnic by **Lake Danum** before climbing **Mount Ampacao** to admire the breathtaking panoramas.

Sagada stays moderately cool most of the year, but the months of December and January are particularly plagued by icy winter winds that make the mountains colder than usual.

Web Resources:

For more information check out the Philippines Department of Tourism's overview page on the Mountain Province, including Sagada.

www.itsmorefuninthephilippines.com





Image © Singapore National Parks Board (NParks)

SINGAPORE

● TREETOPS OF THE MACRITCHIE RESERVOIR

Singapore's **Tree Top Walk** is a free-standing suspension bridge spanning **Bukit Peirce** and **Bukit Kalang**, the 2 highest points in **MacRitchie Reservoir**, and it offers a bird's eye view of the surrounding secondary rain-forest as well as a panoramic view of the nearby **Upper Peirce Reservoir**. Completed in 2004, this 250 m walkway has a high point of 25 m, and from this lofty vantage point, visitors are able to enjoy unobstructed views of some 80 species of birds, colugos (flying lemurs) and long-tailed macaques. It's also worth noting that

the walkway along the bridge travels in one direction only, and the entrance to the bridge is from Ranger Station via Peirce track.

The TreeTop Walk is located approximately 4.5 km from the MacRitchie Reservoir Park, and 2.5 km from the carpark at Venus Drive. Therefore, a there-and-back trip, including the TreeTop Walk itself, might take 3-5 hours depending on your walking pace.

Web Resources:

For more information on the opening hours of the walkway, check out the *Singapore National Parks Board's official page on Tree Top Walk.*
www.nparks.gov.sg

THAILAND



Image courtesy of Tourism Authority of Thailand, used with permission

● JUNGLE TREKKING AND CANOEING IN KHAO SOK

Tourists can choose to explore **Khao Sok** either on foot or by elephant-back. Khao Sok is a rainforest in **Surat Thani** province, Southern Thailand. See the miraculous variety of wildlife and plant life coexisting in much complexity. This area has given birth to many unique species of plants; such as, Bua Phut which has the largest flower in Thailand. There are also many different animals; such as, Asian tapir, Bengal tiger, Clouded leopard, Gaur, Banteng, and more than 200 different birds. Travel takes about 2 hours. Along the way you will be able to see the way of life of the villagers that follow the sustainable living philosophy. Canoeing along **Khlong Sok** is also recommended activity.

The evening is the perfect time to take a car ride to view the mountains at sunset and catch the villagers during their evening activities; such as, shopping at the small local market or watering their vegetables and other agricultural activities. Such lifestyles are so pleasant and charming.

Web Resources:

Visit adventure.tourismthailand.org for info about Khao Sok National Park



●● SURFING

Surf's up everywhere you look across Southeast Asia – from established destinations like Kuta Beach in Bali, to newly discovered regional hotspots.



BRUNEI

● SURFING IN PANTAI TUNGKU

The relatively undeveloped beach here is one of Brunei's lesser-known sports spots, and is marked by a giant boulder-strewn breakwater. Located near the **Empire Hotel**, surfers who venture here enjoy the low, easy waves of **Pantai Tungku**, which average about 3 to 4 ft. in height, interspersed with the occasional high barrel wave.

This little oasis is not very well known to the surfing public yet, but already Brunei's small ex-pat surfer community makes regular visits, particularly between October and March when the waves top out at 5 feet in height. Surfers don't need to swim out too far from the beach to start riding the incoming waves, and there are few if any rocks or sharp corals to watch out for.

The beach itself has a lovely, laid-back feel and it's always a good time here, as the locals are always friendly. For those wanting to make a full day out of it, beach BBQs and evening bonfires are the way to go.

Web Resources:

Search for *Pantai Tungku* on the *Wanna Surf* website to get weather forecasts, location information, and to read the reviews forum.
www.wannasurf.com





Image courtesy of the
Indonesia Ministry of Tourism
and Creative Economy

INDONESIA

● G-LAND: CHASING THE LEGENDARY WAVES OF PLENGKUNG BEACH, BANYUWANGI

Indonesia is most proud of the **Plengkung Beach** at the eastern tip of Java Island. Aside from its enchanting natural beauty, the long curving coast line here is recognized as one of the best surfing sites on the face of the earth.

