

ASIA
INSPIRATIONS

TAILOR MADE ASIA

by  Wendy Wu Tours



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WELCOME TO ASIA INSPIRATIONS

TAILORMADE TRAVEL BY WENDY WU TOURS

Being able to create your very own bespoke itinerary opens up a whole world of possibilities!

It means the freedom to go where you want to go, when you want, for as long as you want but without the stress of having to research and plan it all yourself.

You see, designing your perfect itinerary is a harmonious blend of your ideas and our expertise – you tell us your chosen destination or destinations, the experiences that you wish to enjoy, the sort of hotels you'd like to stay in, and we'll whip up an epic holiday just for you!

With Asia Inspirations it's simple, flexible and fun to create your perfect Asian adventure.



WHY TAILORMADE?

Choosing a tailormade holiday is to choose freedom and flexibility. It also has the following advantages:

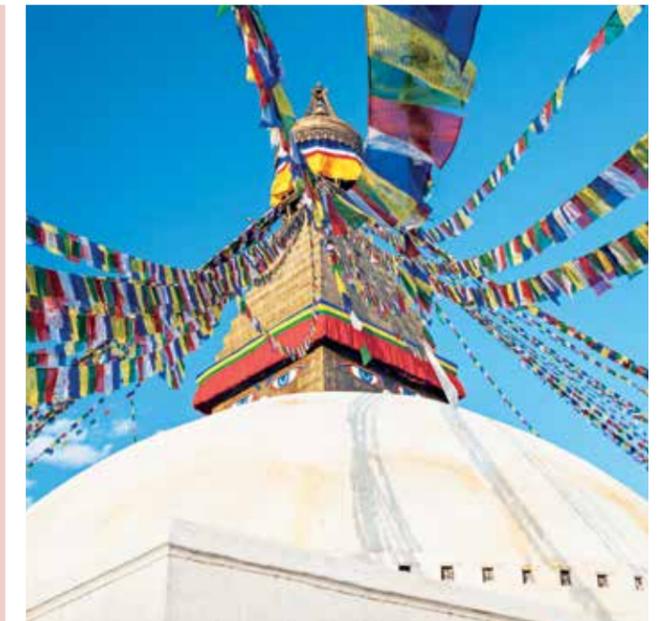
- Create a bespoke itinerary that fulfils all of your travel wants and needs
- Travel where you want, when you want, for as long as you want
- Pick the grade and style of accommodation you are most comfortable with
- Add all or any of the elements that you want included – meals, excursions and guides to name a few
- You're completely in control – it's all up to you

WHY ASIA INSPIRATIONS?

Here at Asia Inspirations we believe that travel is an opportunity to really get under the skin of a destination; a way to understand a new and different culture, the people who call it home, the heritage and history of the sights visited. We want you to have a truly rewarding and enriching experience.

So why choose Asia Inspirations to help you create your tailormade holiday? Here are just a few of the many reasons:

- 1** We are the China and Asia experts, part of the award-winning Wendy Wu Tours
- 2** Dedicated team of tailormade specialists
- 3** Excellent, personal service before and during your trip
- 4** Flexible itineraries that fit all of your wants and needs
- 5** A wide range of accommodation options are available for you to choose from
- 6** Take part in unique, once-in-a-lifetime experiences to help you delve deeper into your chosen destination's culture
- 7** A network of fantastic guides to help you get the most out of your travels
- 8** Excellent value
- 9** No matter how off-the-wall your wants, needs and interests, give us a try - we can accommodate them!



CHINA



CHINA

After five millennia of upheaval, revolution and golden eras, the Chinese civilisation today is a glorious contradiction. Sparkling modernity rubs shoulders with ancient sensibilities whilst gleaming cities transform into quaint, rural landscapes, giving China a fascinating range of sights to explore. Delve into a treasure trove of antiquity, relish the natural majesty, and discover a diversity of people and traditions, all in one sensational destination.



QUICK INFO



APPROX
FLYING TIME
**11 HOURS
DIRECT**



GMT
+8



VISA
REQUIRED
YES

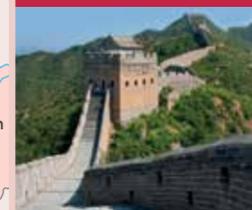


CURRENCY
YUAN

OUR BEST BITS



1 Great Wall,
Beijing



2 Terracotta
Warriors, Xian



3 Imperial Beijing,
Beijing



4 Yangtze
River



5 Panda Base,
Chengdu



See all of
our China
best bits on
one inspiring
itinerary on
page 32

GETTING AROUND



Flying is the
quickest and
easiest way to get
around China.



For ultimate comfort and
convenience we will supply
you with a private car and
driver for sightseeing.



Taking a bullet train or
even an overnight train
can be a more relaxed
way to travel.

WHEN TO TRAVEL



Stretching from the bitter winters and hot summers of the north to the sub-tropical climate of the south, China's vast size means wide variations in weather. Whilst it is always reasonable somewhere and so possible to travel all year round, spring and autumn are considered the ideal times for your explorations.

| JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|-----|-----|-----|------|------|-----|-----|-----|------|------|-----|-----|
| ★ | ★ | ★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★ | ★ |

★ Travel is possible
★★ Good time to travel
★★★ Ideal travel conditions

ACCOMMODATION

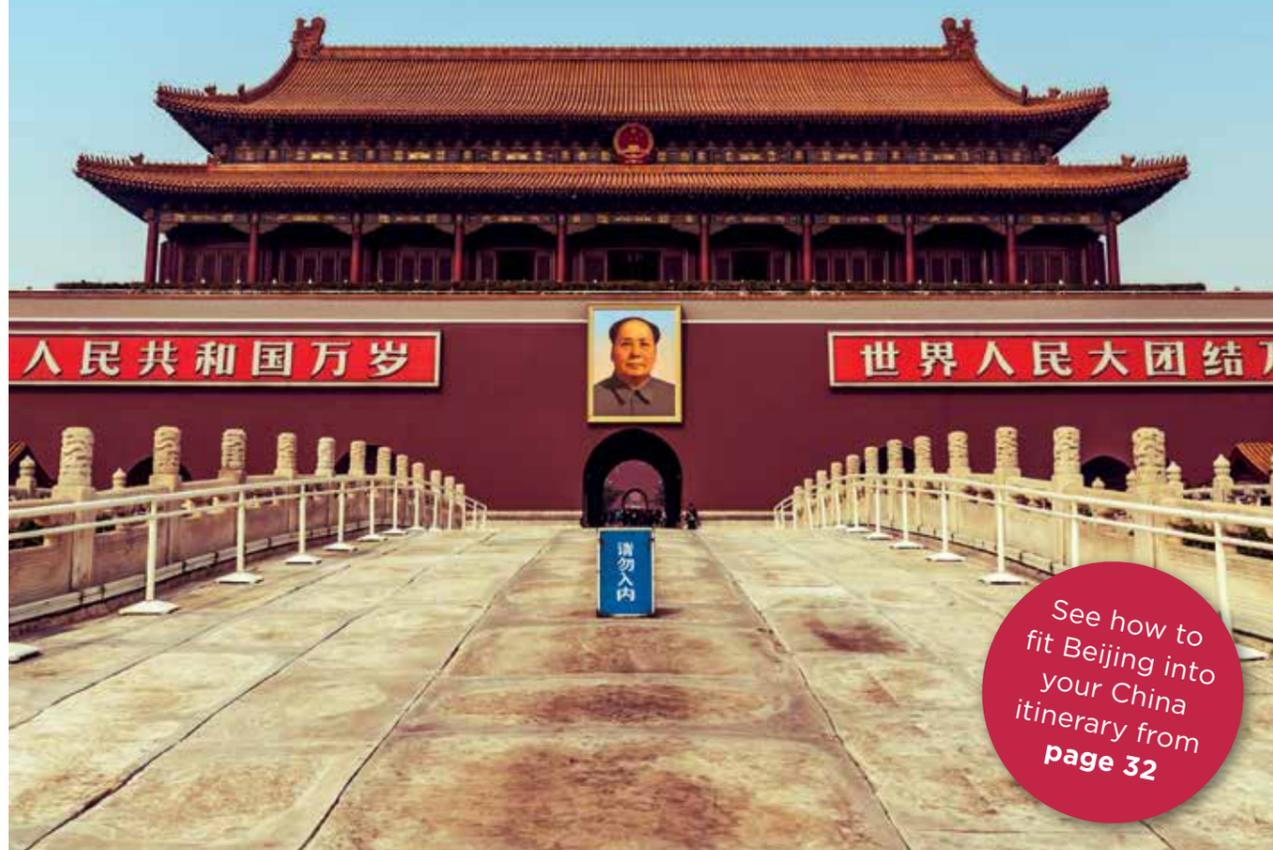
Across China you will find accommodation to suit all tastes and budgets. Cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong can cater for even the most lavish of travellers with character properties and world-renowned brands, whilst there are always comfortable, traditional style hotels to choose from. Generally the more remotely you travel the simpler the accommodation becomes with small, basic guesthouses being the most common option. **Keep an eye out for our handy top 5 hotel lists on some China destination pages!**



Two days will give you time to see all the best bits. Day 1: Tiananmen Square, Forbidden City, hutongs, Temple of Heaven. **Day 2:** Great Wall of China, Summer Palace, Peking duck dinner.

BEIJING

A dynamic mega-metropolis, Beijing is the gateway to China. Magnificent remnants of China's imperial past offer an opulent respite from modernity, whilst surrounding the city you'll find some incredibly scenic spots, including the spectacular Great Wall that winds through the lonely hilltops to the north.



See how to fit Beijing into your China itinerary from **page 32**

▲ Tiananmen Square

Tiananmen Square is an immense open space at the heart of Beijing, lined with austere architecture. Watched over by a huge portrait of Chairman Mao from the Tiananmen (Gate of Heavenly Peace) of the Forbidden City, learn about the cultural significance of the square with your guide. Arrive early morning, or late afternoon to see the daily flag ceremony.



◀ Forbidden City

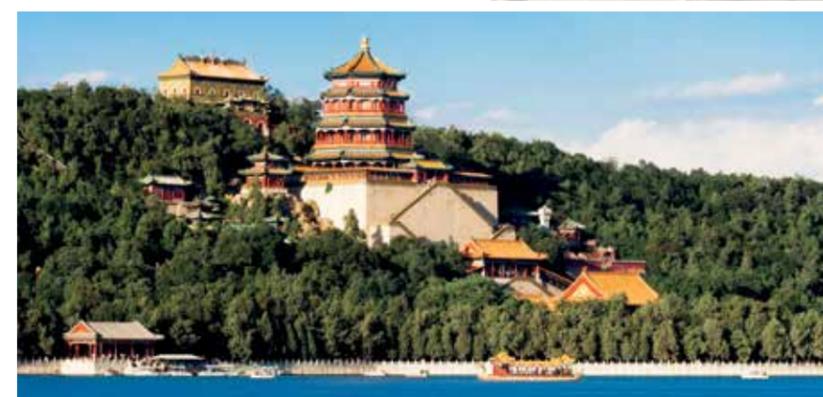
A monument to China's dynasties past, this vast palace, the world's largest palace complex, was the home of emperors for 500 years. With some 800 buildings and reputed 9,999 rooms this can be a mammoth exploration but your guide will help you through.

We can arrange an extra special experience while you are here - the Treasure Hall, a gallery showcasing all the glittering trappings of royal life.

