

2009

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Thailand Tourism Development  
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# Asean<sup>+</sup>

Travelling Guide Book  
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Thailand Tourism Development Research Institute



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## TRAVELLING GUIDE BOOK

### 2009

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The ASEAN Travelling Guide Book in your hand is an outcome of the ASEAN Collaborative Tourism Research Project, initiated by the Thailand Research Fund (TRF) under great collaboration of ASEAN and the Royal Thai Government and jointly undertaken by ASEAN tourism stakeholders in all sectors namely governments, businesses, academics and communities. The Thailand Tourism Development Research Institute (TRI) is a key coordinator for moving the project to success by funding and giving opportunities for Thai researchers to collaboratively undertake the research on tourism positioning of 10 ASEAN nations, China and South Korea and finally create ASEAN tourism positioning to attract more

# Before a Journey

tourists to come to this region. Along the way of researching path, the researchers are requested to write traveling memoirs to invite visitors to share experiences they have had. All destinations appeared in the guide books are sincerely recommended by ASEAN, China and South Korea governments and all concerned peoples. Please do not miss once in a life time to visit them.

TRI really hopes this ASEAN Travelling Guide Book will be your trusted travelling compass for you to see and sense the real **“Cultural Diversity with Warm Hospitality in ASEAN”**. Take my hand and come with me now...

**Therdchai (Ted) Choibamroong, Ph.D.**

Project Director,  
ASEAN Collaborative Tourism Research Project  
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Research Institute (TRI)

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The Royal Thai Government





# ASEAN<sup>+</sup>

TRAVELLING GUIDE BOOK

2009





# ASEAN :

## Cultural Diversity with Warm Hospitality

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The ASEAN is one of the most visited regions in the world reporting record visitors' arrivals over the years. Refusing to rest on its laurel, the 10-member region has made a consistent stride to maintain both its appearance and essence which have enriched the experience of visitors for many years. Undisputedly, the ASEAN is well-positioned to deliver to guests what comes naturally to the region and its people; the common diversity with the human touch. My travels on my occasions have spanned the region and the saying that "the best is closest to heart" reigns supreme.



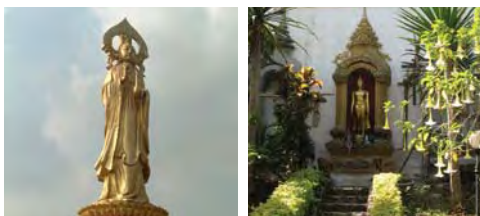
The recollection of my intra-ASEAN trips works in geographical pattern from West to East, kicking off with the Golden Land.

On the world tourism map, Myanmar may be given less prominence than it deserves. And a blessing in disguise it has been for this country rich in geographical, cultural and ethical diversities.

Despite what has been reported about Myanmar, the country has managed to preserve its world-old charm, as I am privileged to have experienced with the kind of wide-eyed excitement.

The Golden Land, as Myanmar looks on the exterior, sums up a rather evocative sense of mystique and reclusion. Too much of the beauty of Myanmar exists in textbooks and not enough of it, it seems, has been unraveled and appreciated.

My journey took me to Yangon (otherwise known as Rangoon), the first point of contact shrouded by the aura of the colonial past. This city of five million people runs a parallel universe; a busy business district set against the silhouette of the famous Shwedagon Pagoda, a religious heart of the predominantly - Buddhist Myanmar. Monks and novices in maroon robes walk slowly toward the pagoda after collecting alms in the morning. The vast plaza bordering the towering golden pagoda is rendered small by the sheer number of pilgrims and visitors who come in their hundreds to pay their respects to the Lord Buddha's relics enshrined in the pagoda. Serenity comes from the sound of solemn chanting by monks and prayers uttered



by people united by faith. Many faces look almost aglow with contentment knowing they are physically and spiritually close to the holy place of Buddhist worship.

My recollection is vivid in my mind of a Myanmar man coming over to a group of foreign visitors at the pagoda to help them clap their palms together in a gesture of reverence to the Lord Buddha. I couldn't help reaching into my satchel to grab a camera and took a snap shot. Human faces tell the best stories.

Yangon previously served as the seat of government and it is where a lot of the country's government offices and educational establishments are located. A stroll down tree-fringed boulevards lends one the impression of the bygone era of Burma, as the country was once known, harking back half a century. Row after row of British colonial buildings stand a test of time and modern development.

I unfolded my map under the cool shade of a tree as I figured out my way to the Bogyoke Aung San Market or the Scott Market. I flagged down a crowded bus which I shared with about 50 commuters, mostly men who displayed amazing agility hanging on to the last steps of the bus without any bother for the tails of their traditional sarong-style 'Longyi'. The bus was packed but fellow passengers were kind enough to spare me a tiny space to squeeze in.

Countless turns and intersections later I arrived at the market. Facing the shops, I found the array of products on sale to be simply mind-boggling.



From handicrafts to the premium-grade jade to typical light-weight Myanmarse slippers, the market catered to all shopping needs and purse sizes. I came away with a few hand-woven cloth bags and wooden cases for holding name cards at prices friendly to bargain hunters.

The next day I journeyed north of Yangon to Bagan, adamant to trace to the historical origin of the country. Bagan was the first capital of Myanmar for over two centuries from 1044 -1286 AD. The city is monumental to the Myanmar rulers' faithful beliefs to Buddhism as they commissioned thousands of temples, pagoda and stupas to be built on the eastern bank of Ayeyarwady River, one of the country's lifelines and a main transport route. The immensity of many brick structures worn by the elements over time speaks volume of how profound religious devotion and will to harmonize the nation of allethnic backgrounds, from the Shan state in the North to the Karens in the South, could surmount all odds.

From one ancient capital to another, the ASEAN is the showcase of many, a colorful history. Another fascinating cradle of cultural origin in the region is in the land-locked Laos admired by so many visitors for retaining the integrity of its way of life and heritage. Vientiane may be the country's commercial and administrative hub but it is Luang Phrabang which captures the essence of life on the slow lane.

I was fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to travel to this World Heritage site and when I stepped off the plane, it was as though time had

stood still. The journey into the heart of the old capital was already a window to one of the lesser-touched cities by tourist hands. The leisurely pace at which the local people go about their daily business had mellowed visitors down a beat or two.

I marveled at the passing scene of Buddhist temples and soon lost count of them. There are many such temples of historical significance and the declaration of Luang Phrabang as a World Heritage site is a welcome reprieve which helps secure the floodgate against modernization. The temples form the hearts and soul of the Laos people and the monks who reside in them are the moral authority of the communities.

A major attraction of Luang Phrabang is the majestic Royal Palace which gives visitors a rare glimpse of Laos' past, transporting them back to the time when the country was ruled by the monarchy once revered as 'Chao Cheewit,' or literally the owner or master of one's life. Outside the palace grounds, girls giggle as they ride their bicycles alongside one another to school dressed in the typical wrap-around school uniform.

The next morning, I woke up at the crack of dawn to offer morning alms to monks. I was told that all I needed to bring with me was cooked sticky rice in a bamboo-woven container. People, mostly elderly women, had gathered by the roadside and a grandmother had gestured me to sit on her mat as we waited for the monks to make the round. When the monks were filing past, people scooped the rice in small portions and shaped them with effortless dexterity into balls which they dropped into the monks' alms bowls. The men and women promptly put the hands together in graceful motion to pay respects to the monks. My only curiosity was where the monks would find the dishes to take with the rice. It transpired later that the people would follow the monks to the temples to provide the dishes afterward.

To a large extent, Laos is the green oasis of Southeast Asia. A lot of the places are sparsely populated and most local villagers would shake their heads in response to a simple request for direction to the nearest internet café. It is a comforting thought that the globalization has not reared its ugly head in the outlying areas of the country, at least for now.

I have always been fascinated by the ability of the Laos people not only to co-exist but be at one with nature. The southern portion of the country is home to many feats of natural attractions, the most exemplary of which is the Khone Pha Pheng waterfalls, nicknamed the Niagara of the East. These are the largest waterfalls of the lower Mekong. The immensity of the water volume which rushes down the cascades and disappears into misty depth can be witnessed from the east bank of the Mekong River near the village of Baan Nakasong. The confluence of the three cascades of the falls provides a perfect spot for villagers to lay their fishing nets and with abundant fish stock, there will always be food on the table. The villagers take what they need from the river and share the surplus with the neighbors, reinforcing a sense of community and the close-knittedness.

Laos is indeed a chest of many hidden treasures. Up in the North lie vast fields popularly referred to as the mysterious Plains of Jars in the Xieng Khouang province. Hundreds of what resemble large stone jars are scattered across open fields which were heavily shelled during the Vietnam War. The old metal scraps from the war became building materials for some local houses, which demonstrates the ingenuity of villagers in turning atrocity into opportunity.

Laos, as did most of its Southeast Asian neighbors, has been scarred by war but the wounds have healed and the country is emerging stronger than ever.

To the East of Laos is Vietnam whose economic prosperity is slowly overshadowing its warring past. Nonetheless, the Vietnam War has become a permanent fixture in the country's long history and it has been one of the magnets for visitors eager to learn how Vietnam had pulled through its darkest period.

Vietnam has so many sights and sounds which appeal to visitors without being exoticized. Perhaps, a sensible springboard point to explore the country is Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon. I arrived in the old capital of South Vietnam before the war culminated in the unification of the country. The city breathes the air of French colonial nostalgia with buildings from that era standing proud in many district quarters alongside the gleaming modern office blocs.

The French influenced not only architecture but also the local taste. I was not disappointed to find local fast food stalls hawking the baguette bread stuffed with the fillings of local meat and condiments adapted to the taste buds of Vietnamese. To complete the meal, I ventured further along a busy alley and stopped at a small eatery for a piping hot Pho noodle soup of a gastronomic proportion.

Geographically speaking, the city is close to the Mekong Delta which earns its name as the rice bowl of the country for its fertile grounds where nutrients from the mighty river have deposited. I jumped at the chance to indulge in the way of life of the delta communities for a day by dropping by a village settlement called My Tho. Before long, I hopped aboard a sampan (flat bottomed wooden boat) on a tour of the waterways and visited orchards and sampled some juicy tropical fruits.

There was also the Chau Doc riverside town showing off a fine blend of architectures of the ancient Cham, Khmer and Chinese.

After I was back in Ho Chi Minh City, I made it a point to go on an excursion to the famous Cu Chi Tunnels, which are remnants of the Vietnam War. They form an extensive network of underground passages which stretch as far away as Cambodia. From Ho Chi Minh City, I headed north to Hué. A short flight later I was in what has been described as the city of open-air museum, Vietnam's historical crown jewel studded with magnificent temples, pagodas, palaces and tombs. Many monuments were listed as the World Heritage sites. My attention instantly turned to the imperial complex which features the impressive structures making up the Thien Mu Pagoda and the tombs fit for kings.

Not far from Hue is a city frequently mentioned in travel brochures. The journey to Danang itself is a destination. The scenery along the route crisscrossing the valleys and mountains was breathtaking, which worked wonders as a diversion from the little dizziness I felt while the bus negotiated the curves and bends on the road. A woman seated next to me smiled and suggested I take a sniff of her inhalant, an offer which I politely declined. I told her she would be notified if I should need a sick bag.

The bus was nearing its last lap of the journey and the sight Danang came into view. The city is a perfect blend of nature and old cultures, accentuated by such attractions as the Cham Museum and China Beach.

Vietnam is another country steeped in distinct history highlighted by landmark historical ruins and I was led to one of the best-kept secrets at My Son, an hour drive from Danang. The My Son Sanctuary sits within an imperial city which rose from the 4<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century during the Champa dynasty. A quiet walk through the sanctuary opens one's eyes to a system of connected temples and towers made unique by the red brick designs. The towers form the central structures of the whole design exhibiting the formidability and divinity of the imperial rulers.



The sanctuary bears the obvious Khmer influence of neighboring Cambodia.

Leaving My Son behind I made my way to the capital Hanoi, the name closely identified with the man who was the war hero, revolutionary, prime minister, president all rolled into one. Ho Chi Minh or Uncle Ho, as he was dearly called by his people, led the movements that defeated the French and the United States in the wars that liberated the country. In his honor, Saigon was renamed Ho Chi Minh city and his mausoleum was built in Hanoi.

To reach the mausoleum or other places of interest on foot may be an impossible challenge and it is not necessarily a question of distance.

The streets of Hanoi are scenes of organized chaos plied by hundreds of motorcycles and I was at my wit's end trying to figure out how best to cross the road without being run over. A university student emerged from a crowd of pedestrians and instructed me in English that I should walk across the road without stopping and the motorcycles will skirt their way around me. I held my breath, marched straight into the traffic oblivious to the horns and never looked back. I repeated the routine over the next several intersections and survived to recount the experience with friends back at the hotel.

The next morning I set off for the majestic One-Pillar Pagoda and Quan Thanh Temple. Later in the day, I decided to go on a tour of the Temple of Literature, the country's first university, which I read about as having preserved the genuinely Vietnamese architectural integrity. It was indeed a place well worth a visit.

Wherever one is in Hanoi, the French colonial buildings are always within a close proximity. Some have been turned into restaurants and hotels and a concentration of such buildings is common in the old French quarter near the idyllic Ho Hoan Kiem

Lake, a backdrop of a picture-perfect ending of my trip to Vietnam that epitomizes the romance of travel.

It surprised even me that all the time I crisscrossed Vietnam I did not buy a single piece of souvenir. The memories of the towns and cities were etched in my mind and I suppose there is nothing I need to get hold of to help me remember the country by. A mere hop over the border is another tourism gem renowned the world over. A casual mention of Cambodia usually spurs the ghastly images of war and tales of human tragedies and untold sufferings. But the country is also the birthplace of one of the world's great civilizations.

Many seasoned travelers who fell in love with Cambodia have echoed the same view that the country is best experienced overland and after canceling the flight I booked earlier to Siem Reap, I drove from Bangkok to the border district of Aranyaprathet opposite Cambodia's bustling border trading town of Poi Pet. Unfamiliar with the geography and road conditions in Cambodia, I arranged for a chauffeur-driven vehicle to transport me from the Thai border to the wondrous Angkor Wat, a coveted dream destination for the intrepid adventurers looking to unlock the Far East mystique.

A certain inexplicable feeling of excitement and anxiety washed over me as I sank into the rear seat of the all-terrain vehicle that would shuttle me back through times to the ancient Khmer Empire of Angkor Wat. The drive to Siem Reap got off to a rather smooth start and soon potholes were rocking the vehicle. But the bumpy ride was no distraction to the scene of huge expanses of lush green paddy fields interspersed with overflowing canals. Children plunged from an improvised bamboo platform into the water creating splashes upon impact that drew bursts of laughter from friends queuing up for their turn. The roar of our vehicle's engine turned their heads and the soaked children flashed their unfeigned smiles and waved frantically

to us. I returned the waves and uttered my broken greeting words in Cambodian to them.

Four hours into the journey and I edged closer to the fringe of Siem Reap which serves as a gateway to the stone complexes of Angkor.

I checked in at a hotel and retired early for the night to ensure my battery is fully recharged for the see-and-die trip to Angkor the next morning.

My vision of the Angkor temples had existed only in text format prior to the trip after an extensive rearing about the archeological ruins which became a lost city following the decline of a once powerful and prosperous empire. The temples of Angkor covered in a thick jungle around the massive Tonle Sap Lake were discovered in 1860 by French explorer Henri Mahout who sparked an exploration rush with historians and explorers streaming to the lost world they once thought was just a legend.

The complexes were built between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries to encompass the imposing brick towers and stone temples. The principle and most visited temple within the Angkor boundary is the Angkor Wat and I was awestruck by its size, beauty and history.

I could not hide my excitement to finally come face to face with the monumental structure believed by many to be the work of god. Before crossing a moat surrounding Angkor Wat I heard from behind a nearly hoarse voice of a petite Khmer girl hug ging a bunch of lotus flowers. 'Sua Saduey,' she said and switching to a heavily-accented Thai, she persuaded me to buy the flowers to be placed as an offering on the altar when praying to a Buddhist image. I bought three of the sweet-scented lotus flowers and treaded on the cobble-stone path leading to the entrance of the Angkor Wat.

The sight before me could not be more magnificent; a gigantic beehive structure which fits the definition

of the supreme centerpiece of the Angkor architecture. King Suryavarman II, revered as a divine figure, had commissioned the temple to be built sometime between 1113 and 1150, demonstrating his unrivalled might. I traced the steps of the old Khmer court attendants by venturing deep through the covered gallery and into the inner section of the temple. I completely lost track of time marveling at the mass of bas-relief carvings, the most elaborate of all being those of the dancing Apsara, or celestial nymph. Statuesque as they were, the Apsara carvings which grace the stone walls look so exquisite in details that they appear surreal with the headgears and the costumes almost flowing in the breeze. The bas-reliefs on the walls of the temple signify the fundamental philosophy and beliefs based on the relationship between human and god.

The smell of burning incense sticks pervades the central tower where I made a steep, death-defying climb up the narrow steps to the top level. The rationale behind the design was to force those seeking audience with the king to crawl up the steps and in doing so, to be made visible as though they were kowtowing the king.

Another magnet of the Angkor complexes is a stone's throw from Angkor Wat. The Bayon Angkor Thom, constructed on the order of Jayavarman VII between 1181 and 1220, is a walled city adorned by the recognizable stone faces of Bayon, some believing them to resemble the image of an ancient Khmer king. I almost froze with admiration for builders of the temple complex which is an example of the typically classic Khmer architecture.

Further away from the Bayon are other Angkor-era temples such as the extraordinary Banteai Srei which groups temple buildings together and is home to the rare carvings in pink sandstone.

At the Baphuon, I exhausted the memory card in my camera taking shots of what has been termed as the distinctive pyramid temple belonging to the Udayadityavarman II period between 1050 and 1066. The archeological statement is in the carvings of the 131-foot reclining Buddha. Buddhism had made advancement to the region where Hinduism had been a force of religious dominance.

I was immersed in the visual feast of the Angkor cultural and historical extravaganza. It was a civilization re-lived and re-told.

While there is truth in the saying that the cultural and historical wealth of Southeast Asia constitutes the mainstay of the grouping's tourism attractiveness, the region also has its cosmopolitan and care-free, fun-loving side to speak of. Malaysia immediately comes to mind at the mention of such description.

The country is a multi-hued fabric of many cultural threads and strands woven together and characterized by the ethnic diversity that is also part and parcel with social unity. The population that is the flesh and blood of Malaysia comprises the Malays, the oldest indigenous group of whom are the ***bumiputera***, or “princes of the soil,” the Chinese whose ancestors migrated to the country on the lure of riches awaiting them in the South Seas or Nanyang, the Indians who cling to their unique way of life themed around the Hindu temples, cuisine, and colorful garments, as well as the ***Orang Asli***, or “Original People,” who are the tribal inhabitants of Malaysia. The intermarriage between the Chinese and the Malays produced a generation of the *nonyas* and *babas*, credited with imparting unique traditions. It is little wonder that the catchy tag line ‘Malaysia, Truly Asia’ needs no convincing of its merit at all.

Malaysia is one of the region's economic success stories and nowhere is more apparent than the

country's commercial heart, Kuala Lumpur.

At Kuala Lumpur International Airport, I was treated to the ultra-modern arrival facilities before breezing through the immigration and customs checkpoint. The train had shuttled me to downtown KL in comfort with only negligible hassle.

My itinerary of the KL visit was absolutely packed. I had to ensure I left no stone unturned in exploring the city which prides itself as the melting pot of the East and West. The fact that I've been to KL a few times before failed to dampen my anticipation for a bedazzling revisit.

The hotel I picked to be my accommodation for the next few nights in KL was centrally located and I was never far away from the city's shopping paradise and always on the pulse of Malaysia's vibrant culture.

I am a believer of cultural interaction and to witness this first hand, my fingers were scrolling the map for the Central Market which made its debut as a wet community market. It is now a nerve centre of the Malaysian arts and crafts where I was spoiled for choice of activities on offer at the shops set up under the award-winning art-deco structure. I literally tried my luck having my fortune told and left rather disappointed with my star. I needed some cheering up and my eyes were fixed on the batik paintings, which topped my shopping list of souvenirs to take home. The Malaysian puppet plays were being performed to a crowd of eager audience and I could not get enough of this charming street entertainment.

When I exited the market, it was already early evening and my biological clock sounded an alert with a stomach rumbling. I decided it was time to dash to my usual open-air food hawker around the city centre which comes alive at night teeming with hordes of hungry mouths. My nose became my eyes as I was led by an appetizing smell of Satay,

the charcoal-grilled skewered meats. The vendor was fanning the flame which seared the succulent chicken on both sides and the smoke generated from the grill worked its hypnotic effects with seats in the stall filled up quickly. My order came with the sweet and tangy peanut sauce and vinaigrette side salad which I savored with palatable pleasure.

After a satisfying dinner, my next stop was the Petaling Street night-market, the ideal place for the purchases of gem and sparkling stones and jewelry. I spent a few hundred Ringgits on the genuinely Malaysian-produced pewter vases which would be enviable New Year gifts.

The next day, I made a connection with Malaysia's architectural past with a trip to the Sultan Abdul Samad Building, the 1897 edifice expressive of the seamless combination of the Mughal, Moorish, Arab, and British neoclassical architectures, adorned by the gleaming copper dome and clock tower of the Sultan Abdul Samad. In the beginning, it was the headquarters of the British colonial administration. What amazes me is how architectural facets that are worlds apart can be constructed under one roof under a single identity.

My afternoon in KL was free to pursue my touring agenda of the modern facade of Malaysia. To catch the glimpse of the city, it is best to do so from the bird's eye view from the top of one of the world's tallest buildings, the Petronas Twin Towers. Rising 1,400 feet above Kuala Lumpur's skyline, it affords visitors the sweeping vista of the capital city through the huge panes of glass all around. The towers have come to symbolize Malaysia's unprecedented pace of economic advancement of the last couple of decades.

The latter portion of my Malaysian holiday I dedicated to the nature-based excursion to the world's oldest rain forest in the state of Sarawak. Landing in Kuching, the capital of Malaysia's largest state, I was high-spirited as I was booked for a multi-mode

transport by shuttle van and a longboat ride through the Bako River which is a natural threshold to the Bako National Park.

Off the boat and I was in the embrace of the forests of all types imaginable and I could not help but draw a deep breath of cool, crisp air. The park unveils the mixed dipterocarp forest, peat swamp forest, and thick mangrove forest and bordering the forests were sandy bays contrasted by the rocky, color-patterned headlands and steep cliffs marvelously shaped by erosion into sea arches.

The forest trek was indeed a rewarding end to my short but memorable tour of the country which adds brightness to the kaleidoscopic Asean.

The region's prosperity has a great deal to do with its geographical uniqueness and down at the very tip of Peninsular Malaysia is where another robust economic engine which never seems to lose steam.

Singapore has a short history as an island nation but the modest background is made up by its glorious achievements in international trade and financial exchanges envied by so many countries. The city state presents itself as another crossroad between East and West and it is here in the squeaky clean and peaceful environment towered by skyscrapers that Singapore reveals its soft and artistic side.

On one of my countless trips to Singapore, I decided to enter the city state from an unfamiliar angle. A Malaysian friend drove me from Johor Bahru and we crossed into Singapore via its northern border and on this particular route we shared traffic with Malaysian workers heading to Singapore for work and Singaporeans making a brief journey to Johor Bahru for a weekend retreat.

The friend dropped me off at my accommodation, the tallest hotel in the city state, and to my delight, the key card was slated for room 55 which was appropriately cornered allowing me a 180 degree



panorama of the Marina Bay on the left, the central business district at 12 o'clock marked by a mushroom of high rise office buildings and somewhat off to the right the shopping mecca Orchard Road. These were the grounds I would cover.

Singapore's determination to shed off its perceived uptightness is apparent in the investment of the Esplanade, the world-class theatre on the Marina Bay. The half-durian structure opposite the iconic Merlion has set stage for Broadway-calibre performers of arts and shows. I had pre-booked the ticket to see one of its acclaimed shows, the *King and I*, and came away mesmerized by superb theatrical performance heightened with the aid of the sophisticated sound and visual technology employed in the hall.

From the Esplanade, I traced my way back to the hotel through the network of air-conditioned underpasses with the built-in shopping arcade, which helps factor out all the fatigue from the long walk and revs up the stamina from the irresistible allure of window shopping. I caught the ultra-fast and efficient MRT subway to riverside Clarke Quay and started sauntering the area in search of a place to sip a glass of frothy cold beer and unwind. Light jazz music was played in a pub next door and I had myself a feast for the ears. It looks like Singapore is finally letting its hair down.

When in Singapore, eat what the locals do and the country's signature, if not the national dish, is none other than the chicken rice. I excused my way into a small restaurant near the legendary Raffles Hotel where seats in almost every square feet of the eatery space are occupied by tourists and workers at lunch break. One of the patrons of the restaurant, a soft-spoken middle-aged Chinese lady, did not think I was presumptuous when I asked her if she knew what was in the recipe that held the secret to the dish's tastiness. She tore off half a notepad in her bag and jotted down the ingredients while explaining to me the do's and don'ts in choosing

the right chicken or the fermented bean paste for making the sauce. Before running off to her office, she left me address of a website of resources and references for chicken rice aficionado.

After a delicious and educational lunch, it was time to be whisked off to another of Singapore's attraction icons, the Sentosa. I never thought that beaches, theme park, tropical resorts, natural park and heritage centre could all roll into one destination. The crowd-pullers include the Mouth Viewing Gallery Deck on level 9 of a giant Merlion which is a larger replica of the real one near the Marina Bay, the heritage centre in which the history of Singapore is narrated and played out in the exhibition of wax figures, and of course, Asia's largest oceanarium, the Underwater World. The enjoyment of the Sentosa afternoon could never be taken for granted as it puts playground fun in perspective.

Rounding off the Singapore trip is the shopping extravaganza. After stopping at the ethnic quarters of the city; the China Town, Little India and Arab Street, the advertisements of the much-anticipated arrival of the sales season had me racing down to Orchard Road in the hopes of grabbing discounted book purchases, some new shirts and shoes and perhaps a travel trolley bag to replace my worn-out Samsonite, bruised and battered from years of travelling. I emerged from the subway near Wisma Atria building and was swamped by shoppers who thronged both sides of the long strip of the road flanked by major department stores located shoulder to shoulder. Anything from the latest electronic gadgets to brand-name apparels at flagship boutiques can be found at the next traffic light. I went into one shopping mall and out of another and in half a day I burned a deep hole in my wallet from the bargain hunting but it was every dollar well-worth spending. Singapore certainly has not lost its crown as one of the region's leading shopping magnets.