More familiarly known among world's renowned international surfers as **G-Land**, the beach, located in the Banyuwangi Regency, is a paradise for surfers offering some of the most outstanding waves in the world. For, Plengkung Beach is dubbed "The Seven Giant Waves Wonder" by international surfers for its legendary 7 rolls of waves that can reach up to 6 m high.

The popular name G-Land itself is said to have been given by surfers, where the G is said to refer to 3 different meanings. The first is for "Great" as an illustration of its outstanding waves. The second is for "Green" or "Green Land" since it is situated near the lush green tropical forest of Alas Purwo. Third, the G may also refer to "Grajagan", the nearby beach which is also the starting point to reach Plengkung by boat. There are also others who suggest that the name G-Land was given because of the curving coast of Plengkung Beach that resembles the letter "G".

Web Resources:

Read about surfing on the official Indonesia Travel website.

www.indonesia.travel



Image © Jojo Nicdao /
Creative Commons

PHILIPPINES

● SURFING A HOLLYWOOD LEGEND

The legend behind **Baler** began after the filming of the epic 1979 movie *Apocalypse Now*. In the film the character played by **Robert Duvall** marvels at the quality of the local surfing in Viet Nam, but he was really pointing to Baler, where the movie was shot. When the film crew finally departed they left the surfboards behind and the locals began learning how to use them thus spawning a new tourism attraction.

Located in the province of **Aurora** – about 230 km northeast of Manila – this lengthy coastline faces a wide expanse of the Pacific Ocean. Every September this region plays host to the Aurora Surfing Cup, a 3-day competition in 4 divisions.

Sabang Beach is the favorite among beginners, offering fun waves and a sandy bottom, while experts prefer the challenge of **Cemento Beach**, where waves can swell up to 14 feet high from October to February. Further north is **Lindy's Point** where experienced surfers enjoy the strong, sharp waves churned by the meeting waters of the river and the Pacific.

Web Resources:

Read an overview of Baler on the Philippines Department of Tourism official website.
www.itsmorefuninthe Philippines.com



Image courtesy of Tourism Authority of Thailand, used with permission



THAILAND

● PHUKET'S BEST BREAKS

The island of **Phuket** gets some fabulous surf waves along its western coast, and between April and November surfers take advantage of both the less crowded beaches and the larger swells, making areas such as **Kata Beach** a veritable surf central, with relatively consistent swells that can rise up to 2 m. Not surprisingly, an array of surf shops, and even the **Phuket Surf House** surfing simulator, have sprung up along this laid-back beachfront to meet the growing interest in all things surf-related. The right-handed reef break at **Kalim Beach** provides a challenging alternative, with waves that rise to up to 3 m, and super long wave rides. Other beaches worth checking out in Phuket include **Surin Beach**, **Nai Harn Beach**, and **Kamala Beach**.

The southwest monsoon season may bring several days of winds, and the great swells that come with them, but the winds eventually drop and you may get glassy calm seas for several days following. Of course, there's still plenty of fun distractions in Phuket to occupy these off-days.

Web Resources:

Find out more about the Surf House by visiting their website, and find out more about Phuket on the official Tourism Authority of Thailand site.

www.surfhousephuket.com

www.tourismthailand.org

VIET NAM



Image © Bernard Tey / Creative Commons

● RIDING MY KHE BEACH'S MONSOON WAVES

Set at an ideal, easy-to-reach distance from the city of **Da Nang**, the 30 km arc of **My Khe Beach** retains a dogged surfing following that enjoyed a renaissance when Vietnam opened up to tourists. Surfing lovers can wait till the northeast monsoon rolls around

between November and March; the waves re-form after hitting a trough, then hit a shore break - this results in about 1- to 2-foot waves that longboard users will appreciate.