▶ Temple of Heaven

Set in a huge and peaceful park just 2 kilometres from Tiananmen Square, the Temple of Heaven is a prime example of the unity of Confucian design. Used by emperors since 1420 to pray for a good harvest at the Winter Solstice, the Temple of Heaven and its surrounding park is now open to all.

For a more local experience let us wake you a little earlier so you can join the local Beijingers practicing Tai Chi. Alternatively we can organise a private master.



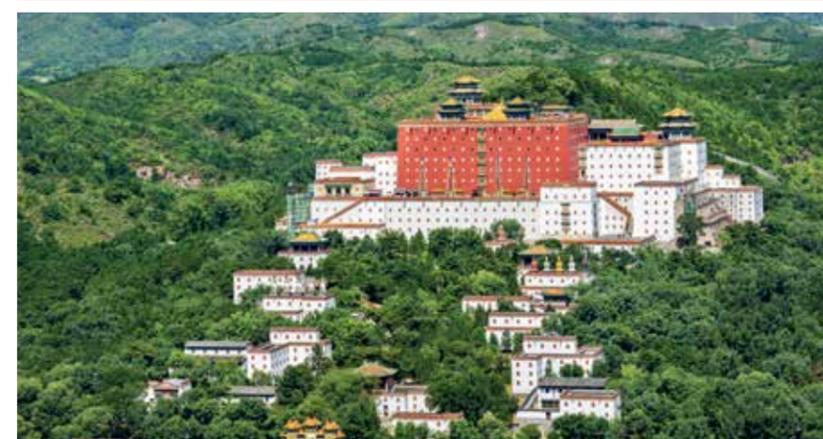
◀ Summer Palace

Once the royal family's escape from the summer heat, today the Summer Palace is Beijing's loveliest spot. A public park complete with huge lake, hilltop view point and exquisitely crafted temples and pavilions, a wander amongst the traditional gardens is the perfect respite from the city.

▶ Hutongs

Old atmospheric alleyways that criss-cross the depths of the city, Beijing's hutongs offer a taste of China before the modern world arrived.

We can arrange for you to explore by cycle rickshaw, take a calligraphy class, or even spend time with a family who live in the hutongs. The Peking duck restaurants that hide amongst these passageways are among Beijing's best.



▲ Chengde

Just over 200 kilometres north-east of Beijing, Chengde was the summer retreat of the Manchu emperors and so is home to a wealth of imperial architecture. A two-day trip here will allow you plenty of time to explore the magnificent mountain villas and intricate temples at a relaxed pace.

★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



1. Aman at the Summer Palace ★★★★★
2. Shangri-La Beijing ★★★★★
3. Jiangxi Grand Hotel ★★★★
4. Holiday Inn Temple of Heaven Beijing ★★★★
5. Park Plaza Beijing West ★★★★

GREAT WALL OF CHINA

The Great Wall is China's most iconic structure and the top of many people's 'must-see' lists. Snaking its way 3,915 miles across the north of the country, over mountain and plain, this magnificent construction may no longer be needed to keep the marauding hordes at bay, but it's certainly still a breathtaking sight!

There are a number of sections that are within a day trip distance from Beijing:

Badaling

The easiest part of the Great Wall to reach (there's a train from Beijing), Badaling is the most visited section of the wall. Completely restored in the 1980s, the surrounding area has also seen significant development.

This section of the wall is recommended for those who are short of time and are looking for a fairly easy stroll.

Juyongguan

Draped over a great mountain pass, Juyongguan is the closest section to Beijing – just 31 miles. However due to the somewhat strenuous nature of a visit here, it is usually quieter than other sections.

This section of the wall is recommended for those who are short of time but looking for a more challenging and dramatic experience.

Huanghuacheng

A less visited and partially restored section of wall 40 miles from Beijing, Huanghuacheng offers steep climbs but undeniably spectacular views are your reward for making it to the top.

This section of the wall is recommended for those who want something different – Huanghuacheng's lake is a unique feature.

Mutianyu

One of the best preserved sections of wall and surrounded by woodland 43 miles from Beijing, Mutianyu is popular due to its cable car, chairlift and toboggan ride.

This section of the wall is recommended for those who need easy accessibility – Mutianyu has wheelchair access and is particularly family-friendly.

Jinshanling

78 miles from Beijing, Jinshanling is one of the least busy sections of the wall. Take the cable car up to the highest point for incredible views over the stark yet magnificent surroundings.

Jinshanling is our favourite part of the wall, and you can also do some once-in-a-lifetime hiking on this section too.

Simatai

Simatai might be a bit of a distance from Beijing, 74 miles, but a visit here is well worth it. Wrapped over steep and dramatic landscapes and surrounded by lush valleys the views here are magnificent.

Simatai is the most photographed section of the Great Wall and is considered by many to be the Great Wall at its best.





Take two days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Zhujiajiao water town, Shanghai Museum, People's Square. **Day 2:** Yu Garden, Old Town, the Bund, Huangpu River Cruise.

SHANGHAI

Shanghai is where China meets the west - a city of gleaming towers and hi-tech gadgets. Old Shanghai still nestles in the shadows of the skyscrapers, ancient temples crammed between modern architecture, but the experience this city offers is all about the exhilaration of going everywhere fast.



See how to fit Shanghai into your China itinerary from **page 32**

▲ The Bund

The Bund exudes colonial grandeur. Once the commercial heart of old Shanghai, now buildings that were once banks, clubs and customs houses are occupied by exclusive restaurants, bars and hotels. Lining the western bank of the Huangpu River, a stroll along the Bund is a must during your visit.

Pop up to an elegant rooftop bar to better appreciate the contrast with the futuristic Pudong on the river's eastern shore.



◀ Districts

Shanghai's districts are fascinating to explore, each with its own personality. The French Concession boasts tree-lined streets lined with colonial mansions, whilst Xintiandi is full of rebuilt, traditional Shikumen houses.



◀ Suzhou & Hangzhou

A worthy overnight trip from Shanghai, the garden cities of Suzhou and Hangzhou have been inspiring poets, artists and writers for centuries. Hangzhou sits on the revered West Lake. Surrounded by green hills and lush tea plantations, it exudes an old world oriental air especially amongst the willow trees, old pagodas and gardens of the lake shores. Suzhou is famous for its classical gardens, nine of which are UNESCO-listed, and has always been seen as a city of elegance and high culture, and is fascinating to explore.

Huangpu River ▶

A cruise on the Huangpu River offers a different perspective of the city, dividing it into east and west. Whether you choose to cruise during the day or under the bright lights of the multitude of skyscrapers at night, there is no better way to see the architectural contrasts between the Bund and Pudong, the past and the future, as well as Shanghai's fascinating wharves.



◀ Water Towns

The suburbs of Shanghai are dotted with sleepy old water towns, all set on canals that were once used to carry goods all over imperial China. Each has characteristics of their own, but all are delightfully quaint, packed with traditional buildings, languid waterways and humpback stone bridges. We recommend Zhujiajiao, Wuzhen and Tongli for their beauty and old-world atmosphere - whilst they are wonderfully picturesque during the day, you might want to consider spending the night so you can enjoy quieter streets and twinkling lights.

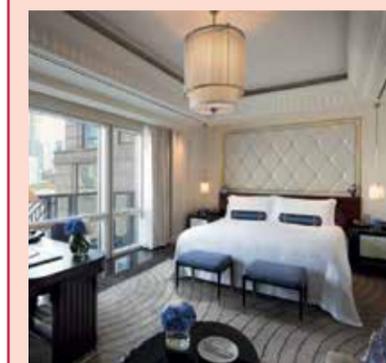


▲ Pudong

Shanghai's newest district, the land on which the gleaming skyscrapers of Pudong now stand was agricultural land just 20 years ago. Made a Special Economic Zone, much of the business conducted in Pudong is what is fueling Shanghai's huge economic advances.

For magnificent views over the city, head up the World Financial Centre Tower, currently Shanghai's tallest building. You can also experience the thrill of speed on the Shanghai Maglev Train, which travels at 268 miles an hour to the international airport - you can just go on for fun!

★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



1. Peninsula Shanghai ★★★★★
2. Four Seasons Hotel Shanghai ★★★★★
3. Greenland Jiulong Hotel ★★★★
4. Crowne Plaza Shanghai Fudan ★★★★
5. Banyan Tree Hangzhou ★★★★★



Take two days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Terracotta Warriors, City Walls, Shui Jiao dumplings. **Day 2:** Little Wild Goose Pagoda, Muslim Quarter.

XIAN

Xian is a city with an illustrious past. An Imperial capital for 11 dynasties and the terminus of the fabled Silk Road, the city has long been a hub of culture and religion. Although a bustling modern metropolis at first glance, explore deeper to find enough sites and relics to impress even the most vehement culture vulture.



See how to fit Xian into your China itinerary from **page 32**

▲ Terracotta Warriors

The warriors of Qin Shi Huang's terracotta army are one of the world's greatest archaeological finds. Buried in battle formation for 2,000 years, until, in 1974, a group of farmers stumbled across them, each of the warriors was crafted with differing facial expressions, heights and rank.

We can arrange for many unique experiences on your visit here: tour the warriors with an archaeologist guide, meet one of the farmers who found the warriors, or have an official photo taken with a warrior!



◀ Xian City Walls

Xian's city wall, built during the Ming Dynasty, is one of the oldest and the best preserved in China. Towering to 12 metres, it creates a circuit of 14km around the oldest part of the city. Within the walls you'll find the magnificent Bell and Drum Towers, also constructions of the Ming Dynasty, which contain displays of old bells and drums.

For a unique perspective of the city, walk, cycle or even be driven by cart around the city walls – also a great way to get your bearings!

Muslim Quarter ▶

Home to a community of Chinese Muslims (Hui) for centuries, Xian's Muslim Quarter is an area of narrow streets crammed with small mosques, specialist shops and stalls selling food and trinkets. At its heart is the Grand Mosque, founded in the 10th century after Islam arrived via the Silk Road.

For a more authentic experience, let us organise a local expert to guide you through the smaller, more atmospheric alleyways of the quarter, tasting the flavours of the Silk Road as you go.



▲ Hanyangling Mausoleum

The burial palace of Emperor Jing and Empress Wang of the Western Han Dynasty, the Hanyangling Mausoleum offers an entirely different archaeological experience to the Terracotta Warriors. Descend below ground to walk amongst the intricately crafted half-sized figures of warriors, women and animals, left exactly where they were found, surrounded by the artefacts of everyday life from the 2nd century BC.

★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



1. Sofitel Legend People's Grand Hotel ★★★★★
2. Shangri-La Xian ★★★★★
3. Grand New World Hotel ★★★★
4. Xian Tourism Golden Flower Hotel ★★★
5. Yulong International Hotel ★★★



Take three days in Guilin and Yangshuo to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Li River cruise to Yangshuo, time at leisure, overnight. **Day 2:** Biking/rafting, return to Guilin, Reed Flute Caves. **Day 3:** Longji Rice Terraces.

GUILIN

Guilin is the casting off point for cruises through the poetic landscapes of the Li River. Here waters flow lazily through entrancing scenes of weathered farmers tending their fields, peaceful fishermen, and water buffalo languishing in the shallows, all watched over by the towering karst peaks for which the area is famous.



See how to fit Guilin into your China itinerary from [page 32](#)

▲ Li River

A relaxed cruise through the spectacular landscapes of the Li River is a highlight of any trip to China. Taking around 4 hours to voyage between Guilin and Yangshuo, all you have to do is sit back and enjoy the passing rural scenes of quaint villages, vibrant paddy fields and jagged karst peaks cloaked in foliage.