It may be hard to visualize that just south of the

bustle of Singapore, the aptly named 'Emerald Belt of the Equator' has added luster to the Southeast Asian tourism allure. The planet's largest archipelago of more than 17,000 islands, 6,000 of which are uninhabited and in their purest state, is Indonesia's gift to visitors.

Probably Indonesia's global name in the holiday resort category is Bali which lies between Java, the most populated island, and Lombok which is a relatively laid-back hideaway island. I chose accommodation on the famous Kuta beach, defying advice of some friends who felt I should book a quieter spot on the island. But I wanted to observe the life on the beach and be where the action is. Of the numerous accolades Bali has earned from being a holiday heaven that it is, one must be about its reputation as the ideal location for surfers who come from all corners of the world to ride on the waves in the exotic island.

What sets Bali apart from most other islands is not the tropical beaches and the deep blue sea but the people whose way of life appears untainted and unharmed for centuries by presence of foreign visitors.

The Balinese people cling firmly to their unique and deep-rooted Hindu culture in the world's largest Muslim population. Their daily lives revolve around festivals, ceremonies and merit-making activities at magnificent temples and palaces. The Balinese are artisans by blood, possessing exceptional skills of the hands. On my way back to the hotel from lunch, I pulled over at a roadside village where carved wooden objects of impeccable quality and handcrafted tortoiseshell ornamental items are produced under thatched-roofed pavilion for the visitors to see. I had the permission of the carver in his 50's to try my hand at chiseling a small block of wood into a human face. He grinned broadly at my helpless fumbling as I let the wood the size of my wrist slip through my fingers. He came over and with the gentle demonstration he took less than

20 minutes carving and sanding the surface of the face, which I gladly purchased. The small monetary token of appreciation for the labor will keep alive the indigenous craft of Bali.

The villagers also demonstrate the weaving of gold and silver-threaded fabrics, called the Songket, and the simpler but equally stunning embroidery work.

Later in the afternoon, I was given a complementary ticket to what promised to be an unforgettable rendition of the Kecak or the Monkey Dance. A hundred or more male dancers sit on the ground and emulate the monkey's movements surrounding a bonfire. They are led by a priest and the rhythm of the spectacularly choreographed entertainment dance is set by the dancers beating their palms against their chests and other parts of their bodies and alternately shouting and chanting with hands stretching out and pulling back in. It was a Balinese cultural feat of the highest originality and beauty.

Balinese dances, some performed to the tune of the orchestra of the gamelan, are usually held to appease the gods and goddesses to relieve sufferings or ease the effects of poor harvests.

From a devout Hindu island, I ferried across to Yogyakarta in Java for an encounter with the grandeur of a Buddhist sanctuary. The sanctity of Buddhism is observed at the mist-shrouded 8<sup>th</sup>-century, hill-top Borobudur surrounded by volcanic elevations and lush green fields. The temple served the purpose of being a place for praying and the name Borobudur, with a World Heritage status, suggests its location, a mountain of terraces. Standing on the peak of the hill 40 meters from the ground is the Great Stupa surrounded by smaller stupas, some housing Buddha statues. I was overwhelmed by the splendor of the Buddhist bas-reliefs touted as the most complete of its kind in the world spanning six kilometers.

I was enthralled by the view of ladder rice fields

spreading out as far as the eyes could see. Driver of the van I rented stepped up to the plate when I inquired about where to sample the Javanese rice and the local cuisine. He pulled up on a gravel drive-way of his modest two-bedroom, wooden family home and invited me to a freshly-prepared lunch. We sat round the dishes of tantalizingly appetizing grilled fish and of course, the steamed locally-harvested rice, to go with it. I declined the driver's suggestion that I eat with a spoon and I followed the lead of the driver's youngest daughter and used my fingers to scoop the rice. Soon, I was helping myself to a second serving, much to the obvious delight of the host.

The fascinating feature of Indonesia is not limited to its religious contrasts. While the country is surrounded by the sea, it also has the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia. Toba Lake, 100 kilometers long and 30 kilometers wide on the Sumatra Island, was created from a massive eruption more than 75,000 years ago of the Toba volcano which later collapsed and formed the caldera which has transformed into the lake. In the middle of the blue waters of Lake Toba is the island of Samosir, which is a land mass surfacing from the bottom of the volcano, I climbed the crest of the lake overlooking the picturesque body of water and was stunned by the hands of mother nature which have sculpted the fiery, violent volcano into a placid lake.

Indonesia owes its geographical and cultural diversities to the vastness of the country. But size alone does not necessarily determine the magnitude of a country's tourism assets as is the case with the oil-rich sultanate of Brunei nestled on the island of Borneo. The country lays claim to be the oldest Malay state and lives up to its image as 'The Kingdom of Unexpected Treasures.'

Brunei may occupy a dot on the Borneo Island but the variety of tourism attractions it has in store for visitors is by no means small. Positioned it self

as a good, clean fun and safe vacation stop for families, the country of 372,000 people is blessed with abundant natural resources and the forests to woo visitors. The country is tapping into its almost in-exhaustible reserve of natural resources in its vigorous drive to increase its exposure in the world tourism arena.

For me, the time or the penchant for a long sweat-soaked adventure is a rarity. But the urge to explore the well-preserved rain jungles of Brunei had me packing my under-used athletic shoes and a bottle of odorless mosquito repellent.

Bandar Seri Begawan is the seat of government of this predominantly Muslim country. And during my journey into the city, I could not take my eyes away from the shining golden mosques which are the regal reminders of the strong Islamic faith which is the binding force that holds the nation together.

The most striking building is none other than what has been reputed as the largest palace in the world, the Istana Nurul Iman, belonging to His Majesty the Sultan. The opulence of the palace which combines the contemporary and traditional Islamic architecture makes the statement of the country's economic wealth.

But I was soon departing the luminous capital for the Temburong district with its dense forests where I did, and not in a metaphorical term, a balancing act treading mindful steps on the elevated walkway above the forest canopy. After looking down at what appeared to be a bottomless depth of the forest, it dawned on me that the walk was not for the faint of heart. The ranger who guided the forest tour chaperoned us along the nature trail while lowering his voice to tell us that the untouched forest expanse also was the habitat of a myriad of wildlife species from egrets to crocodiles.

As we navigated the trail maze back to the boat to leave the forest, rafters were heard erupting in

synchronized screams of thrill. They were seen rafting down the Tamburong River and were close to being drenched from head to toes by the time they returned to the river banks.

Another river which defines centuries of living culture of the people of Brunei is the Brunei River on the banks of which the extraordinary water villages or Kampong Ayer sprout up. Documentaries have been made depicting closeness of the families settling in the cluster of villages built above water which becomes their chief transport route divided by invisible lanes plied by motor boats. I was most enthusiastic to peek into Brunei's answer to suburban development where more than 30,000 people have taken up residences.

The villagers in the Kampong Ayer communities, which have been compared to Venice, live in mostly stilt houses connected by foot bridges and alleyways. The houses are served by public utilities and I did not come across a single house not equipped with at least a 25-inch television set. The village is in essence a small town where people could shop at a store, receive medical attention at clinics and report disturbances at the local police branches. The communities also have their own mosques, schools and even floating petrol stations.

The friendly faces of the Kampong mingled in the communities. I was introduced by a friend to his relative, a lawyer who is a long-time resident of the kampong. He explained in fluent English that it was easier to build a house above the river than felling trees or the mangrove forests, which are breeding grounds for marine animals, to accommodate the housing construction. After our chat, we popped in to a local tea shop where I indulged in the scrumptious local sweets of sticky rice roll wrapped in banana leaves and it was washed down with the aromatic tea. The refills were free.

A few shops down the wooden walkway, we slipped into a brassware shop and for a number of ashtray and candle stand purchases I made, I was given a miniature dagger called Kris as a souvenir.

The Brunei trip would not be complete without a visit to the district of Kuala Belait, the heartland of the country's 'black gold.'

In the town of Seria, I watched the 'nodding donkeys,' an endearing reference to the oilrigs at work pumping up the country's principal export commodity. There, the Oil & Gas Discovery Centre showcases the system of drawing the oil which earns Brunei its billions and feeds the rest of the world with the supply of energy.

Unlike oil, the enormous tourism potentials remain untapped in Brunei and the sultanate is on course to gaining its foothold in the industry which in turn enhances the dynamism of the regional tourism further.

There is no denying that Southeast Asia is in its own right a global village with cross cultural interactions casting influences that shape traditions and customs of member countries. Some countries are historically connected to the West which has left prints on the cultural tapestry, having direct bearing on anything from language, clothes and even food.

One such country is the Philippines.

The Philippines has received its share of mixed cultures from the presence of the people who came to the country. The Negritos were the first to have migrated from Borneo and Sumatra followed by the Malays, the Spaniards and the Americans although many Filipinos see themselves as the 'sprinkling' of the Chinese, American, Spanish, and Arab blood, an ancestral legacy of the long colonial rule and visits of seafaring merchants and traders.

There was so much written and experienced



which reinforced the image of Filipinos as being the boisterous crowds of the region who are also passionate about life. I find such popular perception of the Philippines to be absolutely right.

The definitive character of the people of the Philippines is long associated with their eagerness to celebrate the fiestas which happen through the country all year round. The Filipinos organize the celebrations to cheer up when they are down and to spice up the mood further when they feel upbeat. The bottom line is ultimately to keep the party momentum from fading.

My travel to the Philippines started out surprisingly sunny despite a forecast of effects from an imminent October typhoon brewing in the Pacific. I caught a flight from Manila to the southern island of Mindanao and from there, travel by road to Zamboanga, otherwise known as the 'City of Flowers' on the western tip of the island. The city was gearing up for its annual sea boat racing festival of Hermosa, which has been circled on the calendar as a must-see event of the year.

The race scheduled for the second week of October was a grand-scale affair. I joined the thousands of spectators converging at a beach and securing the best seats in the regatta. The colorful native boats or vintas were floating on the crystal-clear water as oarsmen were listening intently for the blow of the whistle. Once the race was underway, the vintas were quick to build up speed and were already neck and neck half way to the finishing line. The cheering echoed louder with spectators up on their feet and raising their hands high in the air while shouting the names of their favorite teams. The winning team finally beat the first runner-up by the nose. My team came third but I also won a consolation prize myself when fans of the winning vintas handed me a cold beer and patted me on my back.

Being a country broken into 7,107 islands of all

sizes, the Philippines has every right to regard itself as the beach capital of Asia. Bordering the China Sea and the Pacific Ocean, the country has virtually endless choice of powder-white beaches to choose from. From Hermosa, I journeyed north to Boracay, a destination in the northwestern tip of the island of Panay.

The beach at Boracay was every bit as I had imagined it; a long sandy stretch set against the azure blue waters. The sand felt powdery on my feet and the ripples of the sea simply glittered in the sun. The translucent water was inviting although lazing around in the cool breeze under the swaying shade of coconut trees is more my cup of tea.

On the topic of coconuts, a flashback winds the clock back to several years ago when I was lost in the streets of downtown Manila. Dehydrated and direction-blind, I grabbed my only hope of a thirst-quencher and went straight to the vendor at an intersection corner hawking fresh coconut juice. The vendor was armed with a razor-thin piece of bamboo stick and carved the pulp of the coconut from its shell with it. The juice was sealed inside what resembled a soft-shell crab version of the coconut and I prodded a sheepish boy customer to show me how to drink the juice without a straw. He looked puzzled, possibly by my naivety, and then proceeded to bite a little hole in the pulp and began kiss-sucking the refreshing juice. Voila.

During one of my earlier visits to the Philippines, I was awe-inspired by the preservation of the historic town of Vigan in Ilocos Sur. Vigan borrowed its name from the taro plant grown commonly on the banks of the Mestizo River. Within the Unesco-recognised Spanish colonial town, perhaps the masterpiece of the Vigan architecture is the St. Paul's Metropolitan Cathedral, which according to historians, was built by the Augustinians between 1790-1800. Expressing the so-called 'Earthquake Baroque' architectural style, the cathedral is hailed as an out-standing

example of building with the Chinese touch. I could not help but admire the preserved state of the original church interior features which remained intact.

There are also Philippines' own baroque churches in Manila, Bulacan, Ilocos Norte, and Miag-ao. The architectural style of the churches was introduced in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century by Catholic missionaries who arrived from Spain and Mexico. Similarities to Europe's rendition include the decorated pillars, gilding and floral themes but other physical compositions are noticeably different.

With every personal contact with the Philippines both on business and leisure basis, my fondness of the country has grown in leap and bound. The country has promised so much, from its cherished history to sea and sand, and never fails to deliver. It is superfluous to say that the Philippines generates both style and substance for Southeast Asia's robust and diverse tourism.

Another dominant player of the region who helps apply a glossy veneer to Southeast Asia's tourism package is Thailand.

Thailand has continued to put an exhilarating spin on the region. Looking close to heart, I could not agree more with the chorus of complements that Thailand's tourism magnificence goes beyond the surface of the walls of temples and edifices but is ingrained in the hospitable nature of the people.

The kingdom is not called the 'Land of Golden Temples' for nothing. It conveys the message of the profound and distinct historical landscape steeped in centuries-old customs, traditions and natural resources. The country's faith is centralized in the Buddhist religion and the monarchy and the finest examples of these pinnacles of reverence stand side by side in Bangkok.

During my second year in university, a tough

assignment fell on my lap. I was to pretend to be a tour guide to the Grand Palace and the adjoining Temple of the Emerald Buddha and lead fellow students and the lecturer on an educational and yet entertaining walkabout of the compound. My palms sweat profusely as I felt the kind of stage-fright anxiety of the unscripted public speaking but the unrivalled magnificence of the pagodas and throne halls somehow chased away the butterflies in my stomach.

The Grand Palace and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha keep alive the tradition of building an important temple next to the palace. Stepping over the threshold into the Grand Palace, I was spellbound by the architectural grandeur of the Chakri Maha Prasart Throne Hall and after regaining my full concentration, I explained that the throne hall was built during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, the fifth king of the present Chakri dynasty. The hall is an ingenious hybrid of a European building with the Thai-spired roof. Our group was privileged to have been permitted to enter the central chamber, normally off-limits to tourists, of the multi-storey building where the king used to receive foreign dignitaries.

Our group then moved to another “Grand Spired Hall” close by. The Dusit Maha Prasart throne hall was constructed on the order of the founding King Rama I more than 200 years ago. A mood of so-lemnity set in the moment we filed into the hall and I spoke about the function of the hall which is for the lying in state of kings and queens as well as honored members of the royal family. It is also the place where the annual consecration day ceremony is performed.

The latter half of the day was spent at Temple of the Emerald Buddha. As the name suggests the temple, where no monks reside, enshrines the country's rarest and most exquisite emerald Buddha image. Again, I was immersed in the religious aesthetics emanating from the statue. The image is clothed

by a richly decorated ornamental robe which is changed according to seasons of the year by the king.

The Grand Palace which turns golden in the fading evening light is sited strategically on the bank of the country's lifeline, the mighty Chao Phraya River. Bangkok is entwined with rivers and canals which have sustained lives. Just before the waterways empty into the Gulf of Thailand, in a sleepy district called Ampawa in the province of Samut Songkram, being rustic also means being magnetic.

On one extended weekend, after clearing away the last bottleneck of my paperwork, I packed my bag and drove to Ampawa for a night's stay at a home-stay lodging I heard about through words of mouth. The road signs to the house were vague at best, forcing me to ask for direction from a boy on bicycle riding past me. Not a type to verbalize a map in his mind, he told me to follow him to the house. Once there, he waited to make sure I checked in at the house alright before re-mounting his bicycle and resuming his ride home.

I rented a room in the wooden house raised high from the ground to allow air and the cool breeze to ventilate the rooms upstairs. My room was equipped with the basics; a bed with two pillows and a polka-dotted blanket and a study table. Modern amenities and luxury are unheard of. An electric fan was available but it was never plugged in because the wind scented by the flowers of the pomelo trees in the hosts' orchard was blowing in gently. I missed my usual bed-time radio station but the sounds of crickets were music to my ears.

That evening, the house owner knocked on my door and convinced me to join him and his wife for a boat trip on the canal. They promised it would 'light up' my vision.

The boat driver switched off the engine when we neared a bend in the canal and advised us not to

make a sound. The boat was inching forward by the force of the paddle and when we pushed past the bend the surprise came into view. The Lamphoo trees on the edge of the water were illuminated by hundreds of fireflies clinging to the branches. They also flickered every half a second and I was tempted to sing a Christmas carol. The fireflies, for some reason, spurred up my festive mood and brought back fond memories of several years earlier when I toured the enchanting Sukhothai, the king's first capital established 700 years ago.

It was also during the Sukhothai Empire that an elaborate festival of Loy Krathong is believed to have made its debut. Similar to firefly watching, the festival takes place at night on the water and does not stray from the subject of lights. Loy Krathong is to float away bad luck and seek forgiveness from the water goddess for polluting the water. My friend and I created our own krathongs or miniature rafts made of banana trunk and banana leaves emulating the shape of a lotus flower in full bloom. Incense sticks and candles were secured in the middle of the deck with flower petals sprinkled on the bed of the krathong. A chilly November night in Sukhothai was shared with hundreds of revelers who crowded around a large pond inside the Sukhothai historical park to set the krathong afloat amid the night sky aglow with brilliant fireworks. The festival is celebrated throughout the country but we were ecstatic to be right where it all began.

Sukhothai may be country's first established capital but the region where it is now Thailand dates far back to the Bronze Age. The village of Ban Chiang in Udon Thani has shown the world there was adequate level of sophistication in terms of Bronze metallurgy in one of the largest prehistoric Bronze Age sites in the country.

What motivates me to brave the nine-hour trip from Bangkok to the village is the remarkable finds discovered there. Lying beneath Ban Chiang is the cemetery and cultural remains buried more

than 10 feet deep. The prehistoric occupation is estimated to be some 3,600 years before Christ. The artifacts I came across in the museum were ceramics found nowhere else. The patterns printed on the vessels include curves and swirling incisions motifs drawn using red paint. Other artifacts unearthed were iron and bronze jewelry and even glass objects. Much of the village, which previously fell into obscurity, is now a living museum.

In addition to the huge stock of ancient and cultural marvels, another paragon of the country's tourism is its sand and sea mostly featured on the 'handle' or the South of the 'Golden Axe' which alludes to the shape of Thailand. Some of the most talked-about paradise islands are in the Similan archipelago in the Andaman Sea on the western coast.

Last year, my family and I had made plans to be on the morning ferry departing a pier in Phangnga province for the islands. But the rush to the pier did not change the fact that we missed the only boat connecting the mainland to the islands that morning. Disappointed, we were about to head back to the resort when a man shouted from a moored boat close to the landing asking if he could be of any help. After hearing our grievance, he dialed his mobile phone and placed a call to a speed boat owner who emerged from behind the dockyard minutes later and offered to take us to the Similan islands at a very affordable fee. What started out as a hiccup became a blessing in disguise as the speed boat got us to the main island, Similan, in half the time regular passenger boats would have taken and we were already kicking sand on the beach a little before noon.

Nine islands strung from north to south are grouped within the archipelago which is a national marine park with endless assortments of underwater wonders. We decided to venture to other islands nearby and after donning the skin-diving goggles we opened our eyes to the thick forest of coral reefs under the water plied by schools of colorful and

odd-looking fish native to these islands.

On Similan Island, our jump-off platform, we were amazed as we gazed at the Pu Kai, the hairy-legged mountain crabs which are the symbol of Similan islands, the size of a small coconut, crawling fearlessly along the beach.

Steering our way back to shore, we caught sight of a family of dolphins swimming close to starboard side of the boat and the flying fish fluttering their oversized fins that propel them above water to escape the engine of the boat.

The temples, ways of life, festivals, historical origin and the natural treasures are definitive of the greatness of Thailand's tourism realm. They also typify the wider trait of the Asean 'tourism DNA' imprinted in the hearts and minds of travelers the world over. The Wow Philippines, Uniquely Singapore Malaysia Truly Asia, Amazing Thailand, the Hidden Charm, the Green Heart of Borneo (Kingdom of Unexpected Treasures), the Ultimate in Diversity, Jewel of the Mekong, the Golden Land (Mystical Myanmar) and Home of World Heritage speak one voice, the common voice of diversity and warm hospitality.

As the world gets smaller, more and more travelers delve into multi-destination tours to broaden their horizon. From Asean, the passage to the legendary Far East has never been more convenient thanks to the constant expansion and upgrading of the roads, cruise and air connections.

The opening up of Asia's largest country and now an emerging economic dragon has popularized travels to the communist republic. China, which has gifted the world with its civilization spanning thousands of years, is apparently embarking on a move to impress travelers with its phenomenon attractions that are second to none with regards to size, age, workmanship and value.



Because there is no hope of completing my visits to all of the major tourist sites in this massive country, sensibility and logic told me that I should narrow my focus on Beijing and Shanghai first and save the rest for later journeys.

Spring time in China's capital was a welcome escape from the mid-summer heat of Bangkok. Beijing clearly separates its past from present. The jungles of high-rise building blocs are zoned away from the old quarters. My first excursion, however, was taken out of town to the famed Great Wall of China.

The engineering achievement of the wall is testament to the ambition and resolve of China's fore fathers in consolidating the country and defending it against the rogue invaders. I was bussed to the wall and set out on what to me was a stamina-demanding trek on top of sections which are remnants of the Ming Dynasty, said to be a golden era of tremendous constructions. Large bricks are laid, forming the core of unquestionable strength of the wall extending some 600 kilometers across the northern section of Beijing.

I soldiered on and reached a lookout spot where the views of the mountainous terrains and the surrounding valleys from the top of the wall high above the ground were dramatically breathtaking. At which point, I began to pant.

Despite the challenge to my energy reserve, the tour of the Great Wall provided insight into how the early Chinese had surmounted the engineering impossibility.

China never seems to run out of the superlatives. Back in Beijing, I purchased the ticket to the world's largest and perhaps most publicized ancient palace complex at the Forbidden City. The 74 hectares of opulent residential quarters and throne halls and seemingly immeasurable cobblestone courtyards

between them were indication of the immense imperial power of old China. It was home to rulers of the Ming and Qing dynasties where everything from the position of the thrones to colors of the imperial drapes is tied to sacred beliefs about the emperors being the centre of universe and the auspicious times and places.

Later in the day, I made a stop at the Tiananmen Square. The plaza the size of many football fields was in the world media spotlight during the pro-democracy uprising and it validated my knowledge that politics of the past era had monumentalized in the important locations at the plaza including the Monument to People's Heroes and the Mao Zedong Memorial Hall. Our guide also enlightened us on another piece of historical fact that the plaza was where consecrated emperors were declared to the people. I had my snapshot taken in front of the large portrait of the charismatic Mao Zedong in the cool spell of the late afternoon.

I wrapped up my two days in Beijing with a departure on an afternoon flight for the commercial hub of Shanghai. I did my homework by studying the city from various travel magazines so I can appreciate New York of the East in its entirety when I set foot on it. I made the right decision by reserving the hotel near The Bund, probably Shanghai's most photographed waterfront landscape. A few road crossings later and I was flanked by the rows of vintage buildings and the Huangpu River. The buildings look and feel very Western with the collection of architectures exuding Classicism, Romanesque, Gothic, Baroque and Renaissance. The buildings, which adorn dramatic scenes in many movies, are evidence of the trade exchanges China had with the West in centuries past and one of Shanghai's vital trading routes is merely across the road. I turned around and faced the Huangpu River and on the opposite bank, shiny, sliver-tinted skyscrapers and towers project rippled reflections on the surface of the water. The buildings and billboards switch on their colored neon lights

making the entire city shine. I brushed shoulders with people on the streets wearing the latest fashion fresh off the catalogues while munching away at their Curly Fries. Another revolution is taking China by storm.

To understand the wisdom behind the Chinese culture, I toured Shanghai Museum the following morning. The museum is studded with collections of ancient Chinese artifacts such as costumes, pottery and lacquer ware produced in different historical eras by various ethnic cultures which unite China. While standing before the display cases of the artifacts, I grasped the reality of what exemplifies the uniqueness of China which is the country's remarkable ability to accept the cultural divides and open arms to those who are different. On that note, I exited the museum only to run into the structure which connotes the deep-seated belief and philosophy of the old China. I noticed that the dome exterior of the museum supported by a flat base was in fact symbolizing the long-held early idea that heaven was round and the earth was square.

In the afternoon, I visited a small tea shop near the Jade Buddha Temple where I had earlier paid respect to the two jade Buddha statues brought from Burma. The coziness of the shop was an inexplicable enhancer for the taste of the authentic Chinese jasmine tea which let off vapor and aroma that pervades the room. I sipped from a warm porcelain cup and my thoughts simply drifted.

It has been my curiosity for sometime as to how the Far East has reached out to people in other countries in terms of communicating its tourism promotional messages. The answer is through concerts and the living room of our houses.

South Korea has outdone itself in introducing the 'K-Pop culture' to the legions of followers across countries particularly in Southeast Asia and it is the songs, films and television series which portray

aspects of lives of South Koreans. The 'edutainment' bridges cultural gap as audience is engrossed and mesmerized by the story lines and setting of the films and soap operas and even lyrics of the songs crooned by heartthrobs can sweep fans off their feet. That said, there is no ruling out of the inclination of one to experience the culture they have come to passionately identify with.

Personally, my urge to visit South Korea was aroused by the hugely popular television series of Dae Jung Kum, a period depiction of a woman chef of principle who persevered and was eventually bestowed an honorable rank in the imperial court. The cinematography, the plot and the cast were outstanding and spotlight also shined on the country which produced the film. Without doubt, the series was contributing to a surge in the number of out-bound package tours from Thailand to South Korea. Some travel agencies were known to have arranged tours specifically to follow the trail of the shooting of Dae Jung Kum.

It was disappointing I did not get a chance to see the studio where the series was shot but my holiday in the Land of the Morning Calm was nonetheless has a special place in my travel diary.

The court intrigue and protocol played in the series had been a positive encouragement for me to seek out a visit to the 600-year-old Changdeok Gung Palace, or the Palace of Illustrious Virtue, in Seoul. It was intended to be a retreat palace in the early Joseon Dynasty and also functioned as the seat of administration where the king directed the affairs of the state. The palace of unmistakable Korean architectural appearance is a well-deserved UNESCO-certified World Heritage attraction. I basked in the soothing calm atmosphere of the back garden of the palace. So serene was the garden that I was fighting the temptation to practice a beginner's meditation routine.