The typhoon season between June and October produces large but short-period wind swells - fun if you're able to catch them. Whatever time of year you arrive, you'll only need board-shorts to take on the waves, as the temperature only reaches a low of about 25°C during the cooler dry season.

The increased uptake of high-class resorts along the coast have cramped the laid-back atmosphere of My Khe Beach a little bit, but you'll still find cheap places to stay, eat, and rent boards from if you wander down the coastline. Even non-surfers will appreciate My Khe's gently sloping white sand beach, clear waters and sunset view.

Web Resources:

For the closest city to My Khe Beach, read Vietnam Tourism's page on Da Nang.

www.vietnamtourism.com



Image courtesy of Wave House Sentosa

SINGAPORE

● SURFING AT WAVE HOUSE SENTOSA

Even though Singapore's beaches lack optimal surfing conditions, the resourceful residents of this city-state have risen to the challenge posed by local surfers looking for a place to catch a wave. Through a combination of sheer ingenuity and creativity, **The Wave House** on Singapore's **Sentosa Island** is Asia's first artificial wave-generating environment. The facility uses water pumps and curved pool walls to create what nature provides in abundance elsewhere. The pumps can churn up to 600 cubic meters of water per minute, and are thus able to recreate gentle breaks for beginners, and more challenging tubes for seasoned enthusiasts. The surfboards used lack the rudder fins that are so vital on sea-going surfboards, but as far as adrenaline and instinct are concerned, visitors to this hi-tech sports hub will experience all the excitement that accompanies regular surfing.

The 'Wave House Experience' also eliminates some of the natural dangers involved with surfing – namely sharks, sharp rocks, and undercurrents – and to complement the wave-riding experience, this venue also doubles as a party hotspot complete with a fantastic, lively restaurant.

Web Resources:

For more detailed information, visit the *Wave House Sentosa* official webpage.
www.wavehousesentosa.com

OTHER SURFING HOTSPOTS

IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

MALAYSIA

CHERATING SURFING

Located to the north of **Kuantan**, and about 3 hours south of **Kuala Terengganu**, a surf scene has grown up around **Cherating Beach**. The surf season coincides with the monsoon season when the winds and waves pick up.



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www.tourismlaos.org



www.bruneitourism.travel



www.tourismcambodia.com



www.tourism.gov.my



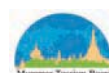
www.yoursingapore.com



www.tourismthailand.org

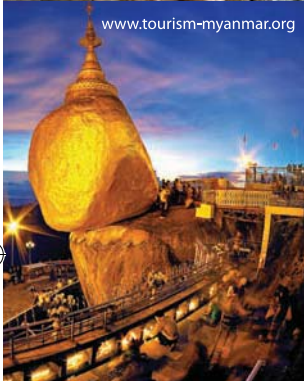


www.vietnamtourism.com





www.indonesia.travel



www.tourism-myanmar.org



www.visitthephilippines.com



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CAMBODIA

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Lot 3A, St. 169, Veal Vong Commune,
Prampi Makara District, Phnom Penh,
Kingdom of Cambodia
www.tourismcambodia.org



INDONESIA

Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy
Jl. Merdeka Barat 17, Jakarta 10110
Indonesia
www.indonesia.travel



LAO PDR

Department of Tourism Marketing, Ministry
of Information, Culture and Tourism
P.O. Box: 3556, Lane Xang Avenue,
Vientiane Capital, Lao PDR.
Tel: +856-21-212248
www.tourismlaos.org



MALAYSIA

Tourism Info Line: 1 300 88 5050

Ministry of Tourism
Malaysia No. 2, Tower 1 Jalan P5/6,
Precint 5 62200 Putrajaya
www.motour.gov.my
www.tourismmalaysia.gov.my





MYANMAR

Ministry of Hotels and Tourism
Building No. 33, Nay Pyi Taw,
Union Of Myanmar.
Tel: 95 67 406129, 406061
www.tourism-myanmar.org
www.myanmar-tourism.org



THE PHILIPPINES

Department of Tourism
JB Building, 351 Senator Gil Puyat Avenue,
Makati City, Philippines
www.tourism.gov.ph
www.itsmorefuninthephilippines.com



SINGAPORE

Tourism Court 1 Orchard Spring Lane
Singapore 247729
Tel: 6736-6622
www.yoursingapore.com

Tourist Information Hotline
at 1800-736-2000 (toll-free in Singapore),
or +65-6736-2000 (from overseas).
Hotline operates Monday to Friday
(excluding Public Holidays), from 9am to 6pm.