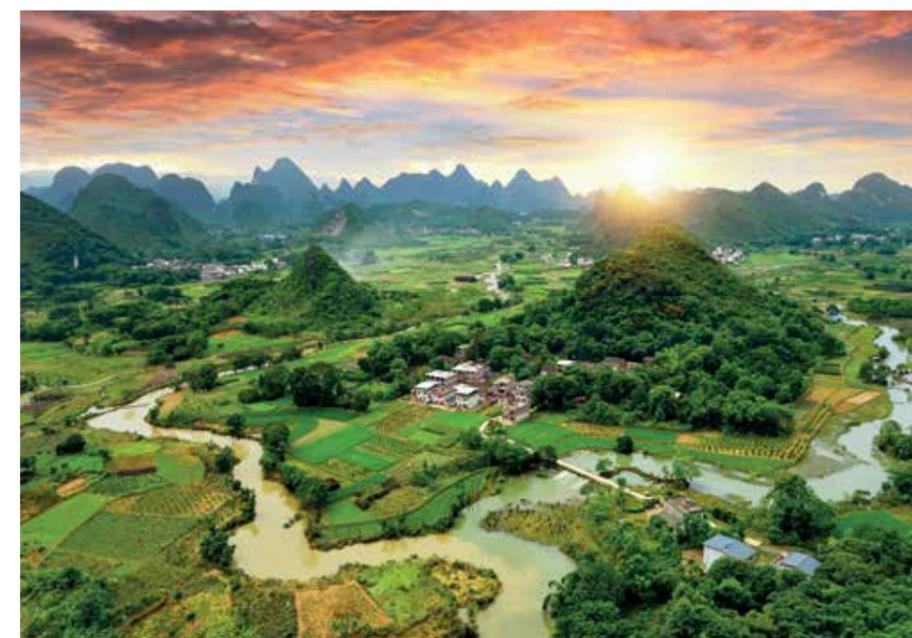
For more river-based adventure, why not go rafting through the beautiful scenery on the Yulong River?



Guilin city ►

Thanks to its spectacular location set amongst the karst and river-scapes of the Li, Guilin is a pleasant place to while away a day. The area has been known for its scenery since the Tang Dynasty (618-907AD), and was one of China's first tourist destinations - admire the impressive stalagmites and stalactites of Reed Flute Cave and enjoy the picturesque views of Elephant Trunk Hill.

Admire magnificent panoramas of the surrounding scenery by letting us take you to climb Mt Diecai, a peak in Guilin's city centre.



◀ Yangshuo

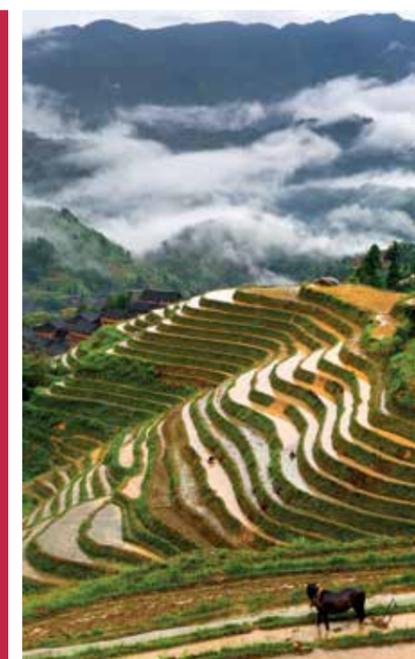
The easy-going town of Yangshuo sits in the midst of gorgeous countryside and exudes the kind of delightful charm that will make you want to stay a few more days. The town itself is perfect for browsing shops, sitting back with a drink and even a cooking class if you fancy.

Explore Yangshuo's beautiful surroundings on a guided bike tour, cycling amongst the emerald paddy fields and karst peaks.

► Longji Rice Terraces

Longji makes for a jaw-dropping sight, row upon row of rice terraces sweeping down and around mountains, forming intricate patterns as they go. A short climb brings you to the village of Ping'an where there are breathtaking views.

For those looking for more of a challenge, take on a rewarding hike that will allow you to visit minority villages and enjoy the views from all sorts of perspectives. We can take you on either a 2-3 hour and 5-6 hour hike.



★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



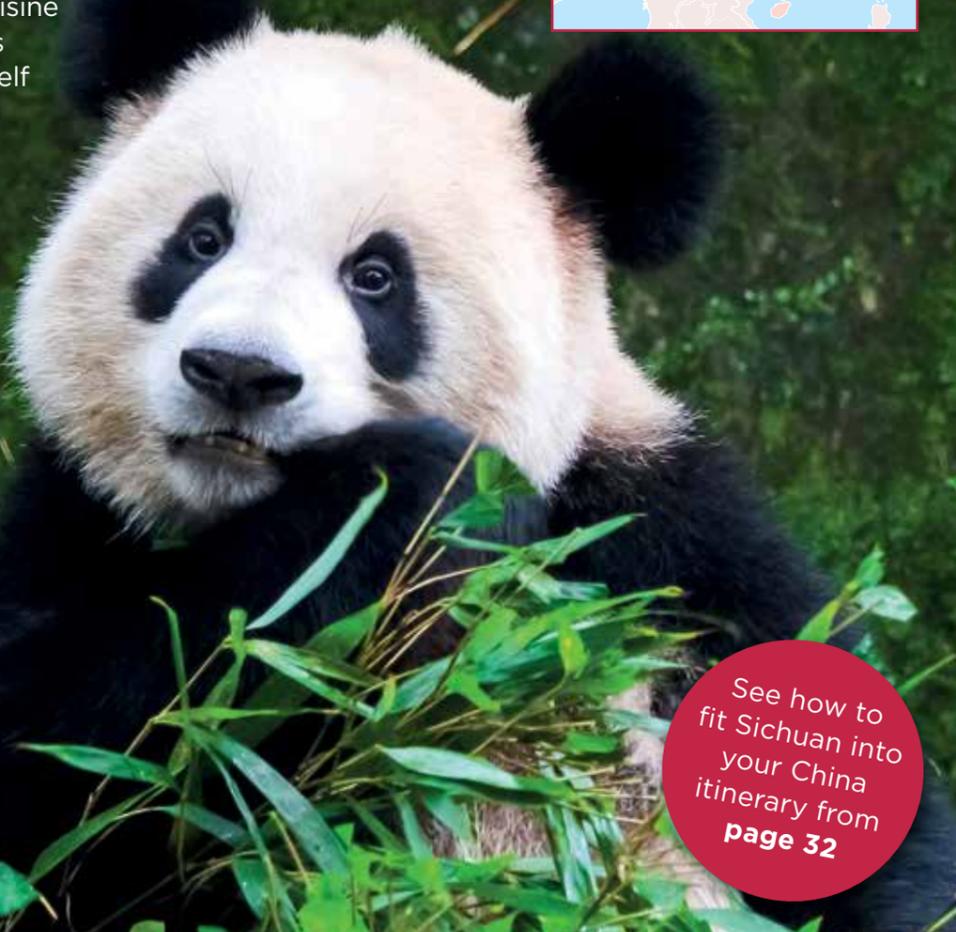
1. Sheraton Guilin Hotel ★★★★★
2. Lijiang Waterfall Hotel ★★★★★
3. Guilin Park Hotel ★★★★★
4. Li-An Lodge Longji Terraces ★★★
5. Yangshuo Resort ★★★★★



Spend four days in Chengdu. **Day 1:** Chengdu Panda Base, Renmin Park, Sichuan dinner. **Day 2:** Travel to Leshan, Giant Buddha, travel to Mount Emei, overnight. **Day 3:** Mount Emei. **Day 4:** Return to Chengdu.

CHENGDU

Chengdu is the capital of Sichuan, a province of towering peaks, fertile plains and swathes of verdant forest. This relaxed and cheery city is home to China's favourite creature – the Giant Panda and is also the best place to taste the fiery cuisine for which Sichuan is famous. Base yourself here to explore this spectacular region.



See how to fit Sichuan into your China itinerary from **page 32**

▲ Pandas

Sichuan is the home of the giant panda and at the forefront of the fight for their conservation. There are a number of panda bases that you can visit – Chengdu Panda Base is the most convenient, being in the city, and is home to 80 individuals and Dujiangyan, about 1.5 hours from Chengdu. Dujiangyan is a field research centre where captive breed pandas are trained to live in the wild and offers one of the most authentic, spacious and natural settings for pandas in the country.

Dujiangyan offers a once-in-a-lifetime panda experience where, with an experienced keeper, you can assist with the daily care routine of the pandas, whilst at Chengdu Panda Base, you are able to take a photo with a juvenile panda, though this cannot be guaranteed.



◀ Mount Emei

Mount Emei is one of China's four Buddhist mountains and the site of its first Buddhist temple. Swathed in forest and dotted with old temples, Emei offers the chance to explore an ecologically diverse and pristine environment just two and a half hours from Chengdu. You can spend a day wandering the lower paths of the mountain with the pilgrims, and take the cable car up to the summit, but it's easy to spend a few days exploring.

We can take you on a hike through gorgeous scenery to Fuhu Temple, Emei's best kept secret, which sits deep in the forest.

▼ Jiuzhaigou

Jiuzhaigou, or the Nine Villages Valley, is a UNESCO-listed national park of blue-toned lakes, rushing waterfalls and thick forest filled with diverse flora and fauna, all encircled in by snow-capped peaks. Located 350 kilometres north of Chengdu and reachable by road or a short flight, Jiuzhaigou's beauty is also accessible, with boardwalks connecting sights and roads and trails to take you throughout the park.

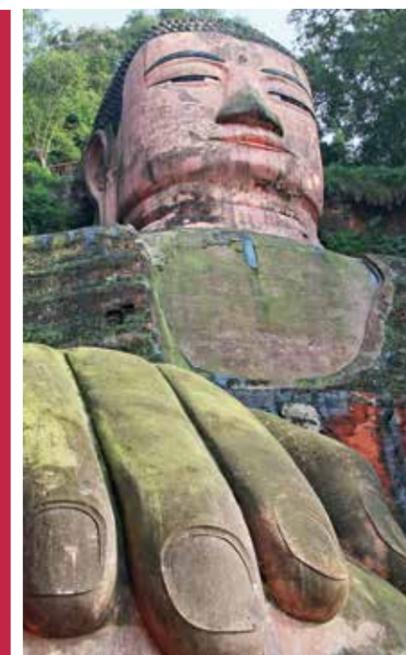


▲ Zhangjiajie

Not in Sichuan province, but easily reachable by plane from Chengdu, is the UNESCO-listed Zhangjiajie National Forest Park, an otherworldly expanse of sandstone karst pillars, peaks and pinnacles enfolded in subtropical rainforest and swathed in swirling mists. It is a spectacular area for hiking, and there are two cable cars that will whisk you up into the peaks for wonderful views.

Leshan ▶

Around two hours by road from Chengdu, the Giant Buddha of Leshan sits serenely overlooking the confluence of the Minjiang, Dadu and Qingyi Rivers. At 71 metres tall he is the world's largest Buddhist sculpture and was built in 713 in an effort to calm the waters that made the route treacherous for shipping. Whether it was Buddha's influence or the amount of rocks that ended up in the river during the construction process, the waters became safe meaning that you can take to them yourself for the best views.