The heritage tourism in South Korea has gained

prominence among foreign visitors and I freed up my entire afternoon for a tour of Bulguksa Temple at foot of Mount Tohamsa situated in the North Gyeongsang province. The temple, considered to be a masterpiece of the golden age of Buddhist art in the Silla kingdom, is believed to have been constructed around 750 A.D. during the heyday of the Buddhist arts and culture. Two imposing stone pagodas in the terraced courtyard are representations of religious structures designed with the purpose to inspire the artistic minds. One pagoda tells a story in the Lotus sutra and the other depicted on the obverse of the 10 won coin.

After fulfilling my quest to see South Korean heritage up close and personal, I was back in Seoul and my wait for the genuine Korean dinner was over. My target was an eatery within a walking distance from my hotel and I spotted one with customer seats spilling out of the front door. I had wanted to order a mouth-watering grilled Korean beef wrapped in crunchy lettuce and a bowl of Kimchi (traditional fermented vegetable) soup to go with it. My spoken Korean was fluent enough to have allowed me to place the correct order and impressed with my language proficiency, the owner's wife shouted from behind the counter, saying the soup was on the house.

A few years ago, I came across a brilliant article in a current affairs magazine about Seoul kick-starting an ambitious project to restore a stream which cuts through the city center. The Cheong Gye Cheon stream has a rather unglamorous history being the water source in a shanty town before it was partially paved over later. The city administrators were determined to revive the stream in an effort to add livable space to the busy Seoul. The project was finished in 2005 and the clear, clean water flowed down the stream once again. Strolling near the stream, I heard office workers calling out to colleagues, 'Roll up your trousers.'

It has become a habit of mine to travel overseas with an extra large cavity spared in the baggage just in case and I was glad I had room in my Samsonite Oyster.

Num Dae Mun Market is a household name among the seasoned shoppers. It is Seoul's one-stop answer to all shopping needs. I un-crumpled my list of shopping items I was asked by family and friends to buy. After two hours, my hands were numb from grabbing too many bags holding the ginseng candies, seaweed sheets, belts and embroideries. I was told to drive a hard bargain but at the prices printed on the stickers, the advice went against my better judgment. Still, I had no choice but to return to the market later to 'tie up some loose ends.'

South Korea seems to be playing its cards right by harnessing its tourism prowess garnered from putting a touch of drama on its appeals.





# BRUNEI

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Image positioning of Brunei is represented by **natural tourism resources** especially, its primary rainforests, which the government has taken great strides to protect. In Brunei, visitors can have the unique opportunity to walk in the rainforest canopy, which houses an abundance of birds, plants, micro fauna and mammals, such as the rare Bornean proboscis monkey, making up one of the world's richest and most diverse ecosystems. Brunei is also home to some of Asia's best nature reserves and field study centers. Indeed, the longboat ride down a winding jungle river, surrounded on all sides by pristine rainforest makes the journey as much of an adventure as the destination itself. With few tourists around, nature lovers will appreciate having this untouched paradise all to them. From virgin rainforests and coral reefs, stunning waterfalls and mangrove-covered islands to easy-to-visit nature reserves and one-of-a-kind jungle canopy



walkways, a visit to Brunei is a glimpse at Mother Nature in her purest form. Visitors may explore at their own pace, returning to lodgings in the capital when they have completed their visit, or staying in more primitive forest lodgings nearby. Information of the impressive tourist attractions is provided regarding to the Brunei's four districts; Temburong, Brunei-Muara, Tutong and Belait.

## **Temburong District**

The geographically district, Temburong District contains dense forest and patches of land utilized for hill rice. Ulu Temburong National Park is the nation's first as well as one of the best preserved rainforests in the world and houses a wealth of biodiversity, offering visitors the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to look out over the rain forest canopy from its elevated walkways. Perhaps the jewel in the crown of Brunei's natural wonders is this untouched area of Borneo, accessible only by long boat. While in the park, visitors will see crocodiles, monkeys and rare egrets as well as be immersed in the jungle sounds, smells, and the awe-inspiring feel of total remoteness. Walk in the rainforest canopy at dawn or sunset for feeling the awe-inspiring power of nature and a view of the earth in its purest form. Return to the comforts of the capital after an adrenalin-rush of rafting down the Temburong River. Visitors who wish to explore the jungle wilderness may opt to spend their two nights deep in the park, while those looking to experience Temburong's indigenous lifestyle attractions may choose one night at either the Bahgar Lodge or





Rainforest Lodge and one night at the National Park.

The isolated **Kuala Belalong Mini Park** is a focus for learning about the lowland tropical forests. The park includes a waterfall, a pond, a landscape garden, and traditional huts exhibiting pictures of His Majesty's Temburong visits and display finding made at the Kuala Belalong Field Studies Centre.

## Brunei-Muara District

Meanwhile, at **Pulau Selirong** (Selirong Island) is a mysterious ambiance pervades on "Mosquito Island". This is a small mangrove island situated of Brunei Bay, affording adventurous visitors a glimpse at a unique tropical ecosystem. It consists of 100% mangroves, majority of the *Rhizophora* species. It has about 3 kilometers plank walkways between matured trees. Visitors are able to enjoy the walk within the mangrove swamp - the natural breeding place of many sea creatures. Listen to the sining of the different species of birds and the clapping sound of the clams as they shut up when the tide ebbs. Experience the feeling of anticipation of encountering one of the species of mangrove snakes or primates, look out for proboscis monkeys and flying foxes on your. It is very ideal place for birdwatchers to spend their day.

Easy access to the rain forest and waterfalls is possible at **Wasai Kendal**. This is a retreat famous for its wide trails and tranquil waterfalls, picturesque pools and beautiful display of tropical flora.



Less than 27 kilometers from Bandar Seri Begawan's town center, **Muara Beach**'s long, quite esplanade invites leisurely strolling and is an ideal destination for a family outing. Amenities here include a well-equipped picnic area, a children's playground, changing and toilet facilities, as well as weekend food and drink stalls.

**Meragang Beach** is another quiet spot for a sunset stroll or a beach jog. The area is also known as "Crocodile Beach". The origin of this name is unknown but despite its name, visitors encounter no such creature along this peaceful, unspoilt stretch of sand - only a warm sea breeze, a brilliant sunset or double rainbow. A mere 10 minutes drive from Muara, **Serasa Beach** is haven for water sports enthusiasts. It is also home to the Serasa Water sports Complex, which provides comprehensive facilities for sporting and recreational activities including jet skiing, kayaking, windsurfing, regatta sailing, power boat racing, aqua sports training and water-skiing.

In addition to the natural attractions in the area of Muara district, **Kampong Ayer** or water village is one of the cultural tourist attractions. Today the Kampong has grown into one of the world's largest water villages and it has been described as the "Venice of the East" that are home to more than 30,000 people who live in traditional houses built on stilts over both banks of the Brunei River. Even four centuries ago, the size and complexity of Kampong Ayer greatly impressed the Magellan expedition, which received a stately welcome upon entering Brunei Bay in 1521. Although Kampong

Ayer is still growing and its sprawling jumble of timber houses now stretches some eight kilometers along the river and most of the houses are now furnished with every modern amenity, a traditionally colorful and lively atmosphere remains. The stilted city is actually a collection of small kampungs each with their own names and their own government-appointed leaders, or Ketua Kampong. The myriad homes, which have piped water and electricity and are bedecked by forest of TV aerials, are interconnected by a maze of wooden walkways along which it is possible to walk from one end of the village to the other. The community is almost self-contained. It has shops, mosques, schools, a police station, clinics and a centuries-old tradition of living over water. A compulsory stop in Kampong Ayer is the Mini Museum at the residence of Haji Mahmud bin Haji Moha-mad at No. 159D, Kg. Saba Laut. Mukin Saba that displays traditional handcrafted brass-ware. Visitors are welcomed to wander along the Kampung's pathways at appropriate hours.

## Tutong District

**Seri Kenangan Beach** is “the beach of beautiful memories”. This scenic locale is a popular recreation spot featuring a narrow spit of land with the South China Sea on one side and the Tutong River on the other. Seri Kenangan is located just five minutes drive from Tutong Town. Chalets, restaurants, huts, a playground and food stalls are available.

## Marimbun Lake & Heritage Park

Another distinctive Brunei attraction, this park is situated around an S-shaped lake and has been earmarked as an ASEAN National Heritage site. Lake, 27 kilometers inland from Tutong, has developed into a popular picnic spot attracting large crowds on Sundays. The large shallow

fresh water lake is about 500 meters long by 150 meters wide, fringed by swamp and long grass. In the middle of the lake is an island. Elevated wooden walkways criss-cross the lake connect the shore and island at several points. Pavilions built off the walkways provide benches, tables and shade for picnics and nature observation. The far side of the island offers pleasant walks through primary jungle.

**Sungai Liang Forest Reserve** immense arboretum features virgin jungle transformed into a park with nature trails accessible for all levels of hiking experience. As visitors walk in the air above on a canopy walkway, they will see the diversity of jungle flora and fauna thriving in Brunei's rainforest.

## Betait District

**Luagan Lalak Forest Recreational Park** is one of Brunei's more unique wonders, this alluvial freshwater swamp that swells to become a lake during heavy rains. A walkway meanders along the lake, allowing visitors a firsthand interaction with this unusual natural attraction.

Surrounded by primary rainforest, this **Wasai Wong Kadir** (Wong Kadir Waterfall) is reached after a rather challenging uphill trek. But the stunning reward at the end is worth every minute of the workout. Treks to Wasai Wong Kadir take approximately 45 minutes from the Luagan Lalek Recreational Park area.

For those who prefer a day of sun and sand while in Belait, **Lumut Beach** offers complete facilities for picnicking, jogging and family out-goings. Added features here are the huts and shelters especially designed for visitors' relaxation.





# CAMBODIA

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Tour operators expand the alternative tourism activities to serve more independent-minded tourists who have a desire for self-fulfillment and learning and search for physically and mentally challenging experiences. Special interest tourism, cultural and heritage tourism, adventure travel or if you wish, ecotourism represent the new trend to serve this niche market. Tracing back to learn about the Khmer Empire and the human past makes a remarkable discovery of Cambodia for me. “Have you been to Angkor Wat?” is always the key question that I have been asked at some point in the talk about Cambodia with friends and students. My name is Aree. I am a lecturer at the Faculty of Service Industries. My dream is clued to the historical horizons of the past Khmer Empire rather than going shopping in the crowded cities. It is noteworthy that much of the Khmer remains are cloaked in mystery and untapped by



mass tourism. Hence, these precious gems allure and offer visitors an opportunity to explore the glories of the great Khmer past. My voyage to Cambodia will not have been successfully achieved without the opportunity and support from the Thailand Research Fund. I anchored my stay at Sunway Hotel, the four star hotel located nearby Wat Phnom. Mr. Ho Vandy who is the President of Cambodia Association of Travel Agents in Phnom Penh has cooperated with my project in Phnom Penh and provided me the overview information of guided cultural and heritage tour of Cambodia discovery. During this trip, I had chance to explore only Phnom Penh and surroundings and Siem Reap Angkor Wat. Though I had no opportunity to visit all destinations recommended during this time of my visit, I still dream of trip to “Sohm swaakokm” the land of rich civilization that people always think of as a MUST once in lifetime.

The trip started at Sunway Hotel in **Phnom Penh**. The environment in the hotel is not much different from hotels in other destinations that replace international atmosphere to serve tourists from worldwide markets. The hotel staffs wear the uniforms dissimilarly from my expectation that hope to see the staff wearing the traditional costume. I took taxi from the hotel to visit Phnom Penh. I arrived at the center of this capital with the acknowledgement that Phnom Penh is the important civilization source of the Greater Mekong Sub-region for it is the center of communication between human and god. Pictures published in guide books of Phnom Penh greatly inspire my imagination. Image of Phnom Penh from variable



sources of media and movies significantly support this city to be a place to discover. Along the street, people walk or use bicycles, motorcycles, cars and local buses. Interestingly, the way of life of local people here is comparable to those of people in other capitals in the East. At the center of Phnom Penh, visitors would feel that tourist attractions are scattered around such as Wat Phnom temple, the national museum, the Royal Palace, Silver Pagoda and National Museum. The first place to visit should be the national museum. This is the fascinating place to learn about the history, religion and beliefs of the Cambodians. Not far from the national museum, the Royal Palace significantly attires the visitors to appreciate its grandeur and glory with the architectural decoration alike the Grand Palace in Bangkok, Thailand. Located peacefully in the center of city, Wat Phnom temple is designated as the symbol of Phnom Penh for the name of capital, Phnom Penh derived from the name of this temple. On the whole, the Capital of Cambodia located at the confluence of the Mekong, Bassac and Tonle Sap rivers. This greatly provides the opportunity to discover the assortment of way of life of people along the river bank. We end the first day with sunset cruise in the confluence of Tonle Sap and the Mekong.

The next morning we visit other historical sites such as the old capital of Oudong and the Angkorian ruins of **Phnom Chisor** and Phnom Da which lie within an easy day-trip of Phnom Penh. Phnom Chisor, the ancient Khmer temple constructed in the 11<sup>th</sup> century of laterite and brick with carved sandstone lintels, is surrounded by the partially



ruined walls of a two and a half metre wide gallery with inward facing windows. As with the other hilltop temples, there are spectacular views of the surrounding countryside and Phnom Chisor makes an ideal excursion combined with Tonle Bati and Ta Prohm Temple. **Angkor Borei** is a town in the area of several ruins and archaeological digs. The area has been continuously inhabited for at least 2500 years and has yielded artefacts dating from the Funan period (4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> century) and Chenla (8<sup>th</sup> century) as well as the later Angkorian period. The small temple of Phnom Da was constructed in the late 7<sup>th</sup>-early 8<sup>th</sup> century, during the Chenla period, under Bahavavarman. The prasat ruins of Phnom Da on top of the hill are 11<sup>th</sup> century C.E. Angkorian era constructed under King Rudravarman. Note the carvings on the lintels and the unusual north-facing entrance. There is a small museum in Angkor Borei displaying some of the artefacts from the area. ([www.angkorjourney.asievoyage.org](http://www.angkorjourney.asievoyage.org))

**Sambor Prei Kuk** is located in Kampong Thom Province. The ancient city where monuments of Sambo Prei Kuk are found today was identified as ISANAPURA, the capital of Chenla in 7<sup>th</sup> century. Many decorative details in Khmer architecture and sculpture are classified as Sambor style. Sambor Prei Kuk cluttering sanctuaries were located in Sambor Village with at least 176 monuments ([www.tourismcambodia.com](http://www.tourismcambodia.com)). Some Sambor Prei Kuk's temples are completely "dressed" by trees and roots, which in the course of the years, are "sculptured" all around and enclose some temples as vegetable octopuses. ([www.angkorjourney.asievoyage.org](http://www.angkorjourney.asievoyage.org))



After the visit of the most beautiful examples of the art Pre-Angkorien, we depart to Siem Reap Angkor Wat, a 5 hour drive. On the way to Siem Reap, there are many interesting phenomenon to appreciate including clay pottery shops on the cart pulled by buffalos, stone craft shops that sell statues of god, Apsara and Jayavarman VII. Life along the street is full up of beliefs emphasizing upon the creation of local traditional art. This clearly represents the local charm of Cambodia at the first place. Siem Reap has colonial and Chinese-style architecture in the Old French Quarter and around the Old Market. Nowadays, Siem Reap offers a wide range of hotels, restaurants, pubs and shops including several upscale hotels and dozens of budget guesthouses. There are many opportunities to experience traditional Cambodia including Apsara's dance performances, craft shops and silk farms, road tours through rice-paddy countryside, boat trips on the great Tonle Sap Lake to fishing villages and bird sanctuary ([www.canbypublications.com](http://www.canbypublications.com)). In the late afternoon, we will go on Angkor site for a look of Angkor Wat from outside and appreciate the nice sunset on Angkor Wat and temples.

**Angkor Wat** is a World Heritage Site officially designated by UNESCO as the Angkor Archaeological Park that hides the myth of the past era towards architecture and artifacts covered approximately the area of 1,200 rai. Angkor Wat is a massive three-tiered pyramid crowned by five beehive-like towers and is the centrepiece of any visit to the temples of Angkor. Other temples of the same and style period include Thommanon, Banteay Samre, Wet Atwea and Beng Melea, which may have served as a prototype to Angkor Wat. A moat and an exterior wall measuring 1300 meters x 1500 meters surrounded Angkor Wat. The temple itself is 1 km square and consists of three levels surmounted by a central tower. The walls of the temple are covered inside and out with has-reliefs and carvings that explained the strong relationships in philosophy between human and god.

Nearly 2000 distinctively rendered Apsara carvings adorn the walls throughout the temple and represent some of the finest examples of apsara carvings in Angkorian era art ([www.angkorholiday.com](http://www.angkorholiday.com)). Angkor Wat could be the fine root to study about history of the Mekong region as it possesses the long trace of story that is mutually related to the civilization of neighbouring countries.

**Bayon Angkor Thom** (Big Angkor) is a 3 km walled royal city and was the last capital of the Angkorian Empire. Bayon is set at the centre of the city. There are five entrances (gates) to the city, one for each cardinal point, and the victory gate leading to the Royal Palace area. Each gate, as well as much of Jayavarman VII'S architecture is crowned with 4 giant faces. The South Gate of Angkor Thom is often the first stop on a tour of the temples. The giant stone faces of Bayon have become one of the most recognizable images connected to classic Khmer art and architecture. There are 37 standing towers, most but not all sporting four carved faces oriented toward the cardinal points. ([www.angkorholiday.com](http://www.angkorholiday.com))

After the fresh breakfast at hotel, we visit the enchanting **Banteay Srey**. Banteay Srey, translated as 'citadel of the women', is a modern designation, discovered by French archaeologists relatively late in 1914, that probably refers to the delicate beauty of the carvings built at a time when the Khmer Empire was gaining significant power and territory. Banteay Srey displays some of the finest example of classical Khmer art. The walls are densely covered with some of the most beautiful, deep and intricate carvings of any Angkorian temple. The temple's relatively small size, pink sandstone construction and ornate design give it a fairyland ambiance. The colors are best before 10:30 AM and after 2:00, but there are fewer tourists in the afternoon. ([www.angkorholiday.com](http://www.angkorholiday.com))

Driving through the countryside and the rice fields alongside the Kulen Mountain range, **Beng Melea**

is 50 km from Siem Reap. Constructed in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century temple and a distinctly Angkor Wat style, Beng Melea preceded and may have served as a prototype of sorts for Angkor Wat. Very few carvings or bas-reliefs are evident and may never have existed. The temple has been neglected and is still seldom visited. The galleries, pools, libraries and sanctuaries lie under fig-tree roots and creepers, waiting to be discovered. In many places tree roots look like the tentacles of a giant octopus. ([www.angkorjourney.asievoyage.org](http://www.angkorjourney.asievoyage.org))

**Banteay Chhama** is about 23 km from the provincial capital of Sisophon and 3 hours by road from Siem Reap-Angkor. A rarely visited temple, it is located deep in the Cambodian jungle near the Thai border. Surrounding temples include Prasat Mebon, Prasat Taphrom, Prasat Samnang Tasok, Prasat Banteay Toap and Prasat Ta Preav, But very little is known about it. Built over nine square kilometres and surrounded by a moat, the site echoes the architectural layout of the better-known Khmer temple complexes of Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom. The site is renowned for its beautifully rendered bas-reliefs, which depict the war between the Khmer and Champa kingdoms and the accession of the Khmer king. ([www.angkorjourney.asievoyage.org](http://www.angkorjourney.asievoyage.org))

**Preah Vihear** is bordered by Siem Reap to the Southwest. The major attractions at Preah Vihear starts with 162 stone step with a short set of stairs decorated with nagas and Gopura I. A 500-meter gently climbing avenue leads up to Gopura II and the courtyard of Gopura III. The short causeway decorated with nagas leads to the inevitable Gopura IV and behind it the second courtyard. On the other side of the courtyard is Gopura V, and beyond it the Main Sanctuary, the centerpiece of the site which now houses a miniature Buddhist temple. ([www.wikitavel.org](http://www.wikitavel.org))

**Koh Ker**, the Capital of the Khmer Empire for a very brief period from the year 928 to 944 AD,

is another destination that visitors should not miss exploring. Koh Ker is located in barren hill country northeast of Angkor, in the province of Preah Vihear ([www.btinternet.com](http://www.btinternet.com)). Koh Ker is in a distant jungle location with up to a hundred ruined temples including a huge stepped pyramid, which is the largest in the region. More ancient temples are being found in the jungle so there is a true sense of discovery here. Many of the temples were built in brick using a mortar made from tree sap. The chief monument at Koh Ker was the magnificent temple of Prasat Thom. The unique style of the Koh Ker period shows Khmer architecture and sculpture on a monumental scale. ([www.btinternet.com](http://www.btinternet.com))

To discover more about the resources of Cambodia, the area of northeastern Cambodia comprising Rattanakiri, Mondulkiri, Streung Treng and Kratie is blessed with the beautiful landscapes, pristine nature and colourful cultures of ethnic minority groups. Rattanakiri boasts some of the most beautiful landscapes and is home to several settlements of ethnic hill tribes. It has also many interesting natural sites that are unique to the territory. There is an incredibly beautiful waterfall, a tranquil volcanic lake and a dense rain forest rich in a variety of flora and fauna. Each tribe has its own territory and town structure, some of these are hidden deep in the jungle making it even more interesting for the tourist since getting there means trekking and this can be done on elephant rides as well. ([www.hotelscam-bodia.org](http://www.hotelscam-bodia.org)). The major attractions in Rattanakiri are Yeak Loam Lake, Eisey Patamak Mountain, Katieng Waterfall, Ou'Sean Lair waterfall, Ou'Sensran on waterfall, Cha Ung waterfall, Veal Rum Plan (Stone field), Virachay National Park and Lumphat Wildlife Sanctuary.

Depart by tourist bus that will take around 4 hours to Sihanouk Ville. **Sihanouk Ville** is Cambodian finest beach resort and it offers an exceptionally well-preserved natural environment. This tropical beach with pristine clear water and glittering

white sand is naturally decorated by splendid rock formations. There are several beaches in Sihanouk Ville but the most popular and developed one is O Chheu Teal beach. There are some other beaches sprawling along the coast but they are not as well developed, such as Chmkar Dong and Thmar Thom beaches. The popular beaches: Victoria, Independence, Sokha, O Chheu Teal, and O Tres. ([www.travelcambodia.com](http://www.travelcambodia.com))

The next destination is **Kampot**. The paradise here comes in the form of 1040 meters high Bokor Mountain. Bokor Hill station used to be one of the most popular recreational places during the French colonial period. The resort was established in the 1920s. On top of the mountain, an old Catholic Church built in French colonial style, hotel and a casino are all abandoned to the wind, leaving evidence of past glory to the place. There are holiday villas and a Buddhist monastery built on the verge of the mountain cliff. A magnificent panoramic view of the Gulf of Siam can be seen from up here. The trip up the mountain provides a completely different travel experience. ([www.hotelcambodia.org](http://www.hotelcambodia.org))

Also in Kampot, is **Kep city** established in 1908 ([www.hotelscambodia.org](http://www.hotelscambodia.org)). From the turn of the century through the 1960s, Kep was Cambodia's premier beach town, drawing weekend holidaymakers to its picturesque shores, and sporting the ocean side villas of the privileged class. Kep is popular holiday destination to both local and foreign tourists. Nowadays, the old villas are in ruins and the town is known more for its ocean front seafood stalls than for its beaches, which are narrow and stony, offering just a few slivers of sand ([www.canbypublications.com](http://www.canbypublications.com)). There is a regular crab market that itself serves well as a tour-attraction as fishermen come onto the beach with baskets after baskets of freshly caught crabs attracting a huge gathering of interested buyers. ([www.hotelcambodia.org](http://www.hotelcambodia.org))

What I still want to do in Cambodia is to make a journey from Battambang to Siem Reap by boat. I imagine villages where local people welcome the visitors with the warm smiles as well as the remote areas with beautiful landscape. I promise myself that I will go back to Cambodia again..... the mythical region that is waiting for me out there.



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# INDONESIA

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Indonesia is known as the “Belt of Emerald across the Equator.” It is the world’s largest archipelago country consisting of more than 17,000 islands, approximately 6,000 of which are inhabited. There are varieties of places waiting for you to visit. In this tour, you will know about the most 15 attractive attractions of Indonesia. These 15 attractions were voted by 12 professionals who expertise in Indonesia tourism. These experts were from business, government and education sectors. Therefore, they know where are the best places that you should not miss when visiting Indonesia. Thank to the inputs of everyone especially Erna and Rara my dear friends and Prof. Pitana and Ika who were very good host when I was there and show me around in Jakarta. Now, let’s learn more about these 15 most prominent attractions of Indonesia, the country “**where culture and nature blend.**”



## 1. Borobudur

The first place that we will visit is Borobudur, one of the greatest Buddhist monuments in South East Asia. This temple is located 42 km northwest of Yogyakarta. It was built in the 8<sup>th</sup> century by the Cailendra dynasty and stands on top of a hill surrounded by volcanoes and overlooking green fields. Based on Kayumwungan inscription, an Indonesian named Hudaya Kandahjaya revealed that Borobudur was a place for praying that was completed to be built on 26 May 824, almost one hundred years from the time the construction was begun. The name of Borobudur, as some people say, means a mountain having terraces (budhara), while other says that Borobudur means monastery on the high place. Built out of millions of blocks of the local volcanic rock joined without the use of mortar, it is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is the primary tourist attraction in Java. The temple rises in seven terraces, each smaller than the one below it. The top is the Great Stupa, standing 40 meters above the ground, surrounded by numerous smaller stupas, some still containing Buddha statues inside. The walls of the Borobudur are sculpted in bas-relief, a total length of six kilometres. These masterpieces of individual artistic value have been acknowledged as the most complete and splendid collection of Buddhist reliefs in the world. The monument has been completely restored in 1983. The restoration took eight years to complete. Large parking area is available not far from the monument, so private cars and buses have to be parked in this area. From that point visitors can hire becaks or horse





carts, or walk the rest of the way to the monument.

## 2. Bali

The next must visit attraction of Indonesia is Bali, known as a tropical island with picturesque and immaculate painted backdrop. It has rice paddies tripping down hillsides like giant steps, volcanoes soaring up through the clouds, dense tropical jungle, long sandy beaches, warm blue water, crashing surf and friendly people who don't just have a culture but actually live it. If you are here, you cannot deny that this tropical paradise has a unique blend of modern tourist facilities combined with wonderful shopping and a rich past and heritage. The Balinese people are proud of having preserved their unique Hindu culture. The Bali Arts Festival is the Denpasar cultural event of the year. It is a full month of daily performances.