THAILAND

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Tel: (+66) 2283 1500
Fax: (+66) 2356 0746
www.mots.go.th

Tourism Authority of Thailand
1600 New Phetchaburi Road, Makkasan,
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Fax: (+66) 1672
www.tourismthailand.org



VIET NAM

Viet Nam National Administration of Tourism
80 Quan Su Street, Hoan Kiem District, Ha Noi
Tel: (84-4) 3942 3760
Fax: (84-4) 3942 4115
www.vietnamtourism.com





●● FAST FACTS

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



BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

Official Name: Negara Brunei Darussalam
Area: 5,765 km²
Population: 393,162
Capital: Bandar Seri Begawan
Languages: Malay, English, Chinese
Religions: Islam, Buddhism, Christianity
Currency: Brunei Dollar (BND)



CAMBODIA

Official Name: The Kingdom of Cambodia
Area: 181,035 km²
Population: 14 Million
Capital: Phnom Penh
Languages: Khmer is the official language, however English is widely spoken and understood.
Religions: Theravada Buddhism
Currency: Riel (KHR)



INDONESIA

Official Name: The Republic of Indonesia
Area: 1,904,569 km²
Population: 237,641,326
Capital: Jakarta
Languages: Bahasa Indonesia is the official language and various ethnic languages, however English is widely spoken and understood
Religions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and others
Currency: Indonesian Rupiah (IDR)



LAO PDR

Official Name: Lao People's Democratic Republic
Area: 236,800 km²
Population: 6,521,000
Capital: Vientiane
Languages: Lao, English, French, and Various Ethnic Languages
Religions: Buddhism, and others
Currency: Kip (LAK)



MALAYSIA

Official Name: Malaysia
Area: 329,847 km²
Population: 27,000,000
Capital: Kuala Lumpur
Languages: Bahasa Melayu, English, Chinese Dialects, Other Regional Dialects
Religions: Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Taoism, Hinduism, Sikhism, and others
Currency: Ringgit Malaysia (MYR)



MYANMAR

Official Name: The Republic of the Union of Myanmar
Area: 676,577 km²
Population: Over 60 Millions
Capital: Nay Pyi Taw (Administrative City)
Languages: Burmese, however English is widely spoken and understood
Religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and some Animism
Currency: Kyat (MMK)



THE PHILIPPINES

Official Name: Republic of the Philippines
Area: 300,000 km²
Population: 98,580,949
Capital: Manila
Languages: Filipino (based on Tagalog), English, 8 major dialects and other regional dialects.
Religions: Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Buddhism
Currency: Philippine Peso (PHP)



SINGAPORE

Official Name: Republic of Singapore
Area: 715.1 km²
Population: 5,312,400
Capital: Singapore
Languages: English, Mandarin, Malay, Tamil, and others
Religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Taoism, and others
Currency: Singapore Dollar (SGD)



THAILAND

Official Name: Kingdom of Thailand
Area: 513,115 km²
Population: 67.4 million
Capital: Bangkok
Languages: Thai
Religions: Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and others
Currency: Thai Baht (THB)



VIET NAM

Official Name: Socialist Republic of Viet Nam
Area: 331,211.6 km²
Population: 88,772,900 (2012)
Capital: Ha Noi
Languages: Vietnamese
Religions: Buddhism, Catholicism, Cao daism, Hoa Hao, Protestantism, Islam
Currency: Dong (VND)

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