★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



1. Shangri-La Chengdu *****
2. Sheraton Chengdu Lido Hotel *****
3. Mercure Chengdu North Hotel ****
4. Yinhe Dynasty Hotel ****
5. Chengdu Tianfu Sunshine Hotel ****



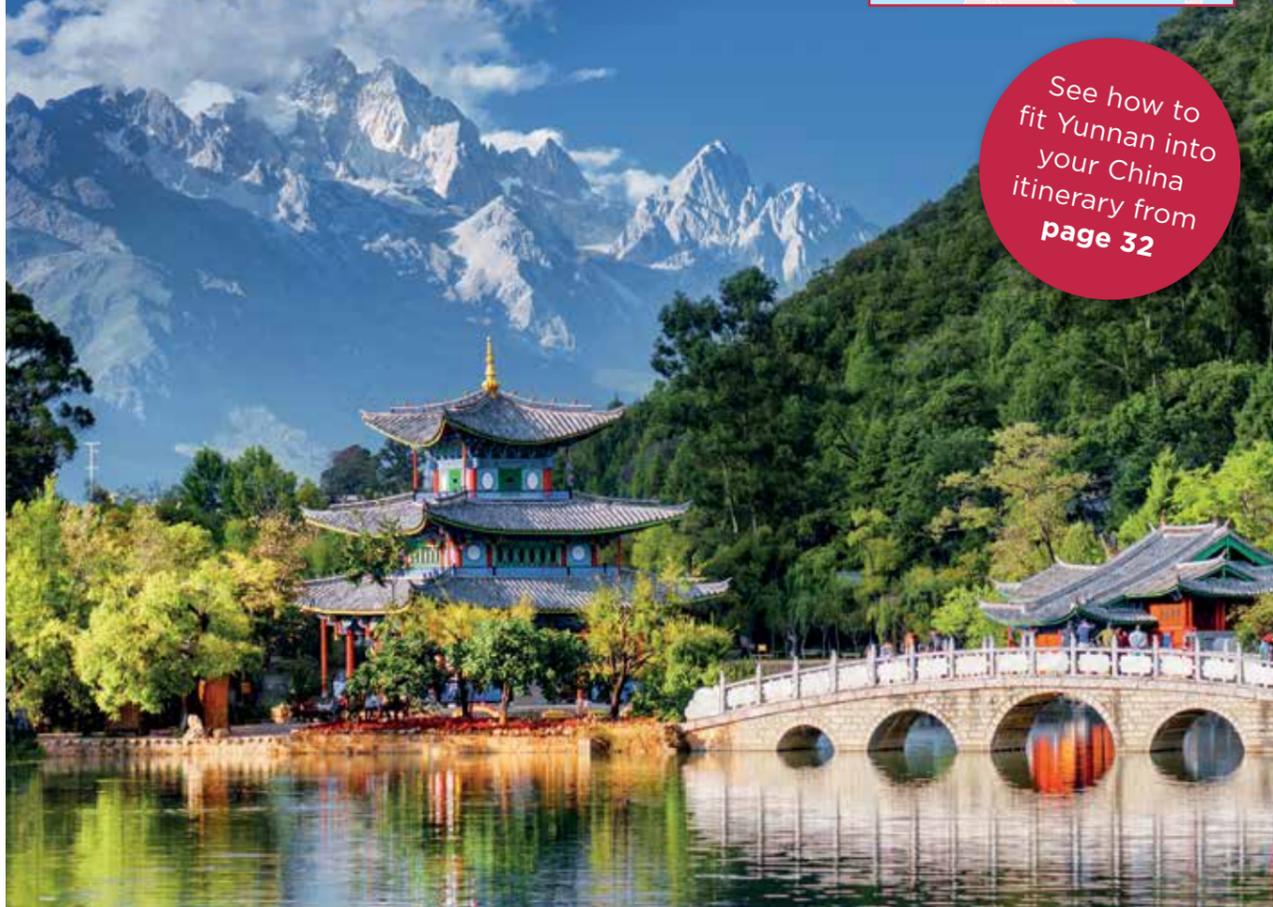
Spend five days in Yunnan. **Day 1:** Kunming, Stone Forest. **Day 2:** Dali, Old Quarter, Three Pagodas. **Day 3:** Lijiang, Old Quarter, Black Dragon Pool. **Day 4:** Jade Dragon Snow Mountain. **Day 5:** Tiger Leaping Gorge.

YUNNAN

A captivating region on China's southwestern frontier, Yunnan's incredible scope of history, landscapes and people is unmatched. The scenery, which extends from temperate rainforest to snow-capped peaks, is magnificent, and makes the province the perfect place to explore China's great outdoors.



See how to fit Yunnan into your China itinerary from page 32



▲ Lijiang

Lijiang nestles amongst the abundant fields and forests that spread out from the foot of Jade Dragon Snow Mountain. As well as its magnificent setting this former capital of the Naxi Kingdom has an 800-year history, much of which can be glimpsed in the labyrinthine, UNESCO-listed old town.

Travel out of Lijiang to the village of Baisha, a Naxi ethnic minority village. Here meet a Dongba shaman who can teach you how to write ancient Dongba characters, a quirky artform!



Dali ►

Dali has earned itself a reputation as the place to see old China. A charming and relaxed spot, the old quarter is a delight to explore whilst the villages strung along the lake shore offer a taste of true local character. For the most picturesque view in town visit the magnificent Three Pagodas which stand proudly against the cloud wrapped peaks of the Cang Shan range.

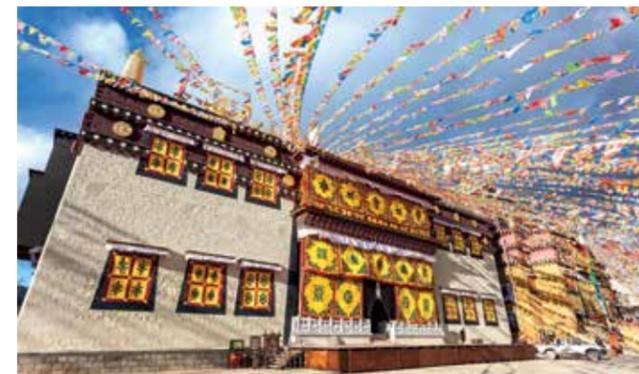
Cycle out to the ancient Xizhou village, home to the Bai Tribe and experience the 'Three Cups of Tea Tasting Ceremony', accompanied by traditional music and dancing.



◀ Zhongdian (Shangri-La)

High on a plateau and encircled by lakes, lush meadows and snowy peaks, it isn't hard to mistake Zhongdian for a paradise on earth. At the heart of an area that is almost wholly Tibetan, the town is a fascinating blend of Tibetan and Han Chinese culture. Visit the Songzanlin Monastery, the largest Tibetan monastery in Yunnan.

For an authentic rural experience we'll take you for a visit a Tibetan village where you can meet the locals in their homes.



Yuanyang Rice Terraces ►

Carved from rolling hillsides over centuries by the Hani people for farming, these spectacular terraces have turned the mountainous terrain of southern Yunnan into what can only be described as land sculpture. Whether the terraces are just pools reflecting the attitudes of the weather or full of the vivid green of millions of rice plants the views are always breathtaking.

The area is also dotted with the villages of ethnic minority people who you will generally see in traditional dress. The very best way to explore is hiking, something we can easily organise for you.



▲ Stone Forest

Covering over 300 square kilometres the towering karst pinnacles of the Stone Forest create a fascinating and eerie natural wonder. The formations you see today have been formed over 270 million years by erosion and seismic activity. Just an hour and a half outside of Kunming, spend a thoroughly unique day exploring its caves, waterfalls and lakes.

▼ Tiger Leaping Gorge

Tiger Leaping Gorge is one of the world's deepest gorges, where the Jinsha River is channelled ferociously between two mountain massifs. It is over 3,000 metres deep and at some points only 30 metres wide - one of China's most spectacular sights. It is just 70 kilometres from Lijiang and is great hiking for experienced walkers.

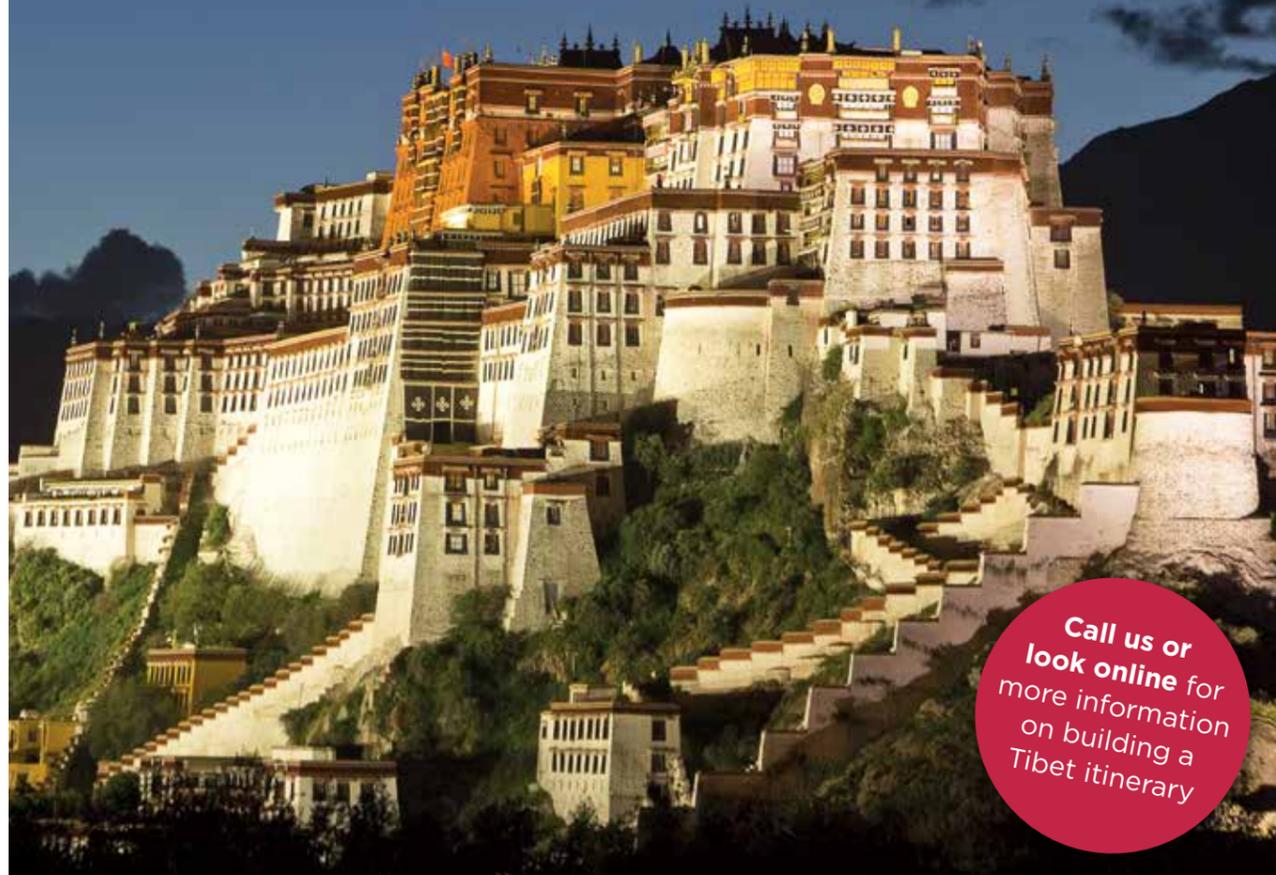




Spend three days in Lhasa to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Free day to acclimatise. **Day 2:** Jokhang Temple and Barkhor circuit, Sera Monastery. **Day 3:** Potala Palace, Norbulingka, traditional Tibetan dinner.