Some of the best surfing beaches in the world can be found on the western side of the island whilst conversely the eastern side is a wonderful haven for families, with beautiful white sand beaches and gentle seas. Here also offer variety standard of accommodations, delicious seafood and also destinations for ecotourism.

## 3. Yogyakarta

Move from Bali to Yogyakarta or Jogja, the maintour destination of Java island. Yogyakarta is located in south-central Java. It is a city with outstanding historical and cultural heritage. It was the centre of the Mataram Dynasty (1575-1640), and until now



the kraton (the sultan's palace) exists in its real functions. It is the only province in Indonesia that is still formally governed by a precolonial Sultanate. An artistic atmosphere is deeply felt here. Malioboro, as the center of Yogyakarta, is overwhelmed by handicraft from all around the city. The city is known as a center of classical Javanese fine art and culture such as batik, ballet, drama, music, poetry and puppet shows.

More than the cultural heritages, Yogyakarta has beautiful natural panorama. The green rice fields cover the suburban areas with a background of the Merapi Mountain. The natural beaches can be easily found to the south of Yogyakarta. Here the society lives in peace and has typical Javanese hospitality. You can go around the city by bike, pedicab, or horse cart; and you will find sincere smiles and warm greeting in every corner of the city. Those who have visited Yogyakarta reveal that this city makes them long for it.

## 4. Tana Toraja

From Java we will now travel to the north of South Sulawesi visiting Tana Toraja (Toraja Land), which is known for its unique culture and ancient traditions. The Centre of tourism in Tana Toraja is Rantepao, 328 km Northeast of Ujung Pandang. Sitting 700 meters above sea level, Rantepeo has cool, pleasant evenings. A gate built in traditional boat-shaped style marks the entry to Tana Toraja. The road passes the spectacular mountains of Kandora and Gandang on which, according to Toraja mythology, the first ancestors of celestial beings descended

from heaven. Two villages with easily accessible cliff graves are Lemo and Londa. Londa is one of the oldest hanging grave sites, in which are buried many members of local nobility. At Lemo, burial chambers are cut out of the rock and several balconies filled with Tau Tau overlook new caves being dug to serve as family graves.

## **5. Toba Lake**

Besides mountainous scenery, Indonesia also has the largest lake in all of Southeast Asia, Toba Lake (Danau Toba). This giant lake sits at an altitude of 800 meters, and is 100 kilometers long and 30 kilometers wide. The lake is situated in the caldera of the huge Toba volcano which erupted approximately 75,000 years ago. The eruption of Toba was one of the most massive eruptions ever on Earth. Many scientists believe that this eruption triggered the last ice age. The eruption probably lasted two weeks until finally the volcano collapsed and formed the caldera which is now Danau Toba. The bottom of the volcano rose and formed the island of Samosir which is beautifully situated in the middle of the blue waters of Toba. This Lake Toba is a must see of Sumatra.

## **6. Komodo Island**

On the strangely foreboding island of Komodo between Flores and Sumbawa is the Jurassic Park of Indonesia, a small island of 280 square km, home to the famous Komodo dragon, a giant monitor lizard over two meters long, the world's biggest reptile. Potential man-eaters, the dragons are extremely dangerous and visitors must be accompanied by a park ranger to the 59,000 hectare park. This has helped preserve the island natural flora, fauna and coral formations. The island of Komodo can now be reached by ferry from Sape on Sumbawa Island, and from Labuan-bajo, in Manggarai. This island is also famous for diving for ones who like to try.

## **7. Bunaken National park**

Indonesia has good system of National Park and one of the famous ones is the Bunaken National Marine Park of North Sulawesi which was formally established in 1991 and is among the first of Indonesia's growing system of marine parks. The park covers a total surface area of 89,065 hectares, 97% of which is overlain by sparkling clear, warm tropical water. The remaining 3% of the park is terrestrial, including the five islands of Bunaken, Manado Tua, Mantehage, Nain and Siladen. Although each of these islands has a special character, it is the aquatic ecosystem that attracts most naturalists. The waters of Bunaken National Marine Park are extremely deep (1566 m in Manado Bay), clear (up to 35-40 m visibility), refreshing in temperature (27-29 C) and harbor some of the highest levels of biodiversity in the world.

## **8. Raja Ampat**

Another place of magnificent nature in Indonesia is Raja Ampat or the Four Kings. It is located off the northwest tip of Bird's Head Peninsula on the island of New Guinea. This vast archipelago comprises over 1,500 small islands, cays and shoals surrounding the four main islands Misool, Salawati, Batanta and Waigeo. It is a part of the newly named Papua province of Indonesia which was formerly called Irian Jaya. Raja Ampat's pristine beauty, both above the water and below the water, is truly unrivalled. Its remote location and lack of infrastructure have inhibited the growth of tourism here.

## **9. Tanjung Puting National park**

The next destination, we are still in touch of nature, Tanjung Puting National Park. It is a 400,000 hectare conservation area of global importance. The area was originally declared as a game reserve in 1935 and a National Park in 1982. Within its borders are a variety of ecosystems, including tropical heath forest, peat swamp forest, and mangrove forest,

and it is also the habitat of over 200 bird species, 17 reptile species and 29 mammal species. Nine of Borneo's primate species are found in this park, including about 2000 orangutans. Tanjung Puting is one of the few remaining habitats for this endangered animal. It is also recognized as a world Biosphere Reserve by the UN and forms the largest protected area of swamp forest in South-East Asia. (Photo by Geert Vanden Wijngaert)

## **10. Leuseur**

Here we are in Gunung Leuser National Park which is one of the biggest national parks in Indonesia (950,000 hectare). Actually, it's a collection of various nature reserves and forests. Most parts of the national park lie in the region Aceh Tenggara. The Gunung Leuser National Park comprises more than 100 kilometres of the Bukit Barisan Mountains. Because of that, the park consists of steep, almost inaccessible mountainous terrain. The Alas River cuts the park into an eastern and western half. Apart from mountains you will find several other ecosystems such as beach forest, swamp areas, lowland rainforest, alpine and mountain forest. Photo by CNET Networks)

## **11. Way Kambas National Park**

The last National Park that we will be visiting is Way Kambas National Park. This park lies on Sumatra's southeast coast in the province Lampung and it is easily reachable with the ferry from Java. It consists of swamp forest, lowland rainforest, mangrove forests, dry beach forests, Nibung swamps and vast areas of grass-land. The park is famous for his Sumatran Elephants of which a large number comes from the Elephant Training School Pusat Latihan Gajah. Moreover, the reserve supports over 270 species of birds.

## **12. Jakarta**

The next destination is city tour. You may know this

name, Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia that you should not miss. Home to over 10 million people, Jakarta is always bustling, from the sound of the wheel of government turning to the sight of the economy churning. Skyscrapers, single story residential houses, modern apartment complexes, survivalists shanties. Jakarta is a modern city with facilities for travelers of every budget and preference. It offers a glorious me-lange of cuisine. Settlers and visitors through the centuries have left a culinary legacy of astounding variety; a delicate blending of Chinese, Arabic, Dutch and native Javanese cooking. If you like to observe city life in Indonesia, here is your destination.

### **13. Bandung**

Another city is Bandung, the country's fourth largest city and the capital city of West Java province. You can travel 180 kilometer southeast from Jakarta to this city. You can also take a three-hours train ride with nice mountain scenery. In 2007 Bandung launches the new TMB (Trans Metro Bandung) as the first mass transit system outside Jakarta. The first lane connects West and East Bandung.

Bandung is surrounded by mountain range gives the city a cool climate throughout the year. With population of over two million, everything moves in slower pace here compare to metropolitan life in Jakarta. Here is an important city of education. Now, Bandung is one of the most popular city in Indonesia for shopping and tourism. The modern and native architectural blending was followed by several Dutch architects that have shaped Bandung architectural landmarks. Historically, the city was home to Australopithecus, Java Man. These people lived on the banks of the Cikapundung in north Bandung, and on the shores of the Great Lake of Bandung. Flint artifacts can still be found in the Upper Dago area and the Geological Museum in this present time.

## 14. West Sumatera

Now I will bring you to the cultural destination, West Sumatera. Its distinct culture distinguishes it from the rest of the island. It lies on the west coast of the island Sumatera. Geographic features include plains, mountainous volcanic highlands formed by the Barisan mountain range that runs from north-west to south-east, and an offshore island archipelago called the Mentawai Islands. The capital of this province is Padang. The prime tourist attractions of West Sumatra are the culture and history of the Minangkabau and Mentawai people.

## 15. Kalimutu Lake

Before we end our trip, we will visit Kelimutu, a small volcano with three summit crater lakes of different colors. The W lake, Tiwi Ata Mbupu (Lake of Old People) is blue, and Tiwu Nua Muri Kooh Tai (Lake of Young Men and Maidens) and Tiwu Ata Polo (Bewitched Lake), which share a common crater wall, have historically been green- and red-colored. It is situated at Flores Island, the long island between Sumbawa and Timor. The island is cored with volcanoes and mountains dividing it into several distinct regions with individual languages and traditions.

After knowing and learning about the attractions of Indonesia, you may agree with me that Indonesia is a great place for tourism. The diversity and authenticity of cultures, arts as well as flora and fauna represents the precious treasures that can be found throughout different parts of Indonesia. It's one of the countries in ASEAN that you should find a chance to be there!



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# LAOS

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The Lao People's Democratic Republic, commonly referred to as Laos, could still be a mysterious place for most tourists. A small country at the centre of the Indochinese Peninsula and land locked by China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar, Laos is truly the 'Hidden Heart of Asia' and offers travelers an unparalleled glimpse of old South East Asia. Tourists come to Laos to experience its rich cultural and natural heritage. The population of Laos comprises a large number of different ethnic groups, many of whom, to date, maintain largely traditional lifeway, particularly in the more remote mountainous regions. Tourists seeking a fascinating, memorable experience, visiting this country will always be enriched and seemingly lost in time.



Only in Laos

**“Where people who run things can  
stop running”**

Only in Laos

**“Where young at heart can feel so young”**

Only in Laos

**“Where the world is beautiful”**

## How to get to Laos

There are many entry points from the neighboring countries, depending on your starting point:

### From Thailand by air:

- Bangkok -Luang Prabang by Bangkok Airways (daily, 1h 40) or by Lao Airlines (3 times a week)
- Chiang Mai-Luang Prabang by Lao Airlines (5 flights a week, 1h)

### From Vietnam by air:

- Hanoi-Luang Prabang by Lao Airlines (2 flights a week, 45 min) or by Vietnam Airlines (3 flights a week, 45 min)

You can also find regular flights from Phnom Pen, Siemreap, Khunming and Hochiminh city.

To come into the country by road, you could take the friendship bridge from Nongkhai (Thailand) to Vientiane. The bridge opens from 6:00 am to 9:30 pm.



## Highlights of “Only in Laos” Experience

The main renowned tourism products of Lao PDR are the world heritage site of Luang Prabang, Wat Phou world heritage site in Champasak, waterfall and 4,000 islands in the South, and the mysterious Plain of Jars in Xiengkhuang. If your trip around ASEAN has been hectic, then arriving in Laos should be the time for you to relax and enjoy plenty of fun eco-friendly activities.

### Luang Prabang

Luang Prabang is the primary attraction for most international leisure tourists and is featured in most tours to the country. Tourists use this most visited tourist location as their principal starting points of the journey either through the Northern part or to the Southern part of Laos. A recommended day tour circuit is to use Luang Prabang as your base to enjoy a varied and broad range of historical, natural and religious sites. You could prepare to spend at least 3-4 days in this gorgeous amazing relaxing beautiful fantastic Luang Prabang.

Some said it is the most picturesque city you could imagine. Luang Prabang is a city surrounded by mountains at the junction of the Mekong and its tributary, the Khan River. Luang Prabang has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1995 to protect the town's 32 precious historic temples, the former Royal Palace and Classic French colonial building from being destroyed by modernity or



over-developing. Being a small town, you can reach everywhere by foot and practically any types of accommodations you choose to stay will be well located. There is definitely more to Luang Prabang than just glittering temples. Being a truly living culture, you could just simply enjoy Laos' every day-to-day life. You could easily spend your days strolling around the adorable city, nibbling baguette sandwiches, staying warm in bookstore/cafe's, and perusing stall after stall of local artisan crafts.

Laos's food is known to be one of the most diverse and delicious in Asia. All over Laos you will find good inexpensive food available in markets or small shops. If you are looking for something more like home then you can also find French, Italian, or Indian restaurants amongst others. A traditional Laos dish is steam cooked sticky rice with the well known papaya salad "tamahung".

## Made "Only in Laos"

While you are strolling around, stall after stall, don't forget that your trip can also help sustain Laos' economy and provide villagers with income by purchasing their work. Throughout the country you can eat delicious home-grown foods, dress in stylish handmade cottons and silks and buy unique souvenirs giving lasting memories of the people you meet, and inspiring your friends and family to visit Laos. While you shop, chat with the locals and try to speak their language. Getting an instant and constant smile and a laugh from local Laos will seal your memories so beautifully. Laos's people

everywhere are so nice and friendly. You will pick up a friendly greetings “Sabaidee” before you know it!

## **The Surrounding Area in Luang Prabang**

You could choose to be more adventurous and physically involved by having a full day bike trip to see an elephant park and a waterfall. Take a 30 km trip North of Luang Prabang to Khuang Si waterfall, a beautiful spot for picnics, swimming and relaxing.

You could also decide to head south about 25 Km to Tham Ting cave. The caves are well known Buddhist site and a place of pilgrimage with 5000 statues. To get to the caves take a slow boat 1.5 hours or a car/tuk-tuk about one hour.

## **Morning Alms Giving**

The morning monks’ round (in Lao: Tak Bat) is a living Buddhist tradition for the people of Laos. Because of its beauty, the morning glory has become a major tourist attraction, especially in Luang Prabang. If you wish to participate in this meaningful religious practice, please protect its dignity and its beauty by carefully observing the ritual in silence, and contributing an offering only if it is meaningful for you and you can do so respectfully. Take those memories home with you and time to add more on, you could now take a trip to the capital city of Laos, Vientiane. On the way, make a stopover enjoying the vibrant town called Vang Vieng.

## **Vang Vieng**

Vang Vieng (population about 25,000) is located about a 4 hour bus ride north of the capital city of Vientiane or about 7 hours south of the town of Luang Prabang. This is truly a city catering for both

young and young at heart. You can find internet cafes, guesthouses, bars, trekking companies. These are all fairly new establishments as it has only been the past 5 or 6 years that Vang Vieng has seen such an influx of tourists. There are people here from all over the world - you can't help but meet people!

Vang Vieng is set along the banks of the Nam Song River. Hardly any visitor can insist the "tubing" trip. Basically this is Laos' most popular tourist activity and anyone who's been to this country has most likely done this. You can rent tubes, then starting at the top of this very very slow moving river, and float down all day. There were lots of places to stop off, eat or drink, or even to stop for the rope swings! Along the way you can enjoy Vang Vieng's the most incredible rock formations. They are jagged limestone karsts that tower above the jungle - steep walls which have somehow eluded the jungles grasp. In the morning hours a fine mist hovers just above the jungle at the base of these formations. In the evenings they form an incredible back drop for picture taking during the "golden hour." The scenery will be wonderful and stunning. The water is nice and calm with dragon flies buzzing all over the place. They are amazing colours, hot pinks, blues and yellows.

## **Vientiane**

As a capital of Lao PDR, the primary gateway for air travelers, and the location of the Friendship Bridge over the Mekong to Thailand. It is a city of interesting and beautiful corners rather than grand elegance. Easily the most spectacular is Wat Xiang Khouan, the Buddha Part, which is the foremost Buddhist monument in Laos and features as part of the national emblem. There are a lot of large statues in this park that are very good for photographs.

One of the more famous statues is the very large

reclining Buddha. There are not only Buddhist statues here, but there are also some Hindu statues as well. The multi-armed Buddha also stands out. Make sure to crawl inside of the “mouth” of the largest statue/building. Once inside you can see several floors of additional statues, and an awesome view of the park. You can take some very good pictures from up here which can include most of the statues in only a few photos.

## **The mysterious Plains of Jars**

After a few days exploring in the capital city, you might like to head to Xieng Khouang province, situated in the north of Laos. Much of the province was heavily bombed during the Vietnam war and old war scrap is used in building houses throughout the province. It is becoming more and more famous among tourists to Southeast Asia, as it is the place to view the mysterious Plains of Jars. The best way to reach Xieng Khouang-as we did-is to fly from Vientiane, the capital of Laos.

## **Heading South**

For those who would like to explore the South of Laos, you could now head down to Champasak province. Of all 7 provinces in the South, Champasak is the most famous for tourism. It will take about 11 hour bus ride south from Vientiane along where the Mekong lies. You can also fly there from only a few other places. Its areas join with Dan Chong Mek of Ubon Ratchathani of Thailand in the west, and with Kampongthom province of Cambodia in the south. Champasak offers many interesting attractions: spectacular Khmer ruins at Wat Phu, the stunning cluster of islands new the Cambodia border known as Si Phan Don (meaning 4,000 islands).

The Wat Phu-Champasak Heritage landscape, a UNESCO world Heritage Site is a major example of both early and classical Khmer architecture

dating from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Located 9 kilometres (5 miles) south of Baan Wat Thong, Wat Phu begins at river level and rises three levels to reach the foot of the mountain. Outside the complex is a large reservoir, which in times past was the site of boat races and ritual bathing. The bathing (and fishing) continues, somewhat less ritualistically. Continuing into the complex, one sees the remains of palaces built by the rulers of the Champasak kingdom towards the end of their dynasty, from which they viewed the annual festivities held on the full moon of the third lunar month, which continue to the present. An East-West axial promenade passes between two large rectangular ritual bathing ponds and leads to the base of the middle level. At the top of a flight of irregular stone stairs, two large worship pavilions flank the central promenade. Scholars have deduced, based on the deities carved into the stone, that the right hand pavilion was used for the male worshippers, and the left for the women-folk. Currently only the right hand structure is open to visitors. Climbing through the small access door, one can view well preserved Hindu bas-reliefs on the lintels inside the pavilion. Most of the free-standing statuary has been re-moved or damaged.

Khong Pha Peng waterfalls the “Niagara of the East” The Phapeng Falls, also known as the Khone Falls are the largest set of waterfalls on the lower Mekong. What they lack in height, they recover in sheer volume. Several of the cascades are visible from a point on the East bank of the Mekong, about 10 kilometres (6 mi) south of the village of Baan Nakasong. From Don Khone or Don Det, one must travel by boat to Baan Nakasong, and proceed south by land. The falls are an impressive sight, and are best viewed from a pavilion located above the falls. Three separate cascades merge at this spot. Fishermen clamber precariously across the raging torrents on bamboo ladders to lay lines, while birds dive through the spray seeking the smaller fry. Phapeng has its share of roasted



chicken vendors, with other local delicacies and plenty of cold beer, a lovely spot for a picnic and a great conclusion to this often arduous but certainly rewarding journey through a unique part of Southern Laos.

The area is also home to one of the rarest large mammal species in the world, the Irrawaddy Dolphin, and unique river wetland habitats. The Mekong rapids on the border with Cambodia, where the astounding force of the water has cut dramatic gorges through the brittle bedrock, are the biggest and widest in SE Asia. A paddle adventure through the Four Thousand Islands offers an experience of a lifetime. It is definitely worth a visit, especially if you add a glimpse of endangered dolphins at Lao-Cambodia border. Here at Don Khone, it is your chance to view the unique and endangered Irrawaddy Dolphin. This mammal can survive in both fresh and salt waters, but it is mainly now indigenous to the lower reaches of large Asian rivers, such as the Mekong and Irrawaddy. Seemingly unafraid of humans, thus a joy to observe, they travel in pods of less than ten, and can be observed in the waters near Don Khone. Every source queried has a different opinion on when and where to find them. Ask a local fisherman to guide you to the *plaa khaa*.

## **Dolphins watching at Lao-Cambodia border.**

The town is lovely. The French architecture adds to the delight. You can easily navigate the town by foot unless you want to head further out. Since the Champasak province has good roads, it is also easy to hire a motorbike (if you know how to ride one!).

You might by now realize the coming end of your journey through wonderful Laos. Memory is a wonderful and magical thing. No matter how heart-breaking the experience was, as time goes

by, you tend to remember every little detail of the good parts, and forget about the bad ones. It is also said that memory is like white water in the river -- it comes and goes rapidly; when you try to forget, it lingers; when you try to remember, everything is already different. Dream is the language of your soul, and we've got to have it. Life is still full of surprises, and we've got to make everyday not like all the others. Dear travelers, experiences you ONLY find in LAOS will last with you forever...

## **Acknowledgements:**

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# MALAYSIA

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Your trip to ASEAN countries will be incomplete if you don't see the very truly "melting pot" of Asia - Malaysia Truly Asia. The best introduction to this colourful country has been well remarked by the Tourism Malaysia... "Multiculturalism has not only made Malaysia a gastronomical paradise, it has also made Malaysia home to hundreds of colourful festivals. It's no wonder that we love celebrating and socialising. As a people, Malaysians are very laid back, warm and friendly". Cultures have been meeting and mixing in Malaysia since the very beginning of its history. More than fifteen hundred years ago a Malay kingdom in Bujang Valley welcomed traders from China and India. With the arrival of gold and silks, Buddhism and Hinduism also came to Malaysia. A thousand years later, Arab traders arrived in Malacca and brought with them the principles and practices of Islam. By the time



the Portuguese arrived in Malaysia, the empire that they encountered was more cosmopolitan than their own. Malaysia's cultural mosaic is marked by these many different cultures, but several in particular have had especially lasting influence on the country. Chief among these is the ancient Malay culture, and the cultures of Malaysia's two most prominent trading partners throughout history--the Chinese, and the Indians. These three groups are joined by a dizzying array of indigenous tribes, many of which live in the forests and coastal areas of Borneo. Although each of these cultures has vigorously maintained its traditions and community structures, they have also blended together to create contemporary Malaysia's uniquely diverse heritage.

Malaysia is geographically and culturally diverse. Malaysia offers two distinct experiences - the mainland [peninsula] and the island of Kalimantan [Borneo]. These are two parts to the country, 11 states in the peninsula of Malaysia and two states on the northern part of Borneo. Cool hideaways are found in the highlands that roll down to warm, sandy beaches and rich, humid mangroves. One of Malaysia's key attractions is its extreme contrasts. Towering skyscrapers look down upon wooden houses built on stilts, and five-star hotels sit several metres away from ancient reefs. For the perfect holiday full of surprises, eclectic cultures and natural wonders, the time is now, the place is Malaysia. It is the year 2007 when Malaysia will celebrated 50 years of independence. The month of August



will be filled with a myriad of parades, cultural performances, street shows and carnivals to commemorate the country's Independence or Merdeka Day on 31<sup>st</sup> August.

Being an exciting and vibrant destination, you can choose an endless variety of unique travel experiences all year round. For those who like to have it all, let's explore the diversity and wonders of Malaysia, starting your trip by its main entry point from the capital of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur.

## **Malaysia's Dazzling Capital City-Kuala Lumpur**

The main gateway into the country is the state-of-the-art Kuala Lumpur international airport (KLIA). A non-stop 28-minutes ride on the KLIA express will take you to the KL Sentral Station inner the city. Kuala Lumpur, affectionately known as KL, is an amazing cultural melting pot. Here, you will wander through communities of Chinese, Malays, South Indians, East Malaysian ethnic groups, Thais, Indonesians, Sikhs and a huge community of expatriates. Each community offering its own festivals, food, music, art and fashion while influencing each other's cultures. KL has a lively nightlife scene and a fascinating art and performance culture, which blends contemporary and traditional styles from many backgrounds. To get a snapshot of the city, you might like to explore the city by taking KL Hop-on Hop-off bus.



## KL Tower

KL Tower is considered a main feature of the city skyline, the KL Tower is the world's fourth tallest communications tower. To experience the exhilarating view from the KL Tower, you can go to the 335-metre high observation deck on a high-speed lift. From here, the city's eccentric architecture and lush greenery will be laid out before you. You will be amazed to find the Bukit Nanas Forest reserve, also known as the 'Green Lung' of KL City, located just beside the KL Tower. This uniquely real' plot of ancient rainforest offers a walking trail and has flora and fauna indigenous to Malaysia. Here, you get the frankly surreal opportunity to see colourful butterflies, insects, monkeys, squirrels and exotic birds in their natural habitat - all within earshot of the hum of downtown traffic!

If you want to add more xcitements into your trip, the latest attraction at KL Tower and Bukit Nanas is a reverse bungee called The G-Force will give you "the faint of heart". You will also get yourride recorded and given to you on a DVD to cherish for many more years to come. On top of the KL Tower is the Seri Angkasa revolving restaurant where you can sample an international buffet spread while watching a continuously revolving view of the Kuala Lumpur skyline.

## Khula Lumpur Highlights

Not long after your arrival, you will certainly enjoy an

inclusiveness which is more than just a way to break down cultural barriers and foster understanding. It is a positive celebration of a tradition of tolerance that has for millennia formed the basis of Malaysia's progress. If the ultra-modern architecture and forward-looking citizens of Kuala Lumpur symbolize Malaysia's hopes for the future, then the quiet, seaside city of Malacca, about 150 kilometers to the south, is the guardian charged with the reflective task of preserving its past. Five hundred years ago, an extraordinary empire rose and fell here, its power and dreams suddenly caught off-guard by the dawn of the Colonial Era. The city was so coveted by the European powers that the Portuguese writer Barbarosa wrote "Whoever is Lord in Malacca has his hand on the throat of Venice." It was a major port along the spice-route, and its harbor bristled with the sails and masts of Chinese junks and spice-laden vessels from all over the hemisphere. Because the city was originally built of wood, there are no crumbling and stately reminders of the power once wielded by the Malaccan Sultanate, but along shores of the Malacca River the scene has probably changed little. After the end of your exploration through the mainland, you will surely leave this efficient and thoroughly comfortable, epitomised by the modern, multicultural city life with lots of vivid memories. With an excellent road links between Thailand and Malaysia through to Singapore, you can also choose to access Malaysia by road via North-South expressway. Upon reaching the mainland, a scenic drive across Penang Bridge will take you to Penang Island. Getting to Penang by rail is also convenient. There are regular rail services from Bangkok to Butterworth.