TIBET

Sat high on a stark plateau amongst some of the world's most colossal peaks, Tibet is a kingdom shrouded in mystery. Still every bit as magical as you'd expect you'll find yourself enchanted by the yak-butter candle scented temples, the vast plains dotted with grazing yak and the indescribable views of Mt Everest.



Call us or look online for more information on building a Tibet itinerary

▲ Lhasa

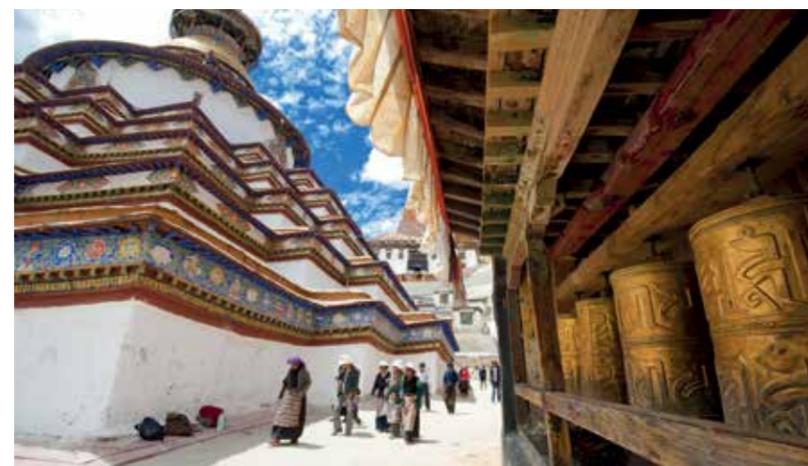
Lhasa is not only Tibet's capital but its heart and soul. Even with the rapid expansion of recent years the city has managed to retain its air of the mystical – at its core you'll come across a world that is still a million miles from the modern one. Join the pilgrims on their circuit of the Barkhor, feel the devotion in the sacred Jokhang Temple, explore one or two major monasteries and admire the former residences of the Dalai Lama, the Potala Palace and the Norbulingka.

Not strictly a traditional meal but still a tasty one, tuck into a quirky and unexpected treat – a yak burger!



Everest Base Camp ►

After traversing some of the world's most incredible scenery, suddenly the view is dominated by just one thing – Mt Everest. Base camp is located beneath Everest's north face, around 600 kilometres from Lhasa just off the Friendship Highway that takes you to Nepal. The sweeping views of Everest and the surrounding mountains from base camp are unsurpassed. These views are reportedly best between September and May and you can pay visits to the world's highest monastery and world's highest post office!



◀ Gyantse

Gyantse was once a stop on a trade route between India and Tibet. Reachable in 7 hours from Lhasa along an exceptionally scenic route that passes the sacred lake of Yamdrok Tso, Gyantse's must see sight is its Kumbum. Famous for its art, this monastery is home to the largest chörten in Tibet which is full of mural-filled chapels.

Why not add in a visit to a traditional folk house where you can sample the home-brewed local tippie 'chang'.



▲ Shigatse

The traditional seat of the Panchen Lama, second in rank to the Dalai Lama, Shigatse is Tibet's second city. 250 kilometres from Lhasa, wander Shigatse's attractive boulevards to the old town to find excellent examples of traditional Tibetan houses. Shigatse's two main sights are the Tashilhunpo Monastery and the Potala-esque Dzong. Tashilhunpo Monastery is now one of the largest religious institutions in Tibet; exploring amongst the hustle and bustle of monks going about their days is a delight.

To really feel the atmosphere of the monastery, join devoted Buddhists for the evening 'kora' of the monastery complex.

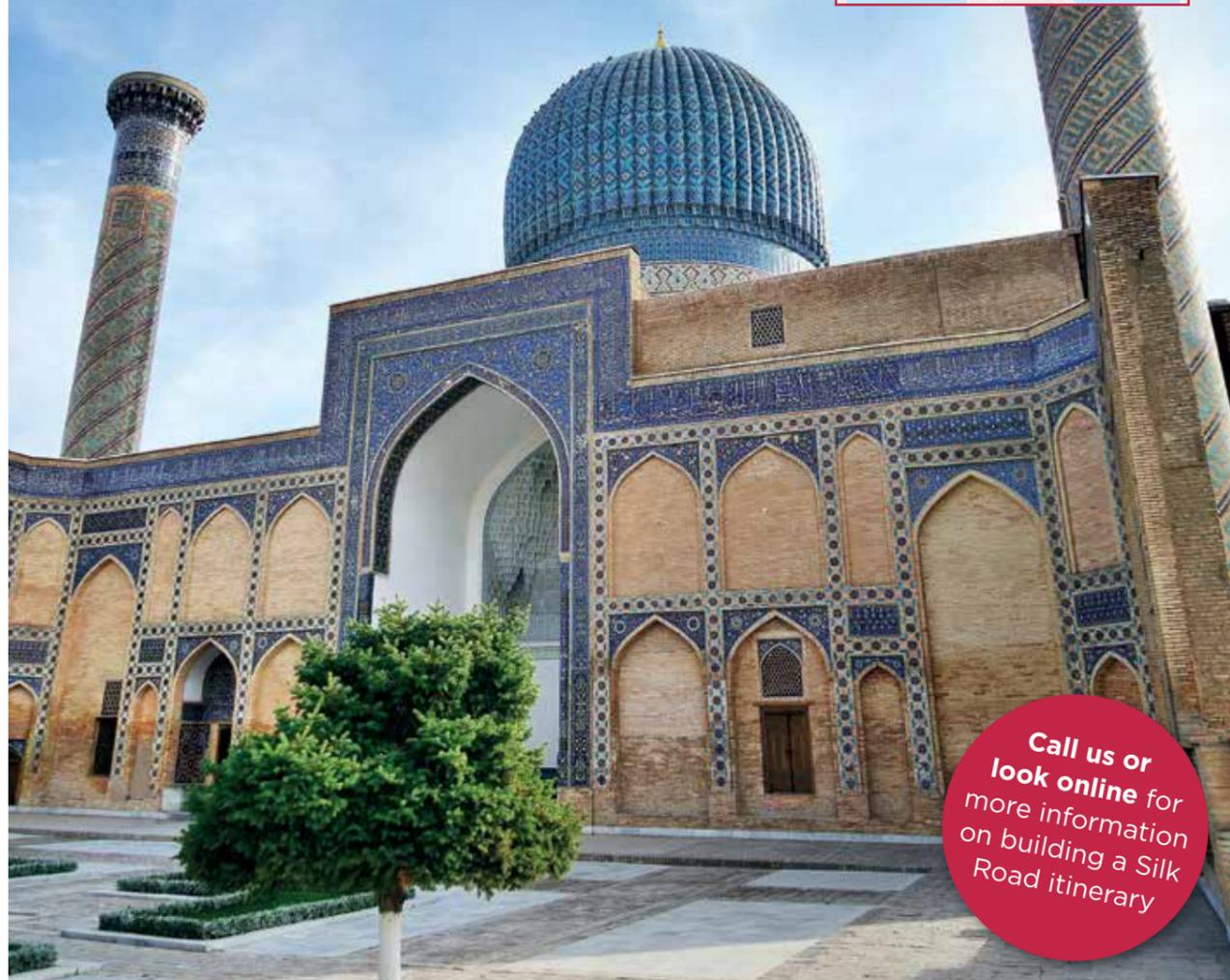
★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



1. Shangri-La Lhasa ★★★★★
2. St Regis Lhasa Resort ★★★★★
3. Four Points by Sheraton Lhasa ★★★★★
4. Gang Gyan Hotel ★★★★
5. Tibet Hotel ★★★★

SILK ROAD

Stories of the Silk Road tell of intrepid adventurers, rowdy markets and colourful camel caravans. Follow this ancient trading route through the starkly beautiful desert and mountain scenery of the province of Xinjiang and beyond China's borders, ticking off the locations featured in the legends as you go.



Call us or
look online for
more information
on building a Silk
Road itinerary

▲ Samarkand, Uzbekistan

The epitome of the romance of the Silk Road, the mythical Samarkand is often referred to as the 'crossroad of world cultures'. Founded in the 7th century BC, Samarkand's long, rich history can be read in the evocative skyline of its old quarter. UNESCO World Heritage-listed sights include Registan Mosque, Ulugh Beg Observatory and Shah-i-Zinda.

Make sure you squeeze in a visit to the UNESCO-listed ancient city of Shakhrisabz, the birthplace of great leader Tamerlane.



Turpan ▶

A fabled oasis set in a vast dry basin, Turpan is famed for its grapes, its pleasant streets lined with lush vine trellises. The area surrounding the town has a long and important history and so is full of cultural treasures. Explore the ruins of the ancient city of Gaochang and visit the Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Cave hidden in a gorge of the Flaming Mountains, easily combinable in a day trip.



◀ Tashkent, Uzbekistan

The capital of Uzbekistan, in the 12th century Tashkent prospered as a strategic point on the Silk Road, trading not only in products but also ideas and culture. Today the city is modern but dig deeper and you'll uncover fascinating Silk Road history amongst the shady courtyards and ancient mosques of the old town.

The Chorsu Bazaar, sheltered beneath an ornate blue dome, is the perfect place to see everyday life in Uzbekistan as people trade spices, grains, fruit and dairy products.



▲ Kashgar

Its skyline punctured by minarets, legendary Kashgar feels a million miles from China. The city thrived for two millennia as a crossroads on the Silk Road and continues to be an integral trading post today. The famous Sunday market still hosts thousands of people who descend on the city to buy and sell anything from fruit to boots to blenders. A visit here is a riot of textures, vivid colours and traditional dress – an unforgettable experience.

▲ Urumqi

Although no longer teeming with camel caravans, Urumqi still sits on its lush plain beneath the Tian Shan (Heavenly Mountains). Visit the Xinjiang Autonomous Region Museum for an introduction to the area's history and minority groups.

Taste the nomadic lifestyle 45 kilometres up into the mountains at spectacular Tianchi (Heavenly Lake). Here you can spend the night in a Kazakh yurt and dine on Uyghur lamb skewers.



◀ Dunhuang

An oasis town on the edge of the Taklamam Desert, Dunhuang sits surrounded by some of the world's highest sand dunes. Once a refuge for those traversing the Silk Road, this remote town is surrounded by many forts, towers and temples. Today it is best known for the Mogao Caves with its excellent Chinese Buddhist art, and its singing sand dunes.

Take a camel ride through the famous singing sand dunes, for the quintessential desert experience.



Spend four days in Hong Kong. **Day 1:** Stanley Market, Aberdeen Fishing Village, traditional junk boat ride. **Day 2:** Victoria Harbour, Lantau Island. **Day 3:** Macau. **Day 4:** New Territories, Victoria Peak dinner.

HONG KONG & MACAU

Hong Kong is a dynamic place to visit – you can shop in boutiques or markets, hike surf-battered beaches before spending the evening relishing gastronomic delights. Just across the Pearl River Estuary Macau is a fascinating combination of colonial charms and casino chic.



It's easy to add Hong Kong to any China itinerary. It is also a fantastic stopover destination

▲ Hong Kong Island

The heart of the territory, Hong Kong Island offers both brash modernity and colonial charms in an area that is only 15km across. Hong Kong Island alone has plenty to keep you entertained – on the north shore you can venture up The Peak by funicular railway for glorious cityscapes and forest walks, enjoy world class shopping or have a flutter on the horses at Happy Valley. Head south to soak up the atmosphere of Aberdeen town, explore the numerous stalls of Stanley Market or relax on the beach.

Rummage through the markets along Hollywood Road's 'Cat Street' for antiques galore!