## **Penang 'The Pearl fo Orient'**

Penang, often referred to as the Pearl of the Orient, is one of the most picturesque and romantic cities in all of Asia. This tropical island lies in the Indian Ocean, just off the north-west coast of Peninsular Malaysia. Penang received its name from the

Penang, or Betel Nut tree, once commonly found on the island. Established as the first British trading post in the Far East in 1776, Penang today is a bustling metropolis reflecting a uniquely exotic blend of East and West.

While driving through the Penang Bridge, one of the longest in Asia at 13.5 km, you will feel the touch of the beach resorts which will offer guaranteed heat and mostly sun, with clear seas and fine sand.

On Penang Island sits the capital, Georgetown, a city steeped in history and tradition yet sparkling with progress and modern development. Certain sections of Penang present a quaint picture from the past where narrow side streets, trishaws, temples and traders plying their goods, seem to belong to a forgotten era. Penang is a shopper's paradise for goods old and new, at bargain prices. The island also boasts some of the best food in the region, ranging from fabulous Chinese, Malay and Nyonya cuisines to foodstall favourites like nasi kandar, char kway teow and penang laksa, all as fabulous as its beaches are, some of Penang's deeper mysteries should also be experienced. According to local folklore, the Snake Temple, dedicated to a Buddhist healer-priest, was inhabited by snakes who crawled out of the jungle on the night of the temple's completion. The snakes are still there today. The Kek Lok Si temple, at Air Itam, is reputed to be the most beautiful and largest temple complex in Southeast Asia. Its seven-storey pagoda, over 90 feet high, is a harmonious blend of Chinese, Thai, and Burmese architecture and craftsmanship. Other worthwhile stops are the delightful Penang Bird Park, the romantic peak of Penang Hill, Fort Cornwallis, the site of Light's first landing, and the Pantai Acheh Forest Reserve (crisscrossed with beautiful trails leading to isolated beaches). If you start your journey here in Penang, you can now choose to head to the dazzling capital city or if your mood is now finetuned with the clear sea and fine sand, then consider Langawi



or Borno. Difficult decision must be made now either to travel across to Malaysian Borno or to take ferries to Langkawi at Port Swettenham in Penang. Both are your best choices.

## Langkawi

Off the coast of Kedah is a cluster of 99 islands with the best of many worlds; beautiful beaches, world-class infrastructure, mangroves rich in flora and fauna, ultra-cheap duty-free shopping and fascinating legends.

Ask anyone in Langkawi about the tragic legend of a beautiful young lady named Mahsuri, and you'll hear a tale of love, jealousy and a curse that was placed upon the island by the her for seven generations. Today, the seventh generation of Langkawi's inhabitants has long come and gone, but people here still believe that the prosperity and blessings the islands enjoy today and the passing of the curse is not a pure coincidence. The mysticism of this legend can be felt in many parts of this island, especially at Makam Mahsuri (Mahsuri's Mausoleum) where the famous legendary figure is said to be buried. Langkawi is not only geared towards tourism. Many of the islanders are farmers, fishermen and entrepreneurs. Experience the beautiful countryside and the peaceful landscape of paddy fields by renting a car and taking a leisurely drive around the island. Some of Langkawi's most rustic and memorable views are along the road that circles the island. You'll pass small villages with wooden houses framed by palm trees, and children pedaling their old bicycles on an errand. Aside from experiencing the local lifestyle, there is no shortage of things to do in Langkawi. Head up the thrilling new cable car to the summit of Mount Mat Cincang - Langkawi's second highest mountain - for an unrivalled view of the entire main island and beyond. You can also visit the Field of Burnt Rice, the Hot Springs, Telaga Tujuh (The Seven Wells) and the Beach of Black Sand. Boat tours are organized to Tasik Dayang

Bunting, (Lake of the Pregnant Maiden), Gua Cerita (Cave of Stories) and the Gua Langsir (Curtain Cave). And if you're more outdoorsy, why not go trekking through the pristine rainforest that blankets most of Langkawi, or go on a boat tour of the mangroves, go diving, or play a round of golf at some of the 5-star resorts. Langkawi also has an underwater world, containing an underground tunnel that runs through a giant aquarium, that has gotten rave reviews.

## **Borneo's Paradise**

Malaysian Borneo is the place to do the really wild thing in a primitive environment, with exotic Dayak tribes, an ancient and endangered jungle sporting ancient creatures such as the orang utan, as well as mountains and spectacular caves. If you skip Sarawak, you'll miss something very special of your trip to ASEAN.

## **Sarawak Highlights**

### *Land of the Hornbills*

The state has a superb system of national parks, beautiful beaches and a diverse thriving tribal culture. Situated on the north-western coast of Borneo, the Land of Hornbills offers you an unmatched rich rainforests, pepper plantations, and the diverse cultures of its indigenous people.

Sarawak shares its borders with Indonesia's Kalimantan province in the south and Brunei and Sabah in the north-east. Sarawak is Malaysia's largest state, covering an area of 124, 450 sq.km. with one of the most pleasant cities in all of Asia, Kuching, as its capital. Kuching, situated on the Sarawak River, offers lots of colonial heritage and is attractive and walkable.

Two-thirds of its land is covered in rainforests and its population of 1.7 million is made up of 23 ethnic groups. Sarawak's indigenous peoples have a

strong sense of identity and have made their mark in government, education and the media. A unique history has given Sarawak a character of its own, distinct yet very much a part of Malaysia. Sarawak the southern province also offers regular short-haul flight from Kuala Lumpur through the main entry point of the capital city of this state-Kuching international airport. You must visit many of its national parks and the world's most extreme diversity of flora and fauna here. Mountains range above extensive jungle waterways, edged with gorgeous beaches. Abundance of wildlife can also be found here.

Your must visit national part is Bako National Park, Sarawak's oldest national park was established in 1957, covers a modest 27 sq. km., and is about 37 km. from Kuching. It's known for its extraordinary natural scenery, habitats, plants and wild life. Its most significant feature are secluded coves and rugged rocky headlands with magnificent steep cliffs that overlook the South China Sea. Bako is famous for being the most accessible place in Sarawak to see the rare, human-looking proboscis monkey. Alternatively, you could visit the Matang wildlife centre about 35km from Kuching, located in Kubah National Park, this large enclosed area of rainforest is home to endangered wildlife. There is a training programme here that teaches Orang Utans, who have been orphaned or rescued from captivity, how to survive in the wild. Visitors will be able to see lots of Orang Utans here, especially during feeding time. Besides these adorable primates, there are also Sun Bears, Sambar Deer, Civet cats as well as three large aviaries that house Sea Eagles, Hornbills and other birds in Sarawak. Jungle trekking is also possible as there are four jungle trails here, the Pitcher Trail (takes about 2 hours), the Sungai Rayu Trail (about 3 - 4 hours), the Sungai Senduk trail (about 1 hour) and Sungai Buluh trail (about 2 hours). Picnic spots, an information centre, accommodation facilities, a car park and a small canteen are available at the park HQ.

## Sabah

### *'Land Below the Wind'*

It is called the 'Land Below the Wind' because it lies below the typhoon belt. Sabah occupies the eastern part of North Borneo and is East Malaysia's second largest state with an area of 74,500 sq.km. Sabah has the South China Sea on the west and the Sulu and Celebes Seas on the east. Mountainous and largely carpeted by lush tropical rainforests, its population of nearly two million is made up of 32 colourful ethnic communities. Kota Kinabalu, the capital, lies in a fertile lowland plain where most commercial and administrative activities are concentrated. But the 'real' Sabah can best be found in its countryside.

International access to Malaysia's eastern gateway is through Sabah's capital, Kota Kinabalu, which receives flights from Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru, Kuching, Singapore, Hong Kong, Manila, Brunei, Jakarta, Seoul, and Taipei.

## Kinabalu Park

For many visitors, the primary attractions of Sabah are its outstanding national parks. A must visit national park is Kinabalu National Park, listed as a UNESCO Heritage Site, due to the diversity of plant life and wildlife there. The Park covers an area of 754 sq km and is made up of Mount Kinabalu, Mount Tambayukon and the foothills. It was gazetted to preserve this valuable natural environment. The mountains have a fascinating geological history, taking 'just' a million years to form. The mighty Mount Kinabalu is actually a granite massif that was later thrust upwards through the crust of the surface. Subsequent erosion removed thousands of feet of the overlying sand and mud stone, exposing this massif. During the Ice Age, glaciers running across the summit smoothed it out, but the jagged peaks that stood out above the ice surface remained unaffected, retaining the extremely ragged surfaces.

This rugged mountain is the focal point of the National Park.

Kinabalu Park provides a challenging climb, where you can find hidden hot springs in cool high altitudes. Sipadan island off the south eastern coast of Sabah, has been one of the top five dive sites in the world for years. This is attributed to unique underwater geography that encourages proliferation of wildlife. Leatherback turtles, barracuda and white tipped sharks are a common sight while diving in Sipadan. Sabah possesses a number of other attractions as well, all of which are worth exploring.

You as a traveler will run from one surprise to another in Malaysia where traditional and modern go hand in hand. Diversity in harmony from the blazing city of Kuala Lumpur, then to smaller towns with traditional architectural style, picturesque villages set against spectacular landscape of matchless beauty to the modern premier resorts will, without any doubt, be quite an impressive experience, full of surprises and astonishing contrasts for any traveler from any part of the world. Malaysian's natural, historical, cultural assets and values altogether constitute an enormous potential and creates the infinite diversity of tourist resources of ASEAN today. With infinite diversity of these natural, historical, cultural resources, values and attractions, Visit Malaysia year 2007 can offer a wide range of tourist products with a selling appeal to anyone, any segment of travel and tourism market and in fact Malaysia can and is a truly ASIA.

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# MYANMAR

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Hello! In this section, I would like to take you to visit Myanmar, known as the Golden land. I'm Pimrawee Rocharungsat. I am responsible for being your guide and going to take you to be acquaint with the most prominent 15 attractions of Myanmar. I guarantee that you will definitely fall in love with this "Old Asia" and "Friendliest People" land, the land that filled with rich culture and Buddhism atmosphere.

I spent about a week in Myanmar gathering research information with the help of Mr. Ye Jhan (Marketing Director of Dusit Inya Hotel) and colleagues who are professionals in Myanmar tourism that I met in the meeting. The process that I received these 15 recommended attractions was from the brainstorming and voting from these 25 professionals. They were from business sectors (hotels, restaurants, travel agents), government sector (Ministry of Tourism) and NGO. Actually they told me that Myanmar has



more than 15 attractions that should be visited so we spent quite a while to consider and discuss which attractions mostly represent Myanmar country as **“Culturally Golden Myanmar.”** Here are the attractions voted for. If you are ready, let’s travel to each place together!

## **1. Bagan, the richest archaeological treasure in Southeast Asia**

The first attraction is Bagan. It was once a splendid and glorious capital of the first Myanmar Empire. Bagan had been the capital of Myanmar for two and a half centuries (1044-1286 A.D.). It has 42 square kilometer area dotted with thousands of ancient pagodas, stupas, shrines, ordination halls, monuments and ruins located to the east bank of the mighty Ayeyarwady River. The story of Bagan may be told in two parts, Bagan before King Anawrahta and after. The countless archeological sites in Bagan are the proof of strong Buddhism of the country, and the symbol of the great glorious of the past. The charm of the city is known to all visitors until these days. If you have a chance to visit this ancient Bagan, you will agree that it is an unforgettable sight, depicting the greatness of human endeavors and aspirations.

## **2. Mandalay, a capital of Myanmar culture**

Now we are in Mandalay, the richest historical landmark next to Bagan. It was the capital of the





last, independent Burmese kingdom, which in 1886 was finally conquered by British colonial forces. This city is situated about 600 kilometers north of Yangon on the Ayeyarwaddy River. It is Myanmar's second largest city and the Capital of Mandalay Division. It is also the major trading and communications center in northern and central Myanmar and is linked by rail with other large Myanmar cities. Mandalay is surrounded by its ancient neighboring cities as Mingun, Sagaing, Innwa (Ava), and Ama-rapura.

Known as the historical old capital, Mandalay has Buddhist Sasana and Myanmar traditional arts and crafts, a city that abounds in historical sites, cultural memorials and Buddhist edifices. Therefore, Mandalay is a cultural and religious center of Buddhism, having many monasteries, famous temples and more than 700 pagodas of great beauty. The Mandalay hill, the Maha Myat Muni Buddha Image is the ideal descriptions of Buddhism. The city houses at least a third of the nation's 150,000 monks and nuns. Mandalay today is a striking phenomenon composed of modern and classic images with the ancient cultural beauty of the royal palace and the moat surrounding it, and the natural impressionistic beauty of the Mandalay Hill, harmoniously added with new architectural photography of modern houses and brickbuildings. It is one of the destinations that you should not miss.

### **3. Inle and Pindaya**

Myanmar also is filled with natural beauty. The Inle Lake, 22 kilometers long and 10 kilometers across,



has a population of some 150,000 many of whom live on floating islands of vegetation. The Inle Lake, natural and unpolluted, is famous for its scenic beauty and the unique leg-rowing of the Inthans, the native lake dwellers. Inle Lake is one of the most significant and productive ecological system supporting an immense variety of plants and animals and yielding great wealth of Myanmar through its occurrence of floating islands. About 45 kilometers drive from Kalaw hill station located around Inle Lake area is Pindaya, well known for its extensive limestone caves. The caves are set deep in the hillsides and there stands at the entrance, a 15 meter high Shwe U Min Pagoda. There are some 6,000 Buddhaimages and interesting stalagmites here.

#### **4. Yangon, the Garden City of the East**

Here we are in the famous city Yangon. You should have heard this name. This city is so evergreen and cool with lush tropical trees, shady parks and beautiful lakes. Being the main entrance to the country and principle seaport, it is the hub of business activities and government offices as well as non-governmental organizations. It also serves as the center for higher learning as it abounds with educational institutions. The city represents a mixture of diverse communities and cultures, with respect to people, religion, business, and settlement. The present day Yangon covers an area of 350 square kilometers with a population of over 5 millions. The recommended places that should be visited in Yangon are:

### **The famous Shwedagon Pagoda**

Towering to a height of 326 feet on Theingottara hill, dominates Yangon. Visitors to Myanmar are stunned by the magnificence and splendor of this golden shrine. The great golden Shwedagon Pagoda is the prominent landmark visible from miles around, where the holy hair relics of the Buddha were enshrined more than 2,500 years ago. It is one of the wonders of the world and the most venerable pagoda in Southeast Asia.

### **The colonial buildings in and around Yangon**

In Yangon, there remains quite a number of old buildings built in the time of British occupation. These remind us of former British's presence in Myanmar. They were constructed in the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century, before the Second World War in 1940. The colonial residences are substantial castles built of brick, masonry and wood with the multigabled roofs, verandas and porches.

### **Bogyoke Aung San Market**

It is a fantastic structure in Yangon known as Scott Market before. It is the most famous shopping place. Myanmar arts and handicrafts are best souvenirs available there at reasonable price.

## **5. Mrauk-U, the soul of Rakhine.**

Move from the city to this historical place, Mrauk-U. It is located near the west coast of Myanmar. It is the 15<sup>th</sup> century ancient city in Rakhine State. There are about 70 stupas and the remains of the magnificent Royal Palace in Mrauk-U. Mrauk-U museum is located near the palace site. It has a good collection of ancient artifacts unearthed around the city. Shitthaung Pagoda, meaning 80,000 pagodas, is located half a mile away from Mrauk-U. Similarly, Koethaung Pagoda or 90,000 pagoda was built by King Thaikkha

in 1553 is the biggest pagoda in Mrauk-U area. They are evidence of the region's long-standing cultural autonomy. There are a number of famous pagodas to be visited here and also religious places such as Dukkan Thane which was used as an Ordination Hall in the past.

## **6. Bago, the capital of second Myanmar Empire**

Another historical town that I will take you to is Pegu or today Bago. It is situated 75 kilometers north-east of Yangon, was founded in 573 by two Mon princes and soon developed into the capital of the most important realm of the Mon, a people which has in the mean-time been almost completely assimilated into the people of the Burmans. This town is not far from Yangon so most of the visitors will plan to visit here after Yangon. The places of interest here are Shwemawdaw pagoda. This pagoda is located in the heart of Bago and even taller than the famous Shwedagon pagoda. Shwethalyaung reclining Buddha is famous image of Buddha, 180 feet in length and 52.5 feet in height. It is known as the golden reclining image. Another attraction is Kanbawza Thadi Palace which was built by King Bayinnaung, the founder of this second Myanmar Empire.

## **7. Sagaing, a religious centre**

If you would like to know the well known religious centre of Myanmar, I will take you here in Sagaing. It is in the north-west of Myanmar, on the Indian border. Sagaing, the division's capital, is home to many historical stupas and today is known as a religious centre, with dozens of Buddhists nunneries and monasteries as well as an important monastic hospital. October and November are the region's busiest months, when Buddhists from around the country come to offer their respects and robes to Sagaing's monks, during the full moon of Tazaungmon. Today, Sagaing is known as a

meditation centre. Myanmarans all over the country would visit Sagaing for the purpose of religious retreat. Most monasteries are located on Sagaing Hill.

## **8. Kyaikhti Yo (Golden Rock), the pagoda upon a hermit's head**

One of the religious places that most visitors would like to see is this Golden Rock or Kyaikhti Yo Pagoda. It is like the jewel in the crown of the Mon State (approximately 60 km east of Bago) and it is considered a miracle by Buddhist devotees. This famous rock lies within a day's drive of Yangon high in the forested mountains above the Mon capital Mawlamyaing, a once bustling seaside town, still retaining its elegant colonial buildings along the waterfront.

The Kyaikhti Yo Pagoda is a small stupa only 5.5 meters high, enshrined with the Buddha's hair relic, resting on top of a huge boulder on the very edge of a high cliff. The gold covered boulder is roughly in the shape of a man's head, and it is believed to represent the head of a hermit who had carried the Buddha's hair wrapped in his own topknot before he died. The boulder, which seems to be constantly on the verge of plunging down the mountainside, seems a miracle in itself and devotees are firm in their belief that a pilgrimage here brings them good health and fortune.

## **9. Mingun**

Mingun, located about 11 kilometers upriver from Mandalay on the western banks of the Ayeyarwaddy River, is a town well-known for its 90 tons Mingun Bell. The bell is the largest ringing bell in the world. A mammoth unfinished Mingun Pagoda, Settawya Pagoda, and Hsinbyume Pagoda are famous places to visit here.

## **10. Putao, the land of wondrous flora and fauna**

Beside historical places, Myanmar also offer natural beauty such as this Town, Putao. It is situated in the north of Myitkyina, the capital city of Kachin state. It can be reached only by air route. The city surrounded with snow peaked mountains and the weather is cold around the year. Flora and fauna can be seen in the forest around Putao. It is famous for its Nature of originated Flora, especially there are many various kinds of orchids and even the world's rarest Black orchids can be found in this area. As for fauna, some of the rarest animal species, Takin (*Budorcas Taxicolor*), Red Panda (*Ailurus Fulgens*), Black Bears, Black Deer, are all endemic to this region. There are also many different ethnic minority tribes in Kachin state. People of the Rawan, Lisu, Khamti Shan, Jingphaw and Kachin are represented in the region. It is the nearest town to the base camp for Climbing Mt.Khakhaborazi (5889 meters), which is the highest mountain in Myanmar and in Southeast Asia. Putao is the starting point for Myanmar's most adventurous trekking adventures.

## **11. Pyin-Oo-Lwin, the city of flowers**

Pyin-Oo-Lwin is another city for nature lover. Over 1,000 meters above sea-level, it is a popular hill station about 69 kilometers northeast of Mandalay. It is well known for its colonial-style houses with large compound and pine trees, eucalyptus and silver-oak abound in town. Trees, blossoms, hidden charms all make Pyin-Oo-Lwin a highland of extraordinary flora and fauna. Country town birds and butterflies dart in and out of the lowering shrubs and bushes along the roads make Pyin-Oo-Lwin a delightful scene. The weather here is cool and pleasant the whole year round. The 175 hectare National Kandawgyi Gardens, Pwe Kauk and Ani-sakan Waterfalls, Goteik Viaduct

and Peik Chin Myaung caves are places of interest of the city.

## **12. Ngapali beach, the purest beach**

Let's continue our trip to the wondrous nature of Myanmar, one of the most beautiful Southeast Asian beaches and it is nearly undiscovered, Ngapali beach. It is said to have been named after the famous Napoli (Naple) beach of Italy. This beach is famous for its natural and unspotted beauty. The beach stretches miles after miles with soft white sand fringed by coconut palms. It lies on one of the finest seaside in the country. It serves as the best ground for sunbathing and recreation. Visitors will fall in love with its natural scenic beauty of the blue sea, white sand and the lovely sun. The water is transparent and the sea is tranquil. Villagers usually sun-dry their fish, shrimp, and coconut. Fish here is fresh, keeping up their original colors offering first class seafood. The best time to visit Ngapali is between October and May. Ngapali is accessible by flight which takes about 45 minutes from Yangon. This is the best place for you to relax.

## **13. Myeik Archipelago, the famous pearl island**

After enjoying pleasant atmosphere on Napali Beach, let's continually enjoy the pearl island, the Myeik archipelago. It is on the southern Taninthayi Division of Myanmar (formerly known as Tennesarim coast of Burma) and comprises of over 500 gorgeous islands. Around and on the east Myeik, there are many valuable tin mines, oil palm plantation, and rubber plantation and evergreen forest. In the Andaman Sea, many valuable pearl breeding and fishing beds can be observed. Pearl Island is the source of high quality pearls, and fishing is the traditional business along the coastal sea and islands. There are about 804 spotted islands

scattered across the blue sea along the Taninthayi coast and the city is on the island in the mouth of Taninthayi River.

## **14. Natmataung (Mt. Victoria), the finest ecological site**

From the island to the mountain, not far from Bagan, Natmataung or Mt. victoria is 10,500 feet high located in southern Chin State. It is situated on Himalayas Mountain Range in the western part of Myanmar. It is an ecological site and a refuge for numerous temperate and sub-alpine species. There are leopard, bear, gaur, barking deer, sambhur deer, serow, goat, wild boar, wild dog, gibbon, various species of wild cat and small animals. Also, forests types are hill savannah, hill evergreen, moist upper mixed deciduous and pine forests. Two thousand and five hundred vascular plant species are found here and endemism is mainly in alpine and at mid-altitudes. Tourists can trek to the peak of Mt. Victoria by various ways and the best time to go is from late October to middle of May.

## **15. Kyaing Tong, regional discovery Myanmar**

The last destination I will take you to the east of Myanmar. There is a beautiful valley between the high misty mountains of the Shan Plateau and the Mekong and the Thanlwin (Salween) Rivers, called the Kyaing Tong Valley. Here is an area steeped in history for it is the homeland of the Gon Shan, the Akhas, the Lisu, the Wa and the White and Black Lahu. Sandwiched between the Chinese region of Xishanungbanna, Laos and Thailand, this area also boasts of spectacular scenery and diverse ethnicity. Kyaing Tong is the capital of this land. It was known in history by many names but now as Kyaing Tong. Here, there is a production of lacquer industry known as Kyaing Tong lacquer ware so you can buy some souvenir back home before leaving.



I hope you have fun travelling in Myanmar to the 15 recommended attractions with me. Once you have experience this country, you will agree with me that it is such an enchanting and unforgettable country and you will love to be back again.

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# PHILIPPINES

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Hello! Allow me to introduce myself. I am Kulvara Suwanpimol from Thailand. I am here today with my friend, Cecille. She is a Filipino, and we would like to take you to a grand tour of the Philippines. This is an unmissable journey. Philippines is among the most famous destinations in Southeast Asia. Philippines is also one of the most remote, peripheral, uncertain, and multicultural regions of the ASEAN. Its tourism may require some strategic management actions in order to compete with alternative destinations and maximize the prosperity of the host population.

Well, let me talk a bit about tourism industry in the Philippines. Tourism has been heavily promoted not only by the Philippines government but also by the governments of many countries in South-East Asia as a key component of development strategies for several decades. This is because it is believed



that tourism promotion will serve as a substantial source of employment, foreign exchange earnings and export receipts, thereby contribute to economic growth and improved income distribution.

In most people views, Philippines is by far recognized as the land of tranquility, freedom, and adventure where many visitors experience a number of unforgettable memories, including astonishing arts and culture, natural resources, and friendly hospitality. In this article, Cecille and I would like to show you 13 major destinations that would take you to a holiday of a life time! (just like I have).

## **Philippines and its recommended destinations**

As earlier mentioned, from here onward, many useful information in relation to those 15 places mostly recommended by visitors and travel agencies around the world are concisely presented here. These include 1) Sightseeing and city tour in Manila 2) Historical Tourist attraction in Manila 3) Environs of Manila 4) Clark 5) Subic 6) Baguio 7) Banaue 8) Vigan 9) Laoag 10) Boracay 11) Palawan 12) Cebu 13) Bohol 14) Camiguin and 15) Davao. I shall then start with Manila, the capital of the Philippines.

### **Sightseeing and city tour in Manila**

First, it is a must to visit Manila, The capital of the Philippines. It sets the archipelago's rhythm and is



a pulsating hub that blends the Oriental with the Occidental, the quaint with the modern, the religious with the profane, and the mundane with the extraordinary.

Manila has been witness to the Philippines' history and growth. In historic time, it was plagued with bombs during the Second World War, and has housed 14 presidents. Its beauty has withstood the test of time.

At the heart of Manila's history is Intramuros. It features the grand Manila Cathedral with its detailed stone carvings and stained glass mosaics; Fort Santiago, the site of torture chambers and dungeons; and a favorite wedding spot, the San Agustin Church.

It is also important to note that Greater Manila, made up of 11 cities and five towns, is where the country's most prestigious business addresses and trendiest leisure establishments are found. Fashionable hotels, restaurants, discos, music bars, boutiques and specialty shops converge around the sleek Ayala and Ortigas Centers.

## MANILA

### Historical attractions in Manila

Manila National Museum is located at the former Senate building. It houses many artworks by renowned Filipino artists, including Juan Luna's *Spoliarium*. Don't miss this if you are a lover of fine arts. Another



must visit site is the Museum of the Filipino People, this museum is of course, where we can learn much about Filipino and their life style. Located almost beside the National Museum, it interestingly houses artifacts from different regions of the Philippines, displaying the diverse and colorful culture this archipelago has to offer.