Lantau Island ▶

Lantau is the largest of Hong Kong's 260 outlying islands. Although its northern tip is home to Disneyland, the rest of the island is somewhat of a rural idyll, dotted with grazing cows, traditional fishing villages and empty, surf-battered beaches. The magnificent Tian Tan Buddha at Ngong Ping is well worth a visit – at 34 metres tall it towers over its surroundings from a hilltop perch.

We can organise for you to explore Lantau on some of its numerous hiking trails which take in some of the island's most beautiful spots.



▲ Macau

A quick hop over the Pearl River Delta from Hong Kong, Macau offers its own distinctive blend of culture and casinos. A Portuguese enclave that pre-dates Hong Kong by 300 years, Macau mixes Mediterranean style, including a profusion of baroque churches and sturdy fortresses, with all the vestiges of Chinese heritage. Macau is also the only place in China where gambling is legal. Macau can easily be visited as a day trip from Hong Kong or the Chinese mainland – take a few days though to really get under its skin.

For Macau's very best egg custard tarts, head to Lord Stow's Bakery in Coloane village.

◀ Kowloon

Kowloon sits on a peninsula looking out over Victoria Harbour. Packed with restaurants, hotels and shops, head to Yau Mai Tai and Mong Kok for local markets with a traditional Chinese flavour. Even if you don't have the time to properly delve into Kowloon it is worth popping over by Star Ferry for the views back over the peaks and skyscrapers of Hong Kong Island.

Sip a drink in the world's highest bar, the Ritz-Carlton's OZONE, on the 118th floor of the International Commerce Centre.

▲ New Territories

The area between Kowloon and the border with mainland China is known as the New Territories. Dotted with new towns and old villages, there are also secluded beaches and wild country parks to discover.

Visit Sai Kung fishing village and sample the freshest Hong Kong-style seafood.

★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



1. Peninsula Hong Kong ★★★★★
2. Langham Kowloon ★★★★★
3. Harbour Grand Kowloon ★★★★★
4. Dorsett Wan Chai ★★★★
5. Eaton Kowloon ★★★★

YANGTZE RIVER

China's longest river, the Yangtze is pivotal in its historical, cultural and economic development. Cruising down the river is the perfect way to slow down the pace of your holiday and enjoy the scenery.

What is a Yangtze River cruise?

The Yangtze River has been the lifeline of China for millennia. It was around the river that some of the earliest Chinese cultures existed; ever since it's been essential for agriculture, for transportation and for the development of the economy. Cruising the Yangtze River not only gives you the chance to take in some wonderful sights, such as the Three Gorges, but also presents you with a steady flow of history and heritage as you wind your way through impressive gorges and cliffs.

Itineraries

There are two itinerary options available on the Yangtze River:

- ▶ From Chongqing to Yichang on a three night itinerary going downstream;
- ▶ From Yichang to Chongqing on a four night itinerary going upstream;

Victoria Cruises

With a fleet of seven five-star ships, Victoria Cruises is the only American company on the Yangtze. The ships blend European and Asian designs and, depending on the ship, carry 200 to 400 passengers. The dining onboard is award-winning, and will take you on a foodie adventure through Chinese fantastic culinary landscapes. Spacious cabins have private balconies, bath tubs and TVs – when you're not relaxing in your room activities such as lectures, cultural demonstrations, Tai Chi, Mandarin or calligraphy classes may take your fancy. Upgraded packages are available.

President Cruises

The President fleet consists of two five-star vessels and one four-star. Two of these, the Presidents 7 and 8 are two of the youngest ships on the river, launched in 2013. These state of the art ships include an indoor heated swimming pool whilst the whole fleet can boast amenities such as a spa, beauty salon, music bar and games room. All cabins are spacious and have balconies and ensuite bathrooms with shower, whilst restaurants, bars and a range of activities, including professional river guides, will keep you entertained.

Century Cruises

A seven strong fleet, the Century ships offer a relaxed and comfortable Yangtze cruise experience. All cabins have a private balcony as well as a private bathroom with shower, flatscreen TV and mini bar, or you can head up to the sun deck or observation bar and lounge for even more panoramic views. There's also a fitness centre, health centre and library onboard. Dine on a mixture of Chinese and Western cuisine with a lunch buffet and evening table service. Each ship also has an excellent range of entertainments, from folk dancing and cooking classes to cultural lectures and Tai Chi.

Sanctuary Cruises

The Sanctuary Yangzi Explorer offers an intimate cruising experience with space for just 124 passengers and a high crew to passenger ratio. Cabins have floor to ceiling windows and balconies, whilst the ship's public spaces are bright and luxurious. Dine à la carte on food prepared by internationally trained chefs and have a tittle from the well-stocked wine cellar. You can also make use of the beauty and fitness facilities as well as getting involved in traditional Chinese exercise, cultural demonstrations and lectures and enjoying the evening entertainment.

It's easy to add a Yangtze cruise to any China itinerary

ITINERARIES

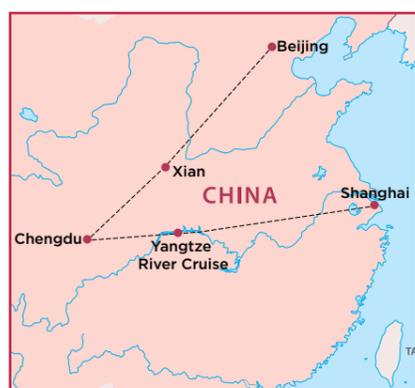
These itineraries are here to guide and inspire, to give you some idea of how you can combine destinations, sights and experiences to create your perfect trip. Look out for our 'best bits' itineraries which feature our top five sights.

All itineraries include international flights, domestic transportation, accommodation, private touring and sightseeing.



'BEST BITS' ■ 14 DAYS ■ SHANGHAI - BEIJING

HIGHLIGHTS ■ The Great Wall ■ Terracotta Warriors ■ Chengdu's pandas ■ Yangtze River ■ Shanghai's Bund



Day 1: Depart UK and fly overnight to Shanghai.

Day 2: Arrive in Shanghai.

Day 3: Shanghai - this great metropolis has plenty to keep you entertained. Try combining the Yu Garden, a stroll along the Bund and an evening river cruise on the Huangpu River or explore the many shopping options, finishing with a trip to the Shanghai Museum.

Day 4: Travel to Yichang to board your Yangtze cruise vessel. We'd recommend taking the one hour 50-minute flight, as the journey takes 14 hours by road.

Days 5-7: Spend four nights on the mighty Yangtze, cruising upstream, passing the manmade marvel that is the Three Gorges Dam, and the dramatic beauty of the Three Gorges themselves, where you should prepare yourself for one dramatic panorama after another. Your cruise will include a number of shore excursions, such as Shibaozhai Temple and Shennong Stream.

Day 8: Disembark your cruise vessel and perhaps pop to old Ciqikou to see the historical, traditional architecture. Travel to Chengdu - this is four hours by road.

Day 9: Chengdu - the highlight of Chengdu is the Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding - spend some time here learning about and visiting the furry residents before returning to the city for a stroll along the lively Jinli

Street. Travel to Xian, one hour 30 minutes by plane or an overnight train.

Days 10-11: Xian - over the next two days take some time to visit the Terracotta Warriors, about an hour outside the city. The Muslim Quarter makes for atmospheric explorations and you can stroll the old city walls. You can also enjoy local dumplings and Tang Dynasty dancing. Travel to Beijing, one hour 50 minutes flying, or an overnight train.

Day 12: Beijing - we would suggest visiting Beijing's imperial treasures today: the Forbidden City and the Temple of Heaven, finishing with a Peking Duck dinner.

Day 13: Beijing - head out of the city to see the magnificent Great Wall - see page 12-13 to see which section is best for you.

Day 14: Fly Beijing to UK.

4★ price from: £3,650
5★ price from: £4,270

FAMILY FRIENDLY ■ 9 DAYS ■ BEIJING - CHENGDU

HIGHLIGHTS ■ The Great Wall ■ Forbidden City ■ Terracotta Warriors ■ Grand Buddha of Leshan ■ Giant Pandas



Day 1: Depart UK and fly overnight to Beijing.

Day 2: Arrive in Beijing.

Day 3: Beijing - why not head into the hutongs and learn to make and fly traditional kites before exploring the Forbidden City. Finish with some impressive acrobatics and a Peking Duck dinner.

Day 4: Beijing - head out of the city to see the magnificent Great Wall - see page

12-13 to see which section is best for you. Maybe try a Chinese painting class.

Day 5: Travel to Xian. This takes 5-6 hours by bullet train or around 2 hours flight. On arrival you can stroll or cycle the old city walls before dining on local dumplings.

Day 6: Xian - Take some time today to visit the Terracotta Warriors, about an hour outside the city, and have a go at sculpting your own. Travel to Chengdu - that's around 1 hour 30 minutes by plane or an overnight train.

Day 7: Chengdu - The Grand Buddha of Leshan is about two hours by road from Chengdu and makes the perfect day trip. Sampling Sichuan cuisine is a must this evening.

Day 8: Chengdu - The highlight of Chengdu is the Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding - spend some time here learning about and visiting the furry residents before returning to the city for a stroll along the lively Jinli Street.

Day 9: Fly Chengdu to UK.

4★ price from: £3,090
5★ price from: £3,580



CULTURE ■ 18 DAYS ■ BEIJING - SHANGHAI

HIGHLIGHTS ■ The Great Wall ■ The Hanging Temple ■ Longmen Grottoes ■ Pingyao ■ Shaolin Temple



Day 1: Depart UK and fly overnight to Beijing.

Day 2: Arrive in Beijing.

Day 3: Beijing - we would suggest visiting Beijing's imperial treasures today: the Forbidden City and the Temple of Heaven, finishing with Peking Duck and the Beijing Opera.

Day 4: Beijing - head out of the city to see the magnificent Great Wall - see page 12-13 to see which section is best for you.

Day 5: Beijing - for those looking for a respite from the bustle of Beijing, head to the Temple of Heaven to enjoy the harmonious ambience.

Day 6: Travel to Datong - we would recommend taking this journey by train (about six hours 30 minutes) or by road (around four hours).

Day 7: Datong - Visit Yungang Caves and the Hanging Temple before travelling on to Wutaishan, around three hours 30 minutes by road.

Day 8: Wutaishan - spend the day exploring some of the many monasteries and temples that dot this sacred mountain. Travel to Taiyuan, just over two hours by road.

Day 9: Taiyuan - home to the fascinating Shanxi Provincial Museum and tranquil Jinci Temple, both are well worth a stopover. Travel to Pingyao, at around one hour and 30 minutes by road.

Day 10: Pingyao - your visit can include the Shuanglin Temple, the Rishengchang Financial House Museum and the Zhou Dynasty walls. Travel to Xian - take the bullet train and arrive in just under three hours.

Day 11: Xian - visit the Terracotta Warriors, about an hour outside the city. The Muslim Quarter makes for atmospheric explorations.

Day 12: Xian - a second day in Xian gives you the opportunity to visit the relics of the Shaanxi Museum, the Little Wild Goose Pagoda and to stroll or cycle the old city walls.

Day 13: Travelling to Luoyang, most easily done by high speed train, takes one hour 45 minutes. Spend the afternoon at the Longmen Grottoes.

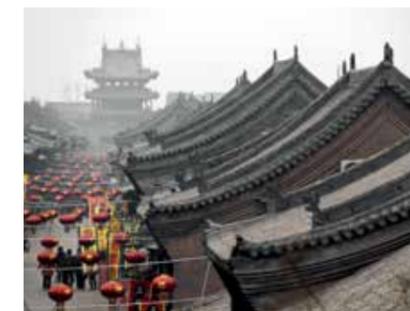
Day 14: Travel an hour outside of Luoyang to visit the famous Shaolin Temple, where you can witness a demonstration by the resident monks. Continue to Zhengzhou, a farther one 30 minutes by road.