You will also love the beauty of Intramuros. This walled city steeped in Old Spanish history is where several Spanish churches and other landmarks are located, such as the Manila Cathedral, San Agustin Church with its 4,500-pipe organ, and the parks such as the Puerta Real Gardens and the Baluarte de San Diego.

As you may have heard of it, Rizal Park (Luneta) is where visitors can see the monument of National Hero Dr. Jose Rizal. A few meters away is a Light and Sound Show, held at the exact place where he was executed. It is also a great place to stroll and enjoy picnics with their family. Cecille and I also enjoyed the walk of Rizal Park.

## **The environs of Manila**

I would also like to recommend other major cities. These include Quezon City, also known as an entertainment hub as well as a government center; Marikina City; the shoe center of the Philippines; Parañaque City, known for its dry goods and seafood markets and restaurants; and Las Piñas, which houses the world's only bamboo organ at St. Joseph's Parish Church.

Calabarzon, comprised of the five provinces of Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon, is only a few hours away from Manila. The area boasts of great destinations and leisure activities for day trips or overnight getaways as well as export processing centers.

## Clark

Now we are taking you to Clark, the second destination in this guide. Clark in Angeles, Pampanga was a former U.S. Air force Base and has long been the principal aviation center of the Philippines. Since the American troops left, the Philippine government has been working hard to convert Clark into a vibrant economic zone.

It is 70 kilometers north of Manila and an hour east of Subic. It has become popular among tourists because it's a center for some thrilling adventure sports, including parachuting, microlight flying and off-road motorcycling.

## Subic

Now, we have come to the fifth destination. Subic is the largest Naval Base outside the USA before being transformed into a commercial free port. It is just 210 kilometers northwest of Manila, and it is a destination of historical significance. It also promises a myriad of experiences, from majestic beaches with fascinating shipwrecks to a multitude of outdoor adventures.

Historically, the Aetas were the inhabitants of Subic before Spanish colonizers came. Their ancestral origin is traced to the foot of Mt. Pinatubo, a revered place they believe to be the abode of a good named Apo Namalyari. Soon afterward Juan de Salcedo, a Spanish conquistador discovered Subic in 1542. He reported that the area was a deep bay and was a strategic location as a port. There was an existing fishing village back then, called "Hubek", which

meant “head of the plow”. Historians say that Salcedo mispronounced it by calling it Subig, this was how its name began to come about.

The Spanish issued a Royal Decree by King Alfonso II declaring Subig as a naval port in 1884. Subig later became “Subiq” and the letter q, apparently of Spanish origin was transposed to c, this was most likely done to avoid mispronunciation by the Americans.

In 1899, the Americans included Subic Bay as one of the locations to be visited by patrolling gunboats. Commodore George Dewey of the Asiatic Squadron, who battled the Spanish fleet in Manila declared Subic Bay as “having no equal in the Philippine islands.”

US President Theodore Roosevelt designated Subic and 70,000 hectares of its neighboring land as an American military reservation in 1903, a year after, the Subic Naval Station was operational. It was the largest US Marine Corps training facility outside the mainland United States. After the Philippines gained its independence from the Americans, an agreement was signed granting the Americans use of the 16 military installations including Subic and Olongapo.

Today, Subic is not just a glimpse of the past, but is also a solace for travelers with a thirst for adventure and an exhilarating getaway for groups of all ages.

## **Baguio**

Our sixth destination in the Philippines is Baguio City. The city is in northern Luzon, known as the summer capital of the Philippines. It is a popular destination particularly during the months of March, April, and May for both local and foreign tourists because of its cold climate. Also known as, “The Flower City of the North,” it is a great venue for various outdoor activities. Come Christmas time, Baguio is also a preferred vacation spot.



Geographically, Baguio is located some 250 kilometers north of Manila, where is nestled 5,000 feet above sea level on the Cordillera Mountain Range, the highest metropolis in the Philippines. In the heart of Benguet Province, it benefits from having political autonomy, being a chartered city since 1909. With an area of 49 square kilometers enclosed in a perimeter of 30.6 kilometers, it has 20 administrative districts where its 129 barangays are distributed.

Baguio, before being discovered by the Americans a century ago, was known as the “rancheria”, Cattle and horses used to flock the area during dry seasons, but most of the time was marshland with a shallow lake where the locals hunted for ducks and snipes.

The Americans saw Baguio as a place to build a future metropolis. A water source was found, pine trees were everywhere and grass covered the area. They immediately decided to make Baguio an admirable site for the future summer capital and health resort of the Philippines.

Today, Baguio is a melting pot of cultures. The diversity of indigenous ethno-linguistic groups enriches the socio-cultural scene. The Ibalois are considered the original settlers and together with other Cordillera groups such as the Bontocs, Kalingas, Ifugaos and Kankanaïs, comprise about 10 percent of the total population. Other ethnic groups from as far as Mindanao also settled in the area. Local visual artists also gather in the city of pines for it is a comfortable space to hone their talents together with their contemporaries.

Baguio City is also popular for its vegetable and strawberry produce. It is also an ideal place for golfers and those who love to trek. Simultaneously this promotes environmental awareness and education for both the young and the young at heart. It is a mountain paradise with a cornucopia of attractions that will surely entice any tourist to visit more than once.

## Banaue

Our seventh destination is Banaue. Interestingly, the word “Banaue” is derived from the word “Banawor”, a nocturnal, swift flying bird that lived in one of the oldest sitios of the town. When the Soaniards occupied the town, they mispronounced Banawor, as Banaue, and the name stuck.

Banaue is politically subdivided into 18 barangays, namely: Amaganad, Anaba, Balawis, Banao, Bangaan, Batad, Bocos, Cambulo, Ducligan, Gohang, Kinakin, Poblacion, Poitan, Pula, San Fernando, Taman, Viewpoint and Uhaj.

Because of its high altitude, Banaue is often described as “where land merges with the clouds to meet the heavens, and the rice terraces as “the stairway to the sky.”

Banaue is a place for nature adventures and cultural immersion. Days are for indulging in activities such as strolling, biking and trekking. Evenings are for campfire chats at a village or warm indoor cossetting at the lodges and inns.

## Vigan

Vigan is our eighth recommended destination. It is the capital of Ilocos Sur. Historically it was established in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is the best preserved example of a planned Spanish colonial town in Asia. Its architecture reflects the coming together of cultural elements from elsewhere in the Philippines and from China with those of Europe to create a unique culture and townscape without parallel anywhere in East and Southeast Asia. It was the seat of the Archdiocese of Nueva Segovia, comprising the whole Northern Luzon, in 1758. It was also once called Ciudad Fernandina in honor of King Ferdinand. It was chartered into a city in 2001. Today, it serves as a mirror of the colorful history of our country. Vigan is one of the five UNESCO World Heritage

Sites found in the Philippines.

## Laoag

This is the ninth destinations of our grand tour to the Philippines. Laoag means “light” in the Ilocano dialect. It sits within Ilocos Norte, a province on the region of the Philippines blessed with a rich heritage and a haven of age-old churches that mirror how the Catholic religion’s predominance greatly affected the Filipino way of life.

Long before the coming of the Spaniards, Laoag and its surrounding provinces have been famous for their gold mines. Merchants from neighboring countries like Japan and China would come to trade gold with beads, ceramic and silk. The people, believed to be of Malay origin, called their locality “samtoy” or “sao mi toy, which literally meant “our language”.

After the Spanish conquistadores settled in Manila, they moved to other locations they can conquer, in the late 1500’s. Juan de Salcedo, Legazpi’s grandson, led an expedition to the north with eight armed bots and 45 men at the age of 22.

Salcedo, together with his men, first set foot in Vigan and then moved on to Laoag, Currimao and Badoc. Along the coast where the, men sailed, they were amazed to see sheltered coves, or “looc”, where the locals lived. Thus, they named the region, “Ylocos” and its people, “Ylocanos.”

The Spanish conquistadors spread Christianity throughout the region. Tracts of land were utilized to build Churches and bell towers in line with the Spanish mission “bajo las campanas”. These old churches standing on numerous areas of the locality are a remembrance of history and are a reflection of the rich culture that evolved from the Spanish occupation of Laoag.

Today, Laoag is a bustling city with all the creature comforts. Restaurants, fast food chains and grocery stores are located within the city. Telecommunications is not a problem for there are phone lines where one can make both local and international calls. It has an international airport so it is very accessible to all kinds of travelers.

## **Boracay**

Our tenth destination in the Philippines is Boracay, which is the country's most famous destination. Patronized worldwide by beach lovers who've come to just visit, build a home, or set up shop, Boracay has that effect only an incredibly beautiful beach can have on anyone in search of "paradise". Since its earliest revelers found their way to this Visayan Island in the late 80's, Boracay has grown tremendously as a beach destination for both locals and foreigners. Today, the three kilometers stretch of White Beach is strewn with luxurious resorts, world-class spas, an array of restaurants and bars with international cuisine, and outdoor shopping establishments that feature the best of the islands. Amid the constant hubbub of Boracay's party scene, it is still possible to wake up to clear skies, sparkling turquoise waters, and the satisfying pleasure of being in one of the best beaches in the country, possibly even in the world.

Boracay is found at the northwestern tip of Panay, off the Sibuyan Sea in the Western Visayas region. The island experiences ideal beach weather half the year through, with the months of December to May as its peak season. Between June to November, few tourists make it to Boracay as the rainy season puts a damper on experiencing Boracay's famous beach. With the unpredictability of the weather, rates around the island are understandably lower.

Before becoming a Mecca for beach lovers the world over, Boracay was solely inhabited by the Ati tribe. The name "Boracay" comes from this indigenous

people, a derivative of the local word “borac” which means cotton, a reference to the island’s white sand. The Atis still live on the island, though in a small, secluded area cut away from the runaway development of their native land.

Boracay is politically a part of the municipality of Malay in Aklan province. The island is made up of three communities: Yapak, Balabag and Manoc-Manoc. Though celebrated for its beaches, Boracay also has hilly areas as well as lush forests.

## Palawan

As our eleventh destination in the Philippines, Palawa is widely known as “The Last Frontier”. The archipelago of Palawan is a magnificent world that should be discovered slowly, feet wriggled into its pristine white sands, and its waters swam in with indulgence. Palawan is the country’s largest province, spanning 1.5 million hectares. Bounded by irregular coastlines of fine white sand, its interior thrives with lush virgin forests and incredible wildlife. Palawan is the most well preserved major island group in the Philippines. The rain forest, caves, coral reefs, mangroves, beaches and clear blue waters are its best assets. One has to go around the islands of Palawan to see how its people and the local government’s conservation efforts have born fruit.

Palawan consists of about 1,769 islands: the Calamian Island group to the north, the Cuyo islands group to the northwest, and the Balacbac-Bugsak group to the southwest. Scuba diving is spectacular because of its crystal clear blue-green waters teeming with the marine life. Fall in love with the majestic hawksbill and green sea turtles, the delightful dugong or sea cows, and plenty of species of dolphins, whales, sharks and manta rays. Above water, there are many species unique to the place, like the Palawan bear cat, Palawan mongoose, Palawan peacock pheasant, fish-eating

Palawan eagle, king cobra, and many rare species of parrots and butterflies. Other delightful creatures like the Calamian deer or the large Monitor lizards also thrive here.

Lustrous pearls of every shape and size are plentiful in Palawan. And all over El Nido, Coron and Pabellones Islands are swallows' nests, costing up to US\$3,000/kg., which is harvested as the main ingredient of the expensive Chinese delicacy, bird's nest soup.

Palawan has actually been called the "island of the gods" and it is not without reason, the spectacular sea and landscapes of Palawan; especially at El Nido, gives the impression of seeing heaven's beauty on earth. Acknowledged as the Philippines' last frontier, Palawan is a must see for the traveler who appreciates the majesty and splendor of nature.

## **Cebu**

Cebu is our twelfth destination. It is the fastest growing metropolis outside of Metro Manila. Located in the middle of the Visayas, the island is a commercial hub that contains the country's second international airport, which is the most important transport facility in the Visayas and Mindanao. Cebu is also a center of the shipping industry, with 80% of the country's shipping industry based in this "Queen City."

Although known popularly as cosmopolitan arena for business and industry, Cebu is also known to offer travelers a great escape from city life. The province is replete with white-sand beaches that never fail to attract tourists and locals alike. Neighboring islands are a popular destination for beach-lovers, and the nearby island of Mactan is a favorite among people who want to experience the sun and surf without going too far away from the city. The mountains are equally distant from the city, and Cebu has a host of lookout points and bars

that offer a fantastic view.

Cebu was historically discovered by Ferdinand Magellan who, having sailed into the harbor of Mactan, was slain by Lapu-Lapu, the chieftain of Mactan Island. Years later, the Spanish conquistadors returned and established it as the seat of Christianity in the Philippines. What once was a fishing village and busy trading port in 1521 has evolved into a highly urbanized metropolitan center which now serves as a focal point of growth and development in southern Philippines. Up until today, Cebu is still referred to as the “Queen City of the South”.

English as well as Filipino. Cebuanos can be quite friendly and hospitable, but most are known to be very economical in their spending. The weather in Cebu is best from December to May, when it isn't wet or too hot. The coolest period is from December to February, the hottest from March until May.

## **Bohol**

Bohol is the thirteenth destination to recommend by us. It is situated in the central portion of Northern Visayas, and the island province of Bohol is the tenth largest in the country. On the northwest of this oval-shaped province is Cebu, while on the northeast is Leyte. Bohol has 73 smaller offshore islands aside from the mainland, and this assures a remarkable retreat that nature has to offer.

Bohol is 700 kilometers directly south of Manila, and is an island popular for its tropical waters and dive sites. The name Bohol is believed to be derived from Bo-ol, a barangay located in Tagbilaran City. Bohol was among the first places toured by Magellan's expedition. According to history books, “the Concepcion”, one of Magellan's ships, was burned in this province after Magellan was killed by Lapu-Lapu in Mactan.

Miguel Lopez de Legazpi made his way to Jagna, east of Bohol and made a blood compact with Sikatuna and Sigala, signifying them as blood brothers. Bohol then was a part of the province of Cebu and was known as “the residencia”.

Before the Spanish conquistadors settled, Boholanos had exhibited a culture that was uniquely their own. Artifacts, with designs influenced by the Ming Dynasty, were found as proof of the thriving culture in areas such as Mansasa, Dauis, and Panglao. There were also traces that the early inhabitants already had a system of writing. Unfortunately materials used were leaves and bamboos, which easily perished.

Now Bohol is a tropical paradise that tourists long to experience. From its rich heritage to its splendid surroundings, it is an awesome destination showcasing picturesque islands and wonders of nature.

## **Camiguin**

The fourteenth destination to recommend in this guidebook is the island of Camiguin. It is said to be “born of fire”, pertaining to the seven volcanoes located on this 238 sq.km. patch of land that sits across the provinces of Misamis Oriental and Cagayan de Oro. In 1953, Mt. Hibok-Hibok erupted violently enough to spew both lava and land that later cooled down to form an extended part of the province. A circumferential road now runs through the entire land, embracing the parts that created the “underwater cemetery” and forming underwater canyon now inhabited by a wealth of marine life.

Camiguin is an island where nature runs aplenty. It boasts an impressive list of tourist attractions and activities, and it is an inviting escape for a nature lover who can trek to waterfalls, bike to springs (hot and cold), lounge on a sand bar, dive, climb, and just breathe in the fresh mountain air



The entire island is inhabited by about 80,000 people, and it takes just one and a half hours to go around the island on a well-paved road that takes you from architectural relics rife with history to lush clearings facing the open sea. Small and developed just enough to be comfortable, Camiguin could very well be the perfect island to travel to for a few days of adventure and exploration.

## **Davao**

Our fifteenth and final to recommend in this guidebook for Philippines is Davao. Davao probably derives its name from the ancient Bagobo word “daba-daba” or fire, which the tribe used for its rituals. The Tagabua tribe, on the other hand, called the river bisecting the region “Daba” and the Guiangan tribe, “Davoh”. Situated in the typhoon-free southern area of the Philippines, Davao is a diverse sights, sounds and tastes. It is a melting pot of both immigrant and highland cultures that blend in a colorful, exciting tapestry of ethnic heritage and modern lifestyles.

Davao is the most progressive city in Mindanao and is the center of economic activity in Southern Philippines. It is now a fast emerging gateway to the evolving East ASEAN Growth Area including Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia and Malaysia - a re-mergence of trade cooperation by the four countries during the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Davao is one of those places where urban relaxation is possible. It has wide, well-lit streets, beautiful buildings, great resorts, the friendliest people and the freshest fruits, vegetables, and the day’s catch from the sea. While you find malls, five-star hotel and nightlife, you can still feel an almost pastoral ambience due to the wildflowers, long blades of grass, beaches and towering Mt. Apo.

Indeed, Davao is touted as one of the most beautiful cities in Asia. From an airplane at night,

it looks like an inverted universe with its billion dancing lights shining from wide, well-lit structures, streets and establishments.

We hope this informative guide to Philippines is useful to those who may be interested in visiting the Philippines. Time and tide wait for no man, it is a great destination and you will absolutely enjoy it! Come and share the same perfect experience with us soon.





# SINGAPORE

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What makes Singapore so unique from other destinations is that it is a vibrant melting pot of ethnic groups, religions and cultures and it is a city of where the east bridges beautifully with the west. You can find the best of the east and the best of the west in Singapore from food, shows, clothes, nightlife and many more. Singapore is renowned for being one of the best places on earth for sampling the variety cuisines from many parts of the world. It has many fine restaurants and a wealth of street food that you can choose from. Singapore is a dynamic city that is full of exciting activities ranging from theme parks, nature parks to off-shore islands, nightspots, museums and places of worship. It is truly a place for all visitors such as families, businessmen for meetings and retreats, the young and the young at heart. Travelling around



Singapore is easy and convenient with its efficient transportation system. You can either take taxis, public buses or MRT, air-conditioned trains that have stations all over the city. There are other two special buses that tourists would find very convenient. They are city buzz that loop the city from 10 am to 10 pm daily and SIA Hop-on that offer unlimited rides for a small fare around the city and Sentosa daily between 9 am to 7.30 pm.

## Recommended Attractions

To make your trip to Singapore complete, there are 15 recommended attractions that you should visit while you are in Singapore.

### 1. Wildlife

Singapore Zoo, Night Safari and Jurong Bird are must-visits for animal lovers. Singapore Zoo has more than 3,200 mammals, reptiles and many other species. Just next door to the zoo, Night Safari houses in 8 different zones over 40 hectares and opens its door to visitors at dusk. It will bring you close to over 900 animals of 135 exotic species. This is the first wildlife park in the world specially built for night visits. For bird lovers, you should visit Jurong Bird Park, the largest bird park in South East Asia, to get acquainted with pelicans, hornbills, flamingos, penguins and many more.



## 2. Orchard Road

Being one of the most famous shopping streets in the world, Orchard Road is a magnet for trendy and fashionable products. Orchard Road is a shopping paradise with a sheer number of malls line up side by side. You can find almost every brand here either in the mall or in its own flagship store on this 2 kilometer shopping spree. Tanglin Mall, Wisma Astria, Ngee Ann City, Paragon Shopping Centre are just some names you must look for. These malls are filled with everything from jewelry, designer ware to home ware and electrical gadgets. If you love shopping, you will adore Orchard Road.

## 3. Sentosa

Sentosa island is known as the isle of peace, tranquility and lush greenery. It is conveniently accessed by road, sea, cable car and the new Sentosa Express monorail. It is truly something for everyone. Sentosa is an all-in-one tourist attraction with beautiful beaches, a themed park, tropical resorts, nature park and heritage centre. There are many things to do at Sentosa. Here, you will find the Merlion, a Singapore's icon in a shape of a lion's head and the fish's body. Take a visit to the Sky Tower, one of the newest attractions on Sentosa, is the tallest air-conditioned public viewing tower. To enjoy more of great view of Singapore, you can take a lift to the Mouth Gallery Viewing Deck on Level 9 of the Merlion. Sentosa is a home of the Underwater



World, one of Asia's largest oceanariums. You will have a chance to get closer to sharks and watch dolphin show at the Dolphin Lagoon. If you wish to unwind, Sentosa also has three fine beaches with wide water-fronts, clean water and soft sand. Also try Sentosa Luge racing downhill on a half go-cart and half toboggan device. Don't forget to end your evening at Café del Mar by the shoreline. There, you can watch the sunset with a glass of cocktail.

## 4. Chinatown

Your trip would not be complete without visiting Chinatown. It is the original site where Chinese immigrants live. Visit Thian Hock Keng, the oldest Hokkien Temple as well as Sri Mariamman Temple, Singapore oldest Hindu temple, built in 1827 by one of the city's first Indian businessman. Don't forget to stop by Food Street and the Chinese pastry shops for home-made tarts and cakes and Chinatown point for arts and craft shopping for souvenirs.

## 5. Little India

A stroll through Little India will make you feel like walking in India. This is a colourful ethnic area. Visit Sri Veeramakaliamman temple, built in 1855. This temple is dedicated to the Hindu goddess of power, Kali. There are plenty of small shops selling saris, Bollywood music, jewelry, fresh fruit, Indian sweets, clothes and shoes. Visit Mustafa Centre, a 24-hour shopping paradise, offers everything

at competitive prices. Try Indian snack at modern Indian fast food restaurants before leaving Little India.

## **6. Arab Street**

The area around Arab Street is dominated by the huge golden dome of the Sultan Mosque. When Sir Stamford Raffles founded Singapore, he divided the city into different areas for each race. The area around the Sultan Mosque and Arab Street was given to Malay population. The Mosque, built in 1825, is the largest in Singapore. Here, you can buy some souvenirs such as traditional basket ware and sarong. Arab Street is the perfect place to try some of the best Malay food in Singapore.

## **7. Esplanade**

Affectionately called “The Durian” by locals due to the resemblance of South East Asian tropical fruit, Esplanade is known for theatres on the bay. It has a 1,600 seat concert hall, a theatre, two studios and indoor and outdoor performance facilities. On most weekends, you can enjoy the outdoor performances at the amphitheatre on the Esplanade grounds. Even if you are not attending any event, you can still enjoy the ambience of this complex at one of its many cafes, bar and restaurants.

## **8. National Heritage Board Museums**

The National Heritage Board museums include three major museums: National Museum of Singapore, Asian Civilizations Museum and Singapore Arts Museum. National Museum of Singapore is an iconic architecture which is beautifully decorated with stained glass and modern design. It has recently been opened with brand new exhibitions and programs. This is the biggest museum in Singapore with a rich history

dated back to 1887. Asian Civilizations Museum is a must-see while you are in Singapore. The building itself is considered one of the finest buildings in Asia. There are two locations for the Museum. The Empress Place branch covers forces that have shaped Asia while the Armenian Street branch focuses on Peranakan culture, which is unique in this part of the world for its mix of Malay and Chinese influences. Singapore Arts Museum is located in the building that once was St Joseph's Catholic boys' school. It contains over 4,000 art works in its 14 galleries. This is a must-visit for art enthusiasts. It is a home to modern and contemporary art from Singapore and South East Asia.

## **9. Newton Hawker Centre**

The most prevalent form of eating places in Singapore are traditional hawker centres, where small stalls that specialize in specific dishes sell their food at reasonable price. Hawker centres are places for visitors to learn about unique local dishes. Newton Hawker Centre is one of the best hawker centres in Singapore. You will find the best of local delights such as oyster omelette, popiah, barbequed chicken wings and barbequed stingray. The best time to stop by Newton would be for dinner and supper. It is open from 7.00 p.m. onwards and is just opposite Newton MRT station.

## **10. Bugis Village**

Bugis, situated near the City Hall area, gives the visitors a taste of street market life. The market stays open into the night where you can find all sorts of souvenirs. Bugis Street houses hundred of stalls selling everything from CDs to clothes and accessories. This is a place for the young and trendy looking for a good bargain. Across the road, there is Bugis Junction where small carts line an indoor air-conditioned street mall. This place houses about 180 specialty shops.



## 11. Riverfronts

By the Singapore river, you can choose from various eating outlets, pubs, bars, clubs and cabaret. Boat Quay and Clarke Quay are now branded as a 24-hour entertainment zone. For dining, these two places house various bars and restaurants which you can find food from all over the world including Thai, Italian, Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese, western and Mexican cuisines. Clarke Quay is Singapore's best nightlife area which can compete with similar waterfront venues around the world.

## 12. National Parks

Just a short walk from Orchard Road, Singapore Botanic Gardens is a beautiful 52-hectare park, and is the only park in the world that is open from 5 am to midnight everyday. You should look for Ginger Garden and Evolution Garden. There is an exclusive French restaurant by the greens. Another must visit is National Orchid Garden, a showcase of Singapore's national flower in a myriad of species. Bukit Timah Nature Reserve is a place for hikers that offers sighting of more than 840 species of flora and fauna. Located only 12 km from the city, it is Singapore's highest point at 164m above sea level. It is one of the few places where you can see how the island once looked before the development. For the more adventurous few, the Tree Top Walk at MacRitchie Reservoir is an eye-opener. The 250m long suspension bridge will give you a bird's eye view of the lush jungle that remains intact in Singapore.

## 13. Marina Bay

Marina Bay has mega malls and designer boutiques. All the malls are linked, making it a true shopping experience. Starting from Raffles City Shopping City Centre, you can walk through CityLink Mall

which leads to Marina Square, Suntec City Mall and Millenia Walk. Marina Square and Suntec City Mall are mega malls with shops offering from fashion and jewelry to watches and chocolate. Suntec City is home to the 'World's Largest Fountain'. Take a walk around the Fountain of Wealth, a *feng shui* masterpiece that signifies achievement and prosperity. If you wish to buy high-end products, you can choose from specialty stores in Millenia Walk and Raffles City. You should also visit CHIJMES (pronounced as chimes), a restored national heritage that once was a Catholic girls' school. It is now a charming plaza filled with retails and premiere wine and dining destinations.

## 14. Vivo City

Vivo city is Singapore's largest multi-ex-periential retail and lifestyle destination which has just been recently opened in December 2006. It is located very near to Harbourfront MRT station. It offers a vibrant and diverse mix of retail, food and beverage and entertainment outlets. Large recreation zones called 'Sky Park' are for kids to have fun at the rooftop pool while mummy and daddy can take a short break. Vivo City will provide you a great shopping experience in Singapore!

## 15. Singapore Discovery Centre

It is the leading "edutainment" attraction in Singapore that celebrates the Singapore experience. Visit iWERKS theatre for watching giant screen showing 2D and 3D movie that provide you exciting sensory cinematic experience. Also, drop by the shooting gallery to try computerized simulated shooting range offers scenarios to challenge your reflexes, hand-eye coordination and shooting capabilities.