Day 15: Zhengzhou - set close to the Yellow River, Zhengzhou's Yellow River Museum gives a fascinating insight into this life-giving river basin. Travel to Shanghai - a flight takes just one hour 35 minutes.

Days 16-17: Shanghai - try combining the Yu Garden, a stroll along the Bund and an evening river cruise of the Huangpu River or explore the many shopping options, finishing with a trip to the Shanghai Museum. A traditional Shanghai dinner is also a must.

Day 18: Fly Shanghai to UK.

4★ price from: £4,440
5★ price from: £5,140



CLASSIC ■ 16 DAYS ■ BEIJING - SHANGHAI

HIGHLIGHTS ■ Great Wall ■ Terracotta Warriors ■ Yangtze River ■ Li River ■ Shanghai



Day 1: Depart UK and fly overnight to Beijing

Day 2: Arrive in Beijing.

Day 3: Beijing - we would suggest visiting Beijing's imperial treasures today: the Forbidden City and the Temple of Heaven, finishing with a Peking Duck dinner.

Day 4: Beijing - head out of the city to see the magnificent Great Wall - see page 12-13 to see which section is best for you.

Day 5: Travel to Xian. This takes 5-6 hours by bullet train or around 2 hours flight. On arrival you can stroll or cycle the old city walls before dining on local dumplings.

Day 6: Xian - dedicating a good part of your day to visiting the breathtaking Terracotta Warriors is a must - you'll find them about an hour outside of the city. Back in Xian, the Muslim Quarter makes for atmospheric strolling, or admire the Big Wild Goose Pagoda.

Day 7: Travel to Wuhan and on to Yichang to board your Yangtze River cruise vessel.

Days 8-10: Spend three nights on the mighty Yangtze, cruising downstream, passing through the dramatic beauty of the Three Gorges themselves, where you should prepare yourself for one dramatic panorama after another and by the manmade marvel that is the Three Gorges Dam. Your cruise will include a number of shore excursions, such as Shibaozhai Temple and Shennong Stream.

Day 11: Disembark your cruise vessel and visit the Giant Pandas. Later travel to Guilin. This is a one hour 20-minute flight. On arrival in Guilin, why not have a look around the Reed Flute Cave?

Day 12-13: Li River - To best enjoy the beautiful karst scenery of the Li River, take a cruise downstream from Guilin to the rural village of Yangshuo where you can spend a day or two relaxing or pursuing one of the many activities available in and around it, from traditional painting to river rafting.

Day 14: Travel to Shanghai. This is a three-hour flight. Use the afternoon to begin your explorations, perhaps the Shanghai Museum or a cruise on the Huangpu River.

Day 15: Shanghai - this great metropolis has plenty to keep you entertained. Try combining the Yu Gardens, a stroll along the Bund and the atmospheric alleys of the old town or exploring the many shopping options with a trip to the futuristic Pudong area.

Day 16: Fly Shanghai to UK.

4★ price from: £3,590
5★ price from: £4,630



ADVENTURE ■ 16 DAYS ■ KUNMING - KUNMING

HIGHLIGHTS ■ Dali ■ Jade Dragon Snow Mountain ■ Tiger Leaping Gorge ■ Tibetan Zhongdian ■ Yuanyang rice terraces



Day 1: Depart UK and fly overnight to Kunming.

Day 2: Arrive in Kunming.

Day 3: Travel to Dali - a 45 minute plane ride or five to seven hours by train.

Day 4: Dali - soak up the atmosphere of the old quarter, view the Three Pagodas and cruise Erhai Lake.

Day 5: Travel three to four hours by road to Lijiang. Explore the atmospheric old town and to visit the Black Dragon Pool.

Days 6-7: Lijiang - perfectly located for trips out to Tiger Leaping Gorge and Jade Dragon Snow Mountain, as well as the Baisha frescoes. Travel to Zhongdian, four hours by road.

Days 8-9: Zhongdian - we recommend to tour the old town and Songzanlin Monastery and take a day trip out to the spectacular Baishui Terraces.

Day 10: Travel to Kunming - a one hour flight or around ten hours by road.

Day 11: Travel to Jianshui - travelling by road allows you to stop off at Tonghai and Xingmeng Mongolian village en route.

Day 12: Head further south to Yuanyang, about two hours by road.

Day 13: Make a day visit to breathtaking Yuanyang rice terraces. You can also hike through the terraces to visit ethnic villages of the Hani people.

Days 14-15: En route to Kunming visit the mysterious Stone Forest. Taste the local delicacy 'Across the Bridge' noodles.

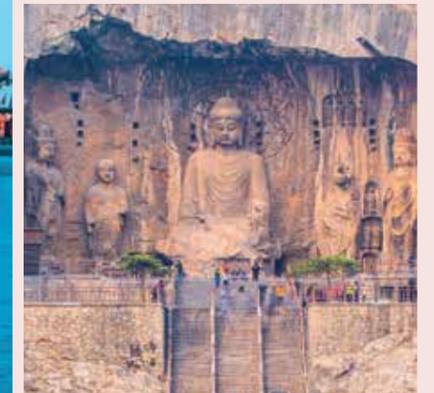
Day 16: Fly Kunming to UK.

4★ price from: £4,290
5★ price from: £4,890



BESPOKE ■ 28 DAYS ■ BEIJING - SHANGHAI

A client asked the Asia Inspirations team to put together a tour that incorporated some of China's Jewish history, similarly we can design any bespoke itinerary just for you.



Day 1: Depart UK and fly to Beijing.

Day 2: Arrive in Beijing.

Day 3: Explore Beijing, visiting Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City and the Temple of Heaven, finishing with a cyclo-rickshaw tour through the hutongs.

Day 4: Spend the day at the Juyongguan section of the Great Wall, returning via the Summer Palace.

Day 5: Travel by bullet train from Beijing to Taiyuan. Transfer to Pingyao.

Day 6: Explore Pingyao, visiting Zhengguo, Shuang Lin Temple, Rishengchang Financial House Museum and Yamen.

Day 7: Fly from Taiyuan to Harbin. Explore the city's Chinese, Russian and Jewish heritage, and the mix of oriental and orthodox styles.

Day 8: Head into Harbin's suburbs to Volga Manor, which features many rebuilt Russian-style buildings. In the afternoon visit a Jewish school.

Day 9: Transfer from Harbin to Sun Island.

Day 10: Fly to Zhengzhou.

Day 11: Explore Henan Provincial Museum. Transfer to Kaifeng to see the Kaifeng Museum and Tower. Visit a Jewish family to gain insight into how they still keep their unique customs and culture.

Day 12: Transfer from Zhengzhou to Luoyang via the Shaolin Temple.

Day 13: In Luoyang, visit the Longmen Grottoes. Take the bullet train to Xian.

Day 14: Visit the Terracotta Warriors. Walk the old city walls and soak up the atmosphere of the Muslim Quarter.

Day 15: Enjoy the Shaanxi Museum and the Little Wild Goose Pagoda. Fly to Wuhan and take the bullet train to Yichang to board your Yangtze River cruise vessel.

Days 16-18: Yangtze River cruise.

Day 19: Disembark in Chongqing and explore historic Ciqikou. Take the bullet train to Chengdu.

Day 20: Head to the Chengdu Panda Reserve to spend the morning seeing the famous residents. Stroll old Jinli Street.

Day 21: Travel to Leshan to see the remarkable Giant Buddha. Return to Chengdu and fly to Guilin.

Day 22: Cruise down the Li River from Guilin to rural Yangshuo.

Day 23: Explore the glorious countryside around Yangshuo.

Day 24: Return to Guilin and enjoy some of the fascinating local cave system.

Day 25: Fly from Guilin to Shanghai.

Day 26: Visit the Jewish Refugees Museum. See the Bund and the Shanghai Museum.

Day 27: Explore the Pudong and Xintiandi districts.

Day 28: Fly Shanghai to UK.

A geisha in a red kimono with a white floral pattern and a red obi, holding a large red parasol. Her hair is styled in a traditional bun with colorful floral ornaments and a silver tassel. The background is a blurred green landscape.

NORTHEAST ASIA

JAPAN

Japan is a country of captivating contrasts, where ancient gods rub shoulders with cutting-edge technology and ultra-modern facades hide deeply traditional values. This fascinating archipelago is packed with futuristic cities, a rich imperial heritage, unique culture and natural resplendence – explore it all whilst embracing the warm and welcoming Japanese spirit.



QUICK INFO



APPROX
FLYING TIME
**12 HOURS
DIRECT**



GMT
+9



VISA
REQUIRED
NO



CURRENCY
YEN

OUR BEST BITS



1 Mt Fuji



2 Kyoto



3 Tokyo



4 Itsukushima Shrine, Miyajima



5 Hiroshima



See all of our Japan best bits on one inspiring itinerary on **page 76**

GETTING AROUND



Flying is quick and easy for short hops between cities.



Japan's train network is one of the world's best – bullet trains are a fast, fun and efficient way to travel.



For ultimate comfort and convenience we will supply you with a private car and driver for sightseeing.

WHEN TO TRAVEL



On Honshu, cold winters bring snow to the mountains between January and March followed by spring and the cherry blossom season in late March and early April. In June and July things turn tropical when the humid rainy season hits, though it is unlikely to rain everyday. Finally, autumn is one of the most spectacular times to visit with cool, clear weather and gorgeous fall foliage.

| JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|-----|-----|------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|-----|
| ★★ | ★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★ |

★ Travel is possible
★★ Good time to travel
★★★ Ideal travel conditions

ACCOMMODATION

Japan has a huge range of accommodation options ranging from thoroughly lavish to serenely traditional. Whichever class of accommodation you choose to stay in, be it a super cosy capsule hotel or a luxury brand, you can rest assured that it will be of a high standard. We would thoroughly recommend spending at least a night in a Ryokan, a traditional Japanese inn. And not forgetting onsen resorts where you can relax in private or larger baths of geothermic waters! **Keep an eye out for our handy Top 5 hotel lists on some Japan destination pages!**



Take two days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Tokyo Skytree, Senso-ji, Edo Tokyo Museum. **Day 2:** Meiji Shrine, Harajuku, Hamarikyu Garden, Tokyo Bay dinner cruise.

TOKYO

A city of chaos, contrast and convenience, Tokyo is at once a neon-bright assault on the senses and full of heritage. The city is forever pushing boundaries but is also unexpectedly traditional, its temples and shrines still worshipped and festivals still celebrated as vehemently as in centuries gone by.



See how to add Tokyo into your itinerary from page 76

▲ Senso-ji

Tokyo's oldest and most venerated temple Senso-ji was built around an image of the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy. Destroyed during World War II and rebuilt as a symbol of the rebirth of Japan, the temple is always bustling with worshipping locals. Pass through the magnificent Thunder Gate to find a street of shops and eateries which originally served the pilgrims that walked miles to worship at the temple.

Join the locals bathing themselves in cleansing incense and try your luck at omikuji – fortune-telling paper strips.

Edo-Tokyo Museum

This fascinating museum charts the history of Tokyo from a 17th century feudal city, through the Edo period to the fast-paced modern capital that exists today. All this is done through the use of intricate scale models that show the city at different stages of its development, as well as an impressive full size replica of Nihonbashi, translating as 'Japan Bridge'.