# THAILAND

Tourism Authority of Thailand

With a rich cultural heritage and diverse landscapes of great natural beauty, Thailand is truly a land of dazzling variety. Whatever your preference is from exploring jungle trails, marvelling at the treasures of the past, enjoying soft adventure tours or simply lazing in the sun soaking up an enviable tan, you have every best choice for the vacation of your dream. Tourism Authority of Thailand has decided to highlight some of the most amazing activities and attractions all visitors to the Kingdom must definitely not miss.

## **1. Relish a Regal and Religious Experience**

Thailand's most sacred statue, the Emerald Buddha, resides at the grandiose Wat Phra Kaew or Temple of the Emerald Buddha, right next to the former residence of royalty, the Grand Palace.



The murals depicting scenes from the Ramayana, a magical epic are other worldly. But so are the gilt covered pagodas and Buddhist images in the country's number-one tourist attraction.

What is also fascinating is how many everyday Thais come here to pray. Watching them observe age-old Buddhist rituals is a genuine slice of Thai life. The temple and palace, located in the historic Rattanakosin Island, are only a short walk from other marvels such as Wat Pho (home of the Reclining Buddha and a traditional Thai massage school), as well as the National Museum, the City Pillar and the National Gallery.

## **2. Break Your Budget at Chatuchak Weekend Market**

For a truly Thai shopping experience, the Chatuchak Weekend Market is guaranteed to appease both the thrifty bargain-hunter and the moneyed antique collector. From home decorations and artworks to exquisite Thai handicrafts and exotic pets, you will find them all-and much much more-in this sprawling behemoth of a bazaar. When you are on the final shopping spree for souvenirs or presents for your loved ones back home, this is the place to shop until your bank balance drops. The Weekend Market consists of more than 15,000 individual stalls spread over 35 acres. It is easily accessed by public transportation such as BTS Skytrain (Mo Chit Station), MRT (Kamphaengphet station), and public bus.



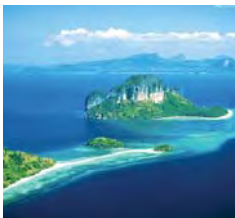
### 3. Be Wowed by Yesteryear's Theatrical Traditions Today

Now visitors to the capital can time travel back to 15<sup>th</sup> century Siam through performance of Khon or Thai Classical Masked Dance at the Sala Chalermskrong Royal Theatre, the art-deco venue that was the first air-conditioned cinema in all of Southeast Asia, and hun lakhon lek or Traditional Thai Puppet at the Joe Louis Puppet Theatre in the Suan Lum Night Bazaar. These traditional shows are packed with traditional Thai music, bedazzling costumes and dancing mermaids. Once performed exclusively for the Royal Court, now visitors can enjoy these regal forms of entertainment. These extravaganzas are based on the mythical Ramayana.

One of the newer venues to add a zesty, cultural dimension to Thailand's nightlife is Siam Niramit. They offer a nightly dinner show package that uses hi-tech special FX to spotlight highlight heaven, hell and the enchanted Himapaan Forest, which lies between them. The other two acts of the show give the audience previews of some of the country's most colourful festivals and take them on a whirlwind tour of its four distinct regions.

### 4. Cruising the Canals, Rolling on the River

Bangkok used to be known as the "Venice of the East" for all the watery arteries connecting to the



main vein - the River of Kings. Taking a longtail boat tour of a few of these canals on the Thon Buri side of the river, like Bangkok Noi and Bangkok Yai with breaks at the temple of Dawn and the Royal Barges Museum is a great way to immerse yourself in Thai and Siamese History. And buzzing down the waterways in a long-tail boat, past canal-side houses and floating petrol stations, inspires a real buzz of excitement you will not find anywhere else.

Another historic voyage is along the canal of Khlong Om to the island of Ko Kret, home to a thriving community of Mon artisans, who sell the fruits of their labours, like sandstone sculptures for very reasonable prices.

## **5. Make a Big Splash in the Gulf of Thailand**

No journey to the Land of Smiles would be complete without visiting some of its globally lauded, tropical islands and oceanfront resorts. Dip into Hua Hin, the country's oldest beach resort, for golf and horse riding on the beach. Try Ko Chang for its abundance of eco-tourism activities. Rock up to Pattaya for its raucous nightlife or savour all of these different delights on Ko Samui. There are many other natural treasures with some sandy fringe benefits where serenity reigns supreme. Ko Tao is popular with families and also certifies more rookie scuba-divers each year than any other destination in Southeast Asia. To really get away from it all, try Ko Mak in the Ko Chang National Marine Park. For a more

Thai Style Experience, close to Bangkok, head for Bang Saen, which boasts some of the cheapest and most succulent seafood in the country.

## **6. Relaxing in Pai**

Pai, the pastoral town in Mae Hong Son province nestled in the northern mountains of Thailand, has become a base camp for eco-explorers of all ages, with trekking and staying over at hill-tribe villages, white water rafting and mountain biking being some of the most attractive options. Close to this town are waterfalls and rolling green hills. And the town itself offers a wealth of classes in everything. Pai is slowly moving more up market thanks to its new airport. But its increasing popularity has yet to sully the town's tranquil charm, art galleries-cum-coffee shops in century-old wooden dwellings, and riverside bungalows in every price range.

## **7. Biking Tour in World Heritage Sites**

Sukhothai, which means "Dawn of Happiness", also marked the dawning of the first Siamese Kingdom and the birth of the Thai language. Once an outpost of the Khmer Empire, they were driven out by the Siamese who established their first Kingdom here in 1238. It was a golden age for classical art, architecture and Buddhism. To traverse these magnificent ruins in the Sukhothai Historical Park-Thailand's equivalent of Angkor Wat-rent a mountain bike for a pittance.

You can also cycle leisurely past dozens of remnants from the next Siamese Empire, Ayutthaya, in its "Ancient City" or scattered around the town and hugging the banks of the rivers, which form a natural moat around what was once considered the most glorious town and trading port in Asia. Well-appointed museums in the city give an overview of the Kingdom's 400 year-old-plus reign.

## 8. Elephant Trekking

Siamese soldiers rode elephants into battle as the tanks of ancient battlefields. Now tourists can ride one, too. Though you can go for an elephant trek on many Thai islands, the most scenic outings are up in the great green north. Atop the elephant's back you can climb hills, ford streams and lumber through the jungle. Some of the camps also put on shows. For an incredible display of the animal's might, just watch them hauling logs. At the National Elephant Institute in the northern province of Lampang, tourists can also sign up for courses on how to be a mahout. Learn how to "drive" the beast, how to take them to the river for a bath and even sleep with your own elephant out in the jungle. Please bear in mind that these intelligent and endangered creatures are sacred to Thai people and that a white elephant once graced the flag of Siam.

## 9. Abseiling in Khao Yai

Imagine climbing down a cliff face with a gushing waterfall on both sides of you. That's the thrill of abseiling in Khao Yai National Park, which has been named a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its diverse eco-systems and 800 different species of fauna. The park is also renowned for its waterfalls, ranging from 15 to 50 meters high. Abseiling (or walking backwards) down them is a thrill sport that will make you feel like Spider-man.

But there are more than just chills and spills to fill out a day in the park. To get to some of the waterfalls requires kayaking across a lake, or trekking through some of the most luscious greenery in the Kingdom. And the jungle is a lair for wild elephant herds, gibbons and hornbills.

Even Spider-man never got this wild.



## 10. Diving at Similan & Surin Islands

Some of the world's most bedazzling spots for scuba-diving and snorkelling are in the archipelagos of the Andaman Sea's Similan and Surin Islands. Below the emerald-green and sapphire-blue surface, you will see manta rays, whale sharks, lionfish, schools of barracuda and around 75 percent of the coral species in Thailand. But that's only rippling the surface, for there's also leatherback turtles, squid, octopus and giant Gorgonian sea fans.

For the upscale option, book a liveaboard (which means you sleep and eat on a boat for several days) from Phuket to explore the Similan Islands and their multitude of dive spots, awash with the colours of what people call the "rainforests of the sea": coral reefs teeming with marine life. You will sleep in comfort and wake up to smell the salty breeze and then plunge into the wild blue yonder beneath the waves.

If you are not a diver, do not worry, because you will not be left high and dry. Many snorkellers opt to stay on the Surin Islands in accommodation provided by the National Park service, or put up their own tents. The park also runs its own daily snorkelling trips to some fantastically beautiful reefs. Even if you are not a strong swimmer, they will provide you with a life jacket so you can get into the swim of things.

## 11. Be Adventurous Like James Bond

Whether you are looking for hard or soft adventures, from sea kayaking to simply soaking up the sun on a sandy tropical beach, the islands of Krabi province (renowned as the setting for *The Beach*) and Phuket (close to where *The Man with the Golden Gun* was shot), are truly amazing destinations.

The symbol of Krabi, which is the oldest continually inhabited province in Thailand, is the limestone crag. Nature's exclamation marks, these towering monoliths punctuate Krabi's inland geography, and make for dramatic cliff faces framing seaview sunsets. For water sports aficionados, there are lots of ways to get a high tide of adrenaline flowing, from jet-skis to banana boats, and parasailing to marine fishing.

But softer tours of beauty are available in the area, too. One of the most scenic trips is visiting Phangnga Bay, studded with limestone crags rising hundreds of meters out of the sea. Most of these tours throw in a stopover at James Bond Island, while "paddling guides" also take you in kayaks through sea caves that open up into lagoons, overflowing with placid aquamarine water that's surrounded by limestone cliffs.

## **12. Find Some Peace of Mind**

The stressed-out urbanite who craves some peace of mind should contemplate doing a meditation retreat in one of the country's many temples. Near the forest monastery of Suan Mokkh, Garden of Liberation, ([www.suanmokkh.org](http://www.suanmokkh.org)) in Surat Thani or at Wat Mahathat ([www.mcu.ac.th/IBMC](http://www.mcu.ac.th/IBMC)) in Bangkok, you can learn the secrets of serenity from real Buddhist monks. These practical lessons will also teach you why the tolerant and compassionate teachings of the Buddha make it the fastest-growing religion in the world today.

At the aforementioned temple in the capital, located near the Grand Palace, visitors receive lessons in sitting and walking meditations from Thai monks conversant in English. You can even stay over at the centre in the temple for a night or even a few weeks as long as you obey the different precepts, like not eating after 12 p.m., just like the monks do. The temple asks only for a small donation; the amount is up to you.

In contrast, the courses at Suan Mokkh International, about one kilometer from the forest temple in Surat Thani, are much more intensive. Here, you have to rise at 4 a.m. to begin a long day of meditation practice that includes listening to talks about Buddhist teachings and even doing yoga. For the entire 10 days you have to remain completely silent. It is tough, but it does have many benefits, including increased concentration, more willpower, and the taming of what the Lord Buddha called “the monkey mind.”

### **13. Take a dose of Healthy Tourism**

Thailand has become the fountain head of the spa business in Southeast Asia. Most of the country's major hotels have a spa, where you can opt for everything from facial treatments to holistic treatments, based on traditional Asian methods of healing, which strike a balance between the physical and spiritual. Many of these spas are opulently appointed with art and antiques to help rejuvenate all of your senses.

What's more, plenty of people come to Thailand to get their teeth done (yes, there is even a dental spa in Bangkok, too) because, for the fraction of the price in the West, they can enjoy quality dentistry and then use the savings to bankroll the rest of their vacation.

As obesity, stress and a lack of physical exercise claim more and more lives each year, good health has become a matter of life and death. No wonder so many tourists are choosing health-conscious holidays. These might entail a week-long fasting and colonics program on a tropical island; or working in some spa treatments after doses of sight seeing; or making sure your hotel has a decent gym and pool to keep yourself in good shape. These days, holidays are not just exercises in gluttony and sloth.

## **14. Learning to Cook Thai Cuisine**

With Thai cuisine enjoying an outstanding world-wide reputation for its unique flavours and tastes, there is no better way to learn about this cooking style than in Thailand itself. Visitors have a choice of venues where they learn from Thai chefs and culinary experts.

From Bangkok to Chiang Mai and Phuket, there are a number of premier cooking schools introducing rich Thai cuisine heritage. Offering personalized, individual family and group culinary courses, they generally aim to provide and insight into the unique art of Thai culinary trove, while demonstrating simple preparation techniques for traditional dishes.

For travelers, cooking schools operated by major hotels are their preferred choices. As meals are generally included, the tuition fees are slightly expensive. Despite this, they offer incredible choices of curricula based on menus served at their restaurants. Schools located in major tourist destinations usually offer classes on local specialties.

## **15. Make Memories at Amazing Festivals**

As night falls, the country's waterways are illuminated by tiny floats filled with flowers, incense and a candle. This tribute to the Water Goddess takes place on the full moon night of the 11<sup>th</sup> lunar month. Loi Krathong is a romantic festival, too. Couples go to float their Krathongs together. While you can see-and participate in-this festival all across the country, wherever there is a river, stream or canal, the most unforgettable place to catch it is in the atmospheric ruins of the Sukhothai Historical Park, where it originated many centuries ago.

The festivities prove how important water is in a society with such agrarian roots. During Songkran, the Thai New Year held in mid-April splashes down with water wars on the streets; the ritual bathing of Buddha images; and endearing displays of the young pouring water over the hands of their respected elders.

Both of these uniquely colourful festivals show off the spiritual and mirthful sides of the Thai people and will surely deposit some scenes in your memory banks that will not soon be forgotten.



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# VIETNAM

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I am Aree, a lady traveller from Thailand. This is not my first visit to the impressive country of Vietnam. The alluring nature and culture I have experienced may come as a surprise to others. Following my first journey four years ago, the persistent use of the horn to warn other drivers along the roads in Hanoi, diligent people in the local markets, good taste of Pho and the fascinating spirit of historic Vietnam always caused me to dream about the next trip to explore more of this wonderful country. At last, I am here again to step on the land of Nguyen's dynasty. Inevitably, my current stay will combine both leisure and work together under the support from the Thailand Research Fund. I stay in the Galaxy Hotel located in the Hanoi old quarter near the wall of Nguyen's dynastic citadel. My friend, Mr. Troung Nam Thang who is the General Manager Hanoi from OSC Travel (S.M.I.Group),



Co., Ltd. has worked with me on my project as a copartner from Vietnam and as a narrator to help complete the pictures of Nguyen's dynastic boundary that I have in mind. We enjoyed discussing and sharing ideas on tourism development in Vietnam, especially the places to visit. What I learned from him and his friends about Vietnam tourism is that Vietnam is a country with the unique physical and social characteristics. The tourism potential of Vietnam is blessed with nature, culture and humanity. They suggested that if people want to discover Vietnam, they should commence their trip on the highlights of natural and cultural tourism to the following classic attractions.

My friend proposed the first day of an exciting trip starting from **Ho Chi Minh City**, the largest city in Vietnam and the business capital of the country. Better known by its former name of Saigon, Ho Chi Minh City is the old capital of South Vietnam which has influences from the United States during the Vietnamese War. Before the Americans played the important role over Saigon, this city was governed by the French. Therefore, the diversity of mixed culture between western and eastern style could be seen everywhere through restaurants, the way of living, dress as well as the way of thinking. The best way to see Hoi Chi Minh City is on foot. Ho Chi Minh City possesses many beautiful pagodas. One of the most interesting is the Nghia An Hoi Quan Pagoda on Nguyen Trai. Cho Lon or Ho Chi Minh City's Chinatown is another place to visit. Cho Lon is one of the oldest and most mysterious parts of Saigon with several temples of interest such as





the colorful Emperor of Jade Temple, the Quan Am Pagoda, Phuoc An Hoi Quan Temple and the Thien Hau Pagoda. Far from the center of Ho Chi Minh City, the Cu Chi Tunnels, often combined in the tour package offered to tourists, are part of an extensive network of underground passages, which extend as far as Cambodia. ([www.vietnamonline.com](http://www.vietnamonline.com))

**Phan Thiet** is 200 km from Ho Chi Minh City and lies south of Cam Ranh Bay on the southernmost stretch of Central Vietnam. Phan Thiet is a small and sleepy seaside town that has a certain old-fashioned and colorful fishing village charm. The attraction of Phan Thiet is the beaches. About 10 minutes from town is the longest and most popular Mui Ne beach. It can be considered the main tourist area as most of the resorts are located here. Mui Ne is a long, straight and narrow road with resorts by the beach and a handful of restaurants on the other side. The Red Sand Dunes in Mui Ne draw a steady stream of curious crowds. Recently a new Co Thach tourism village was constructed with many attractive stilt-houses available to both pilgrims and to those who come to enjoy the beautiful landscape. ([www.traveltovietnam.com](http://www.traveltovietnam.com))

Upon leaving Ho Chi Minh City in the early morning, visitors could start to drive along the roads to Vinh Long to visit the Mekong Delta. The Mekong Delta (an ancient Khmer territory) is the southernmost region of Vietnam and the rice bowl of the country. The most popular destination for day-trippers to the delta looking for a taste of authentic delta life is My Tho. Visitors can take a sampan along the



waterways, visit tropical fruit orchards and try the local delicacy, Elephant's Ear fish. Can Tho is one of the more attractive delta towns. The delta's market, Cai Rang Floating Market, is 6 km from Can Tho. Chau Doc is a busy little riverside town with distinctive architectures of Cham, Khmer and ethnic Chinese communities around the town. Off the eastern coast of the delta near Cambodia is the island of Phu Quoc. Phu Quoc is blessed with some beautiful white sandy beaches and clear blue seas. ([www.asiahighlightstravel.com](http://www.asiahighlightstravel.com))

**Phu Quoc Island** (the island of "99 mountains" or the Emerald Island) is part of an archipelago of 105 islands in the Gulf of Thailand with a land area of 1,320 km and the best beaches in Vietnam, a large forest area, and coral around the small islands. About fifty percent of the islands are covered in forests and flanked by unspoiled sandy beaches. The islands and their surrounding marine areas are currently being considered for 'biosphere' listing by UNESCO ([www.haivenu-vietnam.com](http://www.haivenu-vietnam.com)). Kem Beach is the most beautiful beach in Phu Quoc. In addition to beaches, other interesting places in the island are the Temple and Tomb of national hero Nguyen Trung Truc in Rach Gia, Mac Cuu Tomb, the Bird Sanctuary, a mangrove forest, Tam Bao Pagoda and Tan Hoi Pagoda. Activities on and off the island include snorkeling, scuba diving, trekking and fishing. ([www.circleofasia.com](http://www.circleofasia.com))

**The Tay Nguyen Central Highlands** are the next destination. After breakfast in Ho Chi Minh City, visitors take a short flight to Pleiku and stay

overnight in Pleiku. The highlands cover five provinces including Kon Tum, Gia Lai, Dak Lak, Dak Nong and Lam Dong. Heading out off town, we travel by roads to Kon Tum. Kon Tum is the largest plateau on the central Highlands. The provincial capital of Kon Tum is the township of the same name located on the northern part of Central Highlands. Ethnic minorities make up 51% of the population of Kontum. Kontum has a colourful, diversified culture of ethnic groups. Their customs are unique with special traditional festivals like cong chieng (gongs), buffalo stabling, leaving-the-tomb and new rice festivals. Over the years, gongs have become a typical cultural characteristic, unique and attractive of the Central Highlands. The major attractions in Kon Tum comprise Ba Na Village, Tay Nguyen Grave Rituals and Communal house.

The next inspiring journey begins as visitors leave Pleiku and drive to Quy Nhon Town and stay overnight here. Today, we make our way down the central coast through Tuy Hoa rice bowls to **Nha Trang**. The city is mainly renowned for it's non-Vietnamese past as it was an important town in the Kingdom of Champa ([www.vietnamopentour.com](http://www.vietnamopentour.com)) and has developed into Viet Nam's best seaside resort with the fabulous sunny weather, turquoise sea and white sandy beaches ([www.pattayacity.com](http://www.pattayacity.com)). Nha Trang has several famous islands such as Hon Tre, Hon Yen and Hon Rua. ([www.vietscape.com](http://www.vietscape.com)) Cam Ranh Bay is one of the largest natural harbours of the world. Highlights of Nha Trang include Nha Trang Beach, the Po Nagar Cham towers, Tam Island, Long Son Pagoda, Hon Chong, Cau Da, Hon Yen and Nha Trang Cathedral. In the early afternoon of the next day, we take a short flight back to Ho Chi Minh City.

The next destination of the trip is **Hué** via a short flight from Ho Chi Minh City. Hue was the ancient capital of Vietnam and is one of the most popular destinations for visitors to Vietnam offering the complex of monuments listed among the UNESCO's

World Heritage Sites. This city looks more like a massive open-air museum with hundreds of temples, pagodas, palaces and tombs. The historical museum is one of the best in the country. Some must-see places in Hue are the old Imperial complex, the Citadel & Forbidden City, Khai Dinh Emperor's Tomb, Tu Duc Emperor's Tomb and Thien Mu Pagoda. Each tomb is a walled compound containing temples, palaces, and lakes. ([www.footprintsvietnam.com](http://www.footprintsvietnam.com)) From Hué, visitors travel to **Danang** through the Hai Van Pass, crossing the Truong Son Mountain Range that offers a spectacular view. Danang, encircled with world cultural heritage sites in Hue and Hoi An (My Son), is often referred as 'Saigon of the North'. Its town is situated on the west bank of the Han River. The tour of Danang includes the Cham Museum, China Beach, Danang Cathedral, Caodai Temple, Tam Bao Pagoda, Pho Da Pagoda, Cham Museum, Hai Van Pass and Marble Mountain ([www.circleofasia.com](http://www.circleofasia.com))

An hour drive from Danang, visitors should not miss to visit My Son. My Son, one of the main attractions located in Quang Nam province was an imperial city during the Champa dynasty between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. ([www.traveltovietnam.com](http://www.traveltovietnam.com)). The **My Son** Sanctuary includes temples and towers connected to one other through complicated red brick designs. The main component of the design is the tower, built to reflect the divinity of the king. ([www.traveltovietnam.com](http://www.traveltovietnam.com)) The monuments bear a strong resemblance to Khmer structures found in present-day Cambodia and eastern Thailand. ([www.orientalarchitecture.com](http://www.orientalarchitecture.com))

Heading out of town 30 kilometres south of Danang, visitors make their way to **Hoi An** - a quiet riverside town dotted with temples, shrines, Chinese style tile-roofed wooden houses girding a long narrow road, traditional lifestyle and Chinese architecture ([www.circleofasia.com](http://www.circleofasia.com)) and one of Vietnam's four World Heritage sites. Today, there are more than 450 houses in the historic quarter of Hoi An. The

city also boasts 87 pagodas and temples, 24 ancient wells, numerous assembly halls and merchants clubs, and an ancient bridge (*Lai Vien Kieu*). ([www.globalheritagefund.org](http://www.globalheritagefund.org))

After scattering along the small streets with the town's multicultural past, visitors return to Danang for another flight to **Hanoi**. Hanoi is considered to be the cultural centre of Vietnam. When talking about Hanoi, the picture of Uncle Ho or Ho Chi Minh comes up in my mind. Uncle Ho is the hero of the Vietnamese who liberated Hanoi from the influence of France, Japan during the Second World War and the United States. The atmosphere of Hanoi is very lively with thousand of motorcycles on the street and loud noise of horn to caution each other when driving. Hanoi is located lower than the Red River about 3 meters. Visitors could take a full-day tour of Vietnam's capital including Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum and traditional stilt house, Hoan Kiem Lake, the Ho Chi Minh Museum, the One-Pillar Pagoda, Quan Thanh Temple and Tran Quoc pagoda along the shore of West Lake. The Temple of Literature or the Vietnam's first university is the place that should not miss because this place constitutes a fine example of well-preserved traditional Vietnamese architecture. To the north and west of the Ho Hoan Kiem Lake is Hanoi's old quarter with its narrow cobblestone streets. South and east of the lake, the wide tree-lined boulevards of the old French quarter offer a contrast to the busy old quarter. Many colonial villas are now home to embassies, upscale hotels and restaurants. ([www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org))

Along the way from Hanoi to Ha Long Bay through the scenic countryside, visitors stop at Dong Trieu pottery village and overnight in Ha Long. **Ha Long Bay** is recognized as the eighth wonder of the world and the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the four listed World Heritages of Vietnam ([www.threeland.com](http://www.threeland.com)). The exciting five hour cruise will provide a fantastic view of the scenery. Ha Long Bay's limestone islands are spotted with caves of all sizes and shapes. Most of

these are accessible only by charter boat but some can easily be visited on tour such as Hang Dau Go (Wooden Stakes Cave), Hang Sung Sot (Surprising Cave) and Hang Trong (Drum Grotto). Some of the islands support floating villages of fishermen. ([www.halongbayvietnam.com](http://www.halongbayvietnam.com))

**Cat Ba Island** is situated in Ha Long Bay, 50 km to the east of Hai Phong City in northern Vietnam. It is the largest of 366 islands in the Cat Ba Archipelago. The Cat Ba was approved as UNESCO Biosphere Reserve ([www.HalongbayVietnam.com](http://www.HalongbayVietnam.com)). A trip to Cat Ba Island can be separated or combined with a visit to Ha Long Bay. The island has a few fishing villages and a small town. On the east side of the island, Lan Ha Bay is the interesting attraction which has numerous beaches and excellent scenery ([www.accessivevietnam.net](http://www.accessivevietnam.net)). After a seafood lunch, we return to Hanoi to see an evening performance of Hanoi's famous water puppets and overnight in this charming city.

From Hanoi, visitors take the night train up to Lao Cai and then transfer to Sapa. Sapa has been rediscovered as a tourist attraction for visitors who come to trek into the green valley and experience the colourful traditional cultures of various ethnic minorities groups. The trekking begins from the Zay village - Ta Van in the morning. We will have a magnificent view of the minority villages and terraced rice fields beneath us. Destinations include remote villages, scenic vistas, and even the top of Southeast Asia's highest peak: Fansipan Mountain ([www.easia-adventures.com](http://www.easia-adventures.com)). Sapa has many natural sites such as Ham Rong Mountain, Silver Waterfall, Rattan Bridge, Bamboo Forest and Ta Phin Cave. Sapa is most beautiful in spring. Apricot, plum and cherry flowers are splendidly beautiful. ([www.relax-indochina.com](http://www.relax-indochina.com)). Visitors need to transfer to Lao Cai and board the night train back to Hanoi.