▲ Tokyo Sky Tree

The world's tallest tower (and second tallest structure) at 634 metres, the Tokyo Sky Tree was designed in a style that combines traditional Japanese style with the neo-futuristic – it even has its own colour 'Skytree White'. Ascend to its dizzy heights where there are two observation decks – Tembo Deck at 350 metres and Tembo Galleria at 450 metres. At the peak of visibility you should be able to see all the way to Mt Fuji, though a night visit shows the city at its most bright and vivacious.



◀ Imperial Palace

Located at the heart of Tokyo, the Imperial Palace remains the residence of the Emperor of Japan and his family. Once the site of an Edo fortress, the remnants of which you can still see today, the current palace was built in 1968, replacing one destroyed in World War II. Whilst you cannot visit the palace itself, it is possible to tour part of the grounds. Alternatively stroll through the delightfully verdant Imperial Palace East Garden before heading to the corner of the Imperial Palace Plaza, from where you can admire an original 17th-century watchtower that peers picturesquely over the trees and moat below.

Meiji Shrine ▶

Finished in 1920 and rebuilt after being destroyed in World War II, Meiji is a Shinto shrine dedicated to the Emperor Meiji. Set in a 200 acre stretch of woodland, this nagare-zukuri style shrine offers a calming respite from the bustle of central Tokyo.

Visit the central shrine to explore the fascinating treasure museum displaying the possessions of the Emperor.



▲ Tokyo Districts

Tokyo has many districts that have big personalities of their own! Akihabara is Tokyo's electric town, the place to buy electronics, as well as being home to a load of game arcades and video game stores. Chuo is the main commercial district, here you'll find Ginza, full of luxury, high-end shops, and Tsukiji Fish Market. Shinjuku is the area where the tallest skyscrapers are, whilst Shibuya is the shopping and eating mecca for the younger city dwellers, and where you'll find Harajuku, the centre of Japanese youth culture and fashion.

★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



1. **Palace Hotel Tokyo** ★★★★★
2. **Conrad Tokyo** ★★★★★
3. **Grand Hyatt Tokyo** ★★★★★
4. **Hotel Century Southern Tower** ★★★★
5. **Tokyo Sunshine City Prince** ★★★

MOUNT FUJI

Long revered, the perfectly proportioned cone of Mt Fuji is the iconic image of Japan. Located just 100 kilometres from Tokyo amongst the beautiful panoramas of the Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park, it is one of the country's three holy mountains, and at 3,776 metres high, it is also the tallest. On a clear day you can admire Fuji all the way from Tokyo!

Here are some of our favourite activities and places around Mt Fuji:

Climbing Mount Fuji

The official season for climbing Mt Fuji is very short – from early July to mid-September every year. This is when the trails and facilities on the mountain are open, the weather is mild and the mountain is relatively free of snow. For those who fancy going up Fuji but not climbing, head up to the 5th station by road – it's about half way up and on clear days offers beautiful views.

Hiking

Climbing up the mountain is not for everybody, so why not walk around it instead? A fantastic way to experience the beautiful nature of the Fuji region, tramp through forest, meadows and around lakes, often stopping to take in the wonders of Fuji itself and the surrounding scenery. The trails around the base of the mountain are not steep and are even suitable for light hikers.

Fuji Five Lakes

The Fuji Five Lakes region spreads out from the foot of Mt Fuji and is named for the five lakes that nestle in the mountain's foothills. Each born from Fuji's previous eruptions, the lakes act as natural mirrors for Fuji's perfect cone. The best-known lake is Kawaguchi – here you can take boat trips or head up Mt Tenjo, by cable car or on foot, for spectacular views back over the lake to Fuji.

Lake Ashi

Not far, and easily accessible from Hakone is Lake Ashi. The shores of the lake are wonderfully undeveloped creating an almost alpine scene. Take a cruise on the lake to see, visibility permitting, the cone of Fuji poking above the surrounding hills. Take the cable car over the Owakudani geysers, or sail up to the heights of Mt Komagatake for a spectacular view of Fuji.

Hakone

Set in a narrow valley, the popular onsen resort of Hakone is famous for its hot springs and has been for centuries. There are plenty of lovely hotel options to choose from, both modern and more traditional, so relaxing here is a given. There is plenty more on offer too, including an eclectic collection of modern art at the Hakone Open Air Museum and Pola Museum of Art.

Kawaguchiko

The shores of Lake Kawaguchiko provide a range of lakeside hotels, water sports and boat trips. Providing almost uninterrupted views of Fuji, on clear days at least, this is the most popular of the Fuji Five Lakes. Take relaxing soaks in onsens with Fuji views, embrace culture in a traditional Japanese inn, and just enjoy being outside surrounded by Japan's rural beauty!





Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Miyagawa morning market, Takayama Festival Floats Museum, Kusakabe Folk Museum, Takayama Jinya. **Day 2:** Hida Folk Village, wander old town.

TAKAYAMA

Set in beautiful rural surroundings in the foothills of the Japanese Alps, Takayama is one of Japan's best preserved old towns. Wealthy in the feudal ages, thanks to its wood and woodcraft, the atmospheric old town is lined with picturesque Edo period buildings. The town's festival is considered one of the best in the country.



▲ Hida Folk Village

This open-air museum, located just outside of Takayama is home to over 30 traditional buildings from the Hida region. Each dates from the Edo Period (1603-1867) and have been relocated here and carefully preserved for visitors to explore. Close by you'll also find the Hida Takayama Crafts Experience Center, offering workshops on local handicrafts.



◀ Old Town

There are many buildings, and in some places whole streets of Edo period buildings in Takayama's old town, a rare occurrence in Japan today. As you wander, you may see several of the old houses that are open to the public, so take a peek inside to see how the wealthy merchants of the town used to live. Many of the old shops, coffee houses and sake breweries you'll see have been in business here for centuries.

Takayama Festival ▶

The Takayama Festival actually incorporates two festivals, one in the spring (April) and one in the autumn (October). Both feature magical parades of specially-designed floats, traditional music and costumes, and performances of karakuri dolls. Both festivals are very popular so accommodation needs to be booked a long way in advance. Alternatively, just visit the replica floats in the Festival Floats Museum.



Take two days to visit Yudanaka. Day 1: Train Tokyo to Yudanaka via Nagano, ryokan stay, relax in onsen. **Day 2:** Monkey Park, onward travel.

YUDANAKA

The onsen village of Yudanaka is the most famous of a string of onsen villages on the edge of the Joshinetsu Kogen National Park in the Japanese Alps. Located about an hour and a half from the city of Matsumoto, and overlooked by distant snow-capped peaks there are plenty of onsen baths, indoor, outdoor, public or attached to hotels or ryokan, here in which to relax.



▶ Snow Monkeys

Yudanaka is actually best known for its 'Snow Monkeys'. The delightful Japanese macaque can most easily be seen in the monkey park near Kambayashi Onsen. Taking an easy walk through some picturesque forest you'll arrive at their private pool, where you can watch them soaking and frolicking in the water.





Take two days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Ryoan-ji, Kinkaku-ji, Nijo Castle, Gion. **Day 2:** Fushimi Inari-taisha, Arashiyama, traditional handicraft, tea ceremony.

KYOTO

Imperial capital for over a thousand years, Kyoto is a treasure trove of culture and heritage – just a stroll down one of the old backstreets is all it takes to catch a glimpse of a traditional soul. The ultimate showcase of the legacy of old Japan, discover a city full of temples, silk-clad geisha and gardens.



See how to add Kyoto into your itinerary from page 76



▲ Kinkaku-ji

A Zen Buddhist temple set amongst the wooded hills, Kinkaku-ji, the Golden Pavilion, is one of Kyoto's most enthralling sights. One of the 17 UNESCO-listed Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto, the main hall of the pavilion is covered in shimmering gold leaf, only enhanced by the reflecting pool that laps at its foot. The surrounding gardens are the epitome of classical Japanese garden design. The pavilion that you see today is in fact a 1955 reconstruction after the 14th century original was burnt down by a monk.

Ryoan-ji

Ryoan-ji is home to Japan's most famous Zen garden. Both the garden's origins and its meaning are unknown but it is believed to have been created in the late 15th century, perhaps as a riddle set by a Zen master for his students. The garden demonstrates perfect harmony and simplicity, its long walled rectangle of white gravel painstakingly raked by the temple's monks.

Take your time sitting and contemplating the garden, it will bring you closer to achieving that Zen state of mind.



◀ Gion

Kyoto is the birthplace of geisha culture and is therefore the best place to spend time with, or at least spot, a geisha or to give them their local name 'geiko'. The district of Gion is dotted with old wooden teahouses, still exclusively used for geisha entertainment and is at its most vibrant at night.

Let us help you embrace the geisha lifestyle – in the backstreets of Gion you can have a full makeover and even take a tour of the area in your geisha garb.

Nijo Castle ▶

The Kyoto residence of the first Tokugawa Shogun, Nijo Castle was built as the ultimate show of power to the overthrown emperor. The castle's fortifications consist of two rings of high, thick walls, each with a moat that surrounds the opulence of the inner palaces and gardens. The grandeur within is breathtaking – the very best artists of the time produced carvings and gilded screens to embellish the rooms, whilst the shogun's paranoia of treachery led to the use of tricks and traps such as nightingale floors that 'sing' when stepped on.



◀ Fushimi Inari-taisha

A vast complex of shrines spread across a forested mountain slope, Fushimi Inari-taisha was originally created in the 8th century and dedicated to the god of rice and sake, Inari. Inari in modern Japan is the patron of business, merchants and manufacturers – the vast tunnel of red torii (shrine gates) is made up of individual torii donated by businesses.

Follow the four kilometre trail through 4,000 torii gates to the hilltop main shrine and your wishes will come true!



▲ Ginkaku-ji

Built as a mountain retreat in the 15th century for Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa, the Temple of the Silver Pavilion, which isn't actually silver, was converted into a Zen temple on his death in 1490. The pavilion itself is a simple structure set in sumptuous, landscaped gardens, complete with reflective pond, manicured trees and a raked sand garden all reached by an enigmatic high hedge-lined path. Nestled on its wooded hillside, Ginkaku-ji is particularly spectacular in spring and autumn.

★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



1. Hotel Granvia Kyoto ★★★★★
2. Ritz Carlton Kyoto ★★★★★
3. ANA Crowne Plaza Hotel Kyoto ★★★★
4. Monterey Kyoto ★★★★
5. Karasuma Kyoto Hotel ★★★



Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Nara Park, Todaiji Temple, Isui-en Garden. Day 2: Koya-san, temple lodge stay.

NARA

Capital city until 794, Nara has oodles of cultural legacy packed into a pleasantly compact city. Often heralded as the birthplace of Japanese culture, Nara is certainly the place where Buddhism became pivotal in Japanese daily life. With eight UNESCO sites to explore and a relaxed and peaceful ambience, Nara is a delightful place to visit.



▲ Todai-ji Temple

The colossal Todai-ji is a Buddhist temple built in 745AD by Emperor Shomu. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, it not only houses the Daibutsu (Great Buddha), Japan's largest bronze statue, but can also claim the world's largest wooden building (the current main hall was rebuilt in 1709 and is in fact two thirds the size of the original!). After admiring the 15 metre tall Buddha sitting on his lotus throne wander about the lovely grounds to see the herds of friendly deer – in the Shinto religion they are believed to be messengers of the Gods.



◀ Nara Park

A huge park at the foot of Mt Wakakusa, Nara Park is a designated 'Place of Scenic Beauty'. The park includes the grounds of three of Nara's old temples – Todai-ji, Kofuku-ji and