If visitors still have time, they can further our trip to **Den Hung or Kings Hung Temple**, one of the major attractions in Phu Tho. Phu Tho is located in the Plains and Midland in the North of Vietnam and shares a border with Tuyen Quang. Phu Tho is considered as ancestral land of Vietnam. Den Hung (Hung Temple) Remains is tied to the legend about 18 kings Hung who built Van Lang State, the first one of Vietnam, with Phong Chau as the capital. Phu Tho has bright culture. Archaeological sites like Son Vi, Dong Dau, Lang Ca and many pagodas, temples, tombs around Nghia Linh Mountain prove that Phong Chau used to be cultural centre of ancient Vietnamese. Phu Tho is home of many festivals including Bach Hac and Chu Hoa but the most honorable one is Den Hung Festival. ([www.vietnamtourism.com](http://www.vietnamtourism.com))

My pleasant time in Vietnam is passing by so fast. I say Goodbye to Hanoi from a nice corner in the Roadside Café at Galaxy Hotel. I am never bored to memorize the fascination of Vietnamese ways of life and local charm of Hanoi. Country exploring has only begun. The colorful lanterns lightening the old city of Hoi An on the full moon night always await me to see.....one day so soon.



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# CHINA

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China, an ancient, mysterious and beautiful land, is always appealing to adventurous foreign visitors. It is the third largest country in the world occupying an area of 9,600,000 sq km with various impressive and fantastic destinations. A wide variety of terrain and climate also shape its numerous natural attractions. China is proud of her many people, long history, resplendent culture and distinctive customs. Chinese arts and crafts, including painting, calligraphy, operas, embroidery and silk are distinctive and unique. Ancient Chinese architecture enjoys a long history and great achievements, and created many architectural miracles such as the Great Wall. In the process of its development, superior architectural techniques and artistic design were combined to make unique Chinese architecture be one of the three greatest architectural systems. Information of the impressive tourist attractions is provided regarding to China's four cities; Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing and Suzhou.



## Beijing Great Wall in Beijing

For centuries, the wall served succeeding dynasties as an efficient military defence. The Great Wall represents the magnificent engineering achievement of the ancient China. The well-preserved sections of the Great Wall in Beijing are China's most famous tourist site. These sections are mainly the remains from the Ming Dynasty, an era of tremendous construction. The wall runs across the northern part of Beijing for over six hundred kilometers with various passes and towers. Badaling is the section where most tourists go. The wall is famous for its completeness, imposing structures and the famous Juyongguan Pass. Most pictures publicized on guide books, brochures and magazines are taken in this section. Today, the Wall has become a must-see for every visitor to China.

## Beijing's Hutong and Courtyard

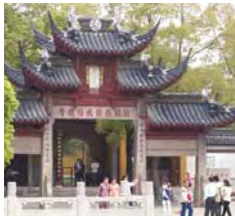
A hutong is unique form of community that exists only in China. The word 'Hutong' literally means a small street or a lane between two courtyards. There are many different types of hutongs. The most interesting to tour is in the Shichahai area, which is a scenic spot. There are many historic scenes around this area. The oldest hutong in Beijing is called Sanmiao Street which has been there for more than 900 years.



A courtyard is like a square. Rooms are built along the four sides of the square. Beijing's courtyards have three sizes - the bigger ones, the middle-sized ones and the smaller ones. The smaller ones are very simple. Usually, there are several rooms arranged on each of the four sides respectively. They are the north rooms, east and west wing-rooms and south rooms. The older family members live in the north rooms; the young live in the wing-rooms, and a south room is constructed as a living room or study.

**Forbidden City** was listed by UNESCO as a World Cultural Heritage Site in 1987. It was the imperial palace during the Ming and Qing dynasties which is now one of the most popular tourist attractions world-wide. It is also the world's largest palace complex and covers 74 hectares. Splendid painted decoration on these royal architectural wonders, the grand and deluxe halls, with their surprisingly magnificent treasures will certainly satisfy 'modern civilians'.

Since yellow is the symbol of the royal family, it is the dominant color in the Forbidden City. Roofs are built with yellow glazed tiles; decorations in the palace are painted yellow; even the bricks on the ground are made yellow by a special process. However, there is one exception. Wenyuange, the royal library, has a black roof. The reason is that it was believed black represented water then and could extinguish fire.



## Summer Palace (Yiheyuan)

The Summer Palace is the archetypal Chinese garden, and is ranked amongst the most noted and classical gardens of the world. In 1998, it was listed as one of the World Heritage Sites by UNESCO. Summer Palace having the largest royal park and being well preserved, it was designated, in 1960 by the State Council, as a Key Cultural Relics Protection Site of China. Containing examples of the ancient arts, it also has graceful landscapes and magnificent constructions. By the time of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), it had become a luxurious royal garden providing royal families with rest and entertainment. Guided by nature, artists designed the gardens exquisitely so that visitors would see marvelous views and be amazed by perfect examples of refined craftwork using the finest materials.

**Temple of Heaven** The Temple of Heaven is a worthwhile visiting place in Beijing, the Temple was built in 1420 A.D. during the Ming Dynasty to offer sacrifice to Heaven. The Temple of Heaven is enclosed with a long wall. The northern part within the wall is semicircular symbolizing the heavens and the southern part is square symbolizing the earth. This design shows that the heaven is high and the earth is low and the design reflected an ancient Chinese thought of 'The heaven is round and the earth is square'.

**Tiananmen Square** (Gate of Heavenly Peace) It is the must place to visit in Beijing City. It is located at

the center of Beijing City. It is the place where you can visit Tiananmen Tower, Monument to the People's Heroes, Great Hall of the People, Mao Zedong Memorial Hall and see the national flag raising ceremony. Thousands of people come to the Square every day. The most important use of it in the past was to declare in a big ceremony to the common people who became the emperor and who became the empress.

## **Shanghai Huangpu River and the Bund**

Huangpu River is the most important shipping artery of Shanghai. Huangpu River divides Shanghai into two parts, east and west. The great modern skyscrapers and the characteristic buildings in different architectural styles are the best records of the development of the city and the Huangpu River, the birthplace of Shanghai, is the faithful eyewitness.

The Bund, also called the Zhongshan Road, is a famous waterfront and regarded as the symbol of Shanghai for hundreds of years. The most famous and attractive sight which is at the west side of the Bund are the 52 various buildings of different architectural styles including Gothic, Baroque, Romanesque, Classicism and the Renaissance.

## **Jade Buddha Temple**

Jade Buddha Temple is a venerable and famous Buddhist temple which was built to keep two jade Buddha statues which had been brought from Burma by a monk named Huigen. Both the Sitting Buddha and the Recumbent Buddha are carved with whole white jade. Not only rare cultural relics but also porcelain artworks the old-time and classical architectural style makes the temple unique and inimitable in this modern city. In addition, More than

7,000 Dazang sutras are kept in the Jade Buddha Tower; these are all the inestimable culture relics.

## **Shanghai Museum**

Located in the center of Shanghai in People's Square, Shanghai Museum is a large museum of ancient Chinese art. The museum style and presentation surround visitors with artifacts demonstrating ancient wisdom and philosophy. The exterior design of the round dome and the square base symbolizes the ancient idea of a round heaven and a square land. Chinese culture is a result of the melding and collaboration of many nationalities. During its long history, minority nationalities have created their own colorful cultures. From clothes to textiles, metal wares, sculptures, pottery, lacquer and bamboo wares, the exotic styles of their artwork give us a general picture of creativity and passion toward life of those ethnic groups.

## **Yuyuan Garden**

Yuyuan Garden is a famous classical garden located in Anren Jie, Shanghai. Yu in Chinese means pleasing and satisfying, and this garden was specially built for Pan's parents as a place for them to enjoy a tranquil and happy time in their old age. However, the small size is not a representative of the attractions of the garden. The pavilions, halls, rockeries, ponds and cloisters all have unique characteristics. Upon entering the garden, you will encounter a rockery, which is called the Great Rockery. On the top of the rockery, you can get a bird's eye view of the garden.

## **NANJING**

### **Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Mausoleum**

The majestic Mausoleums construction was started in 1926 and completed in 1929. The whole

Mausoleum Scenic Area represents an alarm bell as seen from the air, symbolizing the noble spirit and heroic efforts of Dr. Sun Yatsen's devotion to the Chinese people, fight of oppression and winning the independence of China. With deep historical significance, magnificent architecture and beautiful scenery, it is a must see when travelling in Nanjing.

## **Qin Huai River**

Qin Huai River is the largest river in the Nanjing City area and is the 'life blood' of the city. There are many famous sites of interest along the banks of the Qin Huai River, including Confucius Temple, Zhanyuan Garden, Zhonghua Gate, and the sights along the Taoye Ferry ride to Zhenhuai Bridge. While floating on one of the traditional, recently modernized, painted boats of the region, visitors will have the opportunity to fully appreciate the beautiful sights of the Qin Huai River.

## **SUZHOU**

### **Canglang Pavilion (Blue Wave Pavilion)**

Unlike other gardens, Canglang Pavilion emphasizes the harmony between man made buildings and the natural environment. There are also winding corridors with pavilions that link the hills and pools together. As you walk along these corridors that follows a path alongside the unique stone formations and strategically planted ancient trees, it seems as if walking in a primitive forest. The architectures that have been built in the garden are simply and classically designed which present a Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) style.

### **Lingering Garden**

The Lingering Garden is located outside Changmen

Gate in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province. Originally a classical private garden, it is one of the four most famous gardens in China. Possessing typical Qing style, it is well-known for the exquisite beauty of its magnificent halls, and the various sizes, shapes, and colors of the buildings. Maples cover the hill. When all the leaves turn red in autumn, it is extraordinarily beautiful. The northern part used to be a vegetable garden, but now is used to exhibit potted plants of which the Suzhou people are quite proud.

## **Hanshan Temple**

### **(Cold Mountain Temple)**

It presents the architectural style of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). Being one of the most famous temples in Chinese history, Hanshan Temple often boasts about its bell rings. However, the best known bell described in Zhang Ji's poem disappeared a long time ago. The bell in the tower now was modeled on the previous one in 1904. Every year on New Year's Eve in China's lunar calendar, the bell is tolled to pray for the happiness and safety of the coming New Year. This festival attracts thousands of tourists both at home and abroad. Around the Cold Mountain Temple, the visitors can also enjoy the beautiful scenery of the Maple Bridge, where Zhang Ji's boat was once moored, and get a realistic feel of the ordinary life of the people living in the Fengqiao Old Town. The visitors can also have a look at the famous Jinghang Canal, which is the longest ancient man-made canal in the world.







# SOUTH KOREA

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## “Annyeong-haseyo ?” or 안녕하세요?

Korea is a country gifted with many splendid natural attractions and unique culture where traditional and modern cultures coexist in harmony. Furthermore, it is a nation of economic miracles. Korea has become one of the top five tourism countries in Asia due to its internal and external environment. It gives me great pleasure to introduce you some of the unforgettable and breathtaking attractions in the land of South Korea which is popularly known as the “Land of the Morning Calm”, situated on the Korean Peninsula which is very mountainous. It is imperative to visit these places that await you to



offer many things if you ever have a chance to visit Korea since you may pass through life but once.

As I have a wealth of experience both as an academic and a frequent traveler to Korea, I would like to appeal tourists and holiday makers to make Korea your memorable destination next time. Korea is such a remarkable country that you can enjoy visiting it all the year round. You will be able to sense and experience her distinct four seasons and the colorful changes of nature, which would definitely impress both you and your beloved ones immensely. The memories about the historic, natural places and hospitable people you may carry to your destination from this spectacular land with a history of over 5,000 years will remain stark and never fade away from your memory as long as your life exist under the Sun.

Now I believe it is my paramount would duty to introduce you some of the best attractions based on the themes, such as Natural tourism, Cultural tourism, Heritage tourism and Shopping tourism, which will find it easy for you to choose the one depending your interest.

For those who prefer Natural tourism, the following three places are a must.

## 1. Seoraksan National Park

**Mountain Seoraksan** is known as the most beautiful mountain in South Korea. The numerous visitors to this popular mountain can enjoy royal



azalea blossoms in spring, the crystal-clear waters in the valleys in summer, the spectacular changes of the leaves in autumn and starkly beautiful snow capes in winter. In 1982 Mt. Seoraksan became the first mountain in the Republic of Korea to be designated as an “Ecosystem Preservation Area” by UNESCO.

If your strong feet took you there, you and your beloved ones would surely be able to feel a sense of refreshment for mind and body, calmness and romantic feeling which is hard to feel in our daily lives.

Another place we would like to recommend when you visit here is Seorak Waterpia.

**Seorak Waterpia** is a ‘spa theme park’. It houses not only spa facilities which enable visitors to enjoy both exercise and entertainment., but also a broad range of water sports facilities, including a wave pool, which gives the feeling of being in the ocean, and a running-water pool, which has 70m- and 100m-long water slides. All of your family can enjoy playing water together

## 2. Jeju-do

**Jeju-do** is an island with beautiful natural settings and a unique traditional culture. It is the premier tourist destination in Korea because of its natural beauty and semitropical climate. Scenic beaches, waterfalls, cliffs and caves throughout the island allow visitors numerous ways to enjoy their leisure



time here. Mt. Hallasan, a national park which is comprised of an extinct volcano cone, is especially popular with hikers. There are various hotels and golf courses to further enhance the enjoyment of the island's laid back atmosphere. Jeju Island has also served as a venue for several historical summits. Here is the most favorable domestic place for Korean's honeymoon trip. You can sense the sweet and romantic atmosphere around the sland.

### 3. Cheonggyecheon Stream

**Cheonggyecheon Stream** is the new attraction for both Korean and foreign tourists. The history of Cheonggyecheon is quite interesting and impressive to all visitors. Before the 1960s, King Yeongjo (the 21<sup>st</sup> king of the Joseon Dynasty) launched large-scale operations to dredge Cheong-gyecheon Stream. Around 200,000 workers cleared away earth from the stream to create a straight channel.

After the Korean War, the Cheong-gyecheon Stream area became a shanty town. The polluted stream and its decimated surroundings were, nevertheless, an area where the less fortunate lived out their lives.

In the 1960s and 70s, the stream was paved over from Gwanggyo Bridge to Ogansugyo Bridge in Dongdaemun as part of efforts to clear the slum and improve sanitary conditions. Bur-geoning commercial enterprises and heavily congested streets sparked construction of elevated expressways,

which were built on top of the cement-covered roads. As a result, more modern commercial facilities were constructed in the area. Later, in the 1970s and 80s, with the continued growth, the stream area gained a reputation as the center of Seoul. As time passed, dust and emissions from traffic on the roads and overpasses polluted the covered stream and corroded the roadway infrastructure, posing a threat to public safety.

In 2005, to make Seoul an environmentally viable city for residents in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the project to restore the Stream began in 2003. On October 1, 2005, the clear blue waterway was revealed. The restoration of the stream is a remarkable step towards making Seoul a city where nature, culture and history exist in harmony.

Around the Stream, there are many interesting places to visit as follows.

**Cheonggye** Plaza is the starting point of Cheong-gyecheon Stream. There is a candle fountain illuminated by tri-color lighting, a circular firecracker fountain, and two-tier fountain pumping 65,000 tons of water each day. The bottom of the stream glows with a soft light, creating a calm and serene atmosphere which is hard to forget easily.

**Gwangtonggyo Bridge** was once the biggest bridge in Seoul. The bridge was built in Joseon Dynasty as a major thorough fare for the royal family and ministers.

**Banchado** is the painting of King Jeongjo's royal procession. It is the largest ceramic wall painting in the world. It has been reproduced as a 192-m-long wall painting showing the royal retinue of 1,700 figures and 800 horses.

Here you can see how much Korean paid an effort to preserve the environment and create a new lung for downtown people.

For those who prefer **Cultural tourism**, we would like to recommend you to visit these 2 places in Seoul as follows.

## 1. Insa-dong

To experience the traditional culture of Korea while remaining in the heart of the city, visit Insa-dong. With all size of art galleries, traditional craft stores, antique art dealers, Korean paper shops, paper hanger shops, traditional tea houses and restaurants, it is simply the place in Seoul for visitors wanting to experience traditional Korea. In sa-dong is referred as a place to relish Korean art and craftsmanship.

The area is especially good for antiques like old paintings, ceramics, paper crafts and antique furniture can all be found in abundance at Insa-dong. The 70 or so art galleries in the area also make Insa-dong ideal as a cultural attraction. Insa-dong is designated as vehicle-free on weekends (Saturday from 14.00-22.00, Sundays from 10.00-22.00), and a flea markets set up in the streets with people peddling their antiques, accessories and artwork. Travelers from abroad also gather here with wares from the world over, the flea market items are not just limited to Korean goods. You can enjoy both shopping and sight-seeing in the same time and forget how long and how fast the time goes by without any notice.

## 2. Jongmyo Royal Ancestral Shrine

Jongmyo is a shrine where the tablets of kings and queens were preserved and memorial services for deceased kings and queens were performed based on the Confucian practices of the Joseon Dynasty. The king, after building up the nation, constructed the Jongmyo and Sajik to preserve and perpetuate the royal line and traditions. The Joseon Dynasty designated Seoul as the nation's capital and built

Jongmyo and Sajik on the left and right of Gyeongbokgung palace, respectively. Here you will be able to know and imagine how great the Joseon Dynasty was at that time.

For those who prefer **Heritage tourism**, we would like to recommend you to visit these 7 places in Korea as follows.

## 1. Changdeokgung Palace

Changdeokgung was built in 1405 during the early Joseon Dynasty as a villa palace for royalty. It was also used as a main palace where several kings conducted state affairs. The layout of Changdeokgung was designed to be in harmony with the surrounding terrain. Huwon, the back garden of Changdeokgung epitomizes traditional landscaping, with the garden designed not merely for viewing, but as a place where people could go to commune with nature. Changdeokgung was added to the UNESCO's world Heritage Site list in December 1997. The atmosphere is really favorable for all and impresses all visitors by its unique architecture and decoration.

## 2. Hwaseong Fortress

Hwaseong Fortress is considered as the Dream of King. Hwaseong in Suwon is one of the Korea's most notable cultural heritages. It boasts of both historical and architectural significance. Hwaseong represents the most advanced features of fortification available in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Korea. The UNESCO World Heritage Committee designated Hwaseong as a World Heritage site in December 1997.

Hwaseong was originally built by King Jeonjo of the Joseon Dynasty to show his devotion to his deceased father. King Jeonjo transferred the grave of his father, Crown Prince Sado, from Yangju to Hwasan in Suwon in order to comfort his wandering spirit. As a newly-enthroned king, Jeongjo felt the need

to consolidate his royal authority and decided to construct a new city to strengthen loyalty and cooperation among his supporters. Hwaseong envelops downtown Suwon in a huge ellipse running a total of 5.52km.

### 3. Seokguram Grotto and Bulguksa Temple

Seokguram Grotto is located high on the ridges of Mt. Tohamsan, the construction of Seokguram was begun in 751 and completed in 774 (23 years). Inside an artificial stone grotto created with white granite is a central Buddha figure, flanked by 40 sculptured Buddhist figures but currently 38 figures remain. In the Seokguram Grotto, a corridor connects a rectangular room with the main rotunda. The rotunda's arch ceiling was built using 360 huge granite blocks, an architectural technique unprecedented in the world. It was registered as a UNESCO World Heritage in December 1995, jointly with Bulguksa Temple.

**Bulguksa Temple** is located in the foothills of Mt. Tohamsan. It was built in the same period with Seokguram Grotto. Bulguksa epitomizes the spirit of Silla's artistry and represents the apex of Korea's Buddhist culture and art. In the terraced courtyard are two great pagodas, one being the Dabotap and the other being three-storied Seokgatap. In addition, there are two double level stone bridges which are notable and lots of the cultural heritages were found in here. The architecture is really impressive which made all the tourists amazed how smart the old people were. It's their great masterpiece left for the later generations.

### 4. Haeinsa Temple's Janggyeong Panjeon

Everyone can study Buddha's teachings at the main



hall of Haeinsa which is called Daejeokgwangjeon. Haeinsa Temple in Gyeon-gsangnam-do houses the depositories of wood-blocks of Tripitaka Koreana, a 13<sup>th</sup> century edition of Buddhist scriptures. The Tripitaka Koreana is the great collection of Buddhist scriptures carved onto wooden plates numbering about 81,258. It is the only building in the world constructed to serve such a purpose, and it is also designed in such a way that the temperature, ventilation and humidity can be controlled by taking advantage of the natural weather conditions. The wood-blocks are considered invaluable to the study of Buddhism today. The depositories were registered on the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List in December 1995.

## 5. Jongmyo Shrine, Jongmyo Jerye and Jongmyo Jeryeak

Jongmyo shrine is dedicated to the spirits of royal ancestors. The royal family of the Joseon Dynasty paid homage to their forefathers in the time-honored Confucian tradition as Confucianism was the moral backbone of the time. Jongmyo was built in the most classic style of the dynasty with architectural grace and beauty and used as a place where memorial services are performed for deceased kings. Jongmyo was registered on the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List in December 1995.

**Jongmyo Jerye** or regular royal ancestral rites were performed on a grand scale in the Main Hall in each of four seasons and in the last month of the year in the Joseon period. Today, the ritual ceremony is conducted on the first Sunday in May each year by the Office of the Jeonju Yi Royal Family.

**Jongmyo Jeryeak** is the royal ancestral ritual music. It has been recognized and selected by UNESCO as a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

## 6. Gyeongju Historic Areas

The entire city of Gyeongju, the capital of Silla (57 BC-935 AD) is a living history museum containing the remnants of the Silla Kingdom as well as relics pertaining to Buddhism, the national religion at the time. Gyeongju City and its surroundings have inherited traces of the glory that flowered and withered in the ancient Silla Kingdom. And excavations continue to reveal the buried secrets of this ancient city. The Gyeongju Historic Areas were registered on the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List in December 2000.

## 7. Dolmen Sites

Dolmens which are large burial monuments from ancient times, have been found across Northeast Asia but the highest concentration of this unique burial form has been found in Korea. Of the many dolmen sites in existence, the sites in Gochang, Hwasun and Ganghwa have been honored with designations as UNESCO World Cultural Heritage sites. The Gochang Dolmen Site is located in the center of Maesan village in Gochang, Jeollabukdo Province. On a land area of 1,764 m, there are about 442 individual dolmens. The dolmen site in Hwasun, Jeollanamdo Province, was discovered relatively recently and contains dolmens preserved in superior condition.

For those who prefer **Shopping tourism**, we would like to recommend you to visit these 3 places in Seoul as follows.

### 1. Dongdaemun Market

Dongdaemun Market is the busiest shopping area in Seoul. Traditional open-air stand alongside modern shopping malls. You can find almost everything you need at this Market. The market is full of shoppers year round and is open all night long, enabling

people to enjoy both shopping and other cultural activities at any time of the day or night. The biggest items are fabrics, clothing, leather goods, women's and children's costumes, bedding, house wares, footwear, and sporting goods. The Dongdaemun Gate (East Gate or Heunginjimun) area has become famous for selling clothing similar to what can be found in department stores at reasonable prices. Modern shopping malls such as Migliore, Doosan Tower, hello apM, Blue Gate and Designer Club attract many young people. You can sense the atmosphere of modernism. There are plenty of high and colorful buildings and everywhere is crowded with young generations.

## **2. Namdaemun Market**

Namdaemun Market is the largest and most prominent conventional open market in Seoul. It is widely acknowledged as one of the Seoul's best tourist attractions. Unlike the other marketplaces, Namdaemun Market is more vibrant and bustling at night than during the day. Clothing malls take up the biggest share of the market. Besides clothing, visitors can shop at large specialized areas for items such as fashion accessories, kitchenware, flowers, embroideries, and handbags. Traditional oriental foods and medicine, such as ginseng are also popular items here. The Namdaemun Gate (South Gate or Sungnyemun) is just a few minute from Namdaemun Market. It is close to the downtown area and deluxe hotels. The market's history traces back to the Joseon Dynasty and since then has become the main transactional place of daily products between urban and rural areas of Korea. Here is also the Korea's wholesale center and virtually anything you want can be found here: clothing, shoes, house wares, foodstuffs, flowers, tools, wigs, glasses, accessories of every kind, gift items, sporting, goods, construction materials, electric appliances, furniture, etc. We are sure that you can find everything you want in Korea here with a reasonable price.

### 3. Itaewon

Itaewon is a major shopping district which is located in the Yongsan area and caters to the tastes of foreign shoppers. It is crowded with around 2,000 shops of all kinds, which sell shoes, clothes, bags and many other items as well as jazz bars, nightclubs and ethnic restaurants. There are wide range of accommodations, restaurants, entertainments, hotels and health clinics. Here is popular with both foreign residents and tourists. Though it boasts many ethnic restaurants, Itaewon is the best place for those who wish to try delicacies from countries around the world. Restaurants serving traditional German, Italian, Indian, Pakistani, Swiss and Thai foods are concentrated in Itaewon. This concentration of such a diverse range of ethnic restaurants is rare in Korea. Visitors to Itaewon can also enjoy tasty and traditional Korean, Chinese and Japanese foods.

Itaewon comes alive at night when the lights go out in the business districts. Roadside stalls shift to hundreds of carts serving drinks and snacks. With many karaoke and fancy disco clubs, Itaewon is ablaze with activity throughout the night. Here you can enjoy night life, drinking, eating and shopping that made you spend all night without any hesitation.

We are quite sure that South Korea is really a delightful destination for international tourists. You can discover her rich natural beauty combined with a unique cultural and historical heritage. After a rapid modernization process in recent decades, Koreans still maintain their traditional values such as hospitality for foreigners and the time-honored Confucian respect for the elderly. Korea is considered as a country of “A Green Outdoor and A Sage People”. Here is a country swathed in green, prodding its stony fingers skyward, and the Koreans are a people obsessed with nature, and with mountains in particular. Wherever you travel, you’ll see

Koreans out in the open air, clad in the latest adventure fashions, pushing ever onward and upward. Especially in Seoul, it is considered as a historic city reborn from Hermit kingdom to Tiger Economy. Seoul is an intriguing city transforming itself from the Yi Dynasty capital of the Hermit Kingdom to a major mover and shaker on the international scene, especially in the field of commerce and sports. Nowhere else is the Korean drive to come to terms with a turbulent and fractured past so evident. Seoul is a unique place where the modern age is harmonized with the past. Seoul is a city with great energy and vitality which you can feel by yourself.

South Korea, one of the best destinations in Asia, is waiting for all of you to discover and experience all year round. And we're sure that it will be one of your **“unforgettable memories”**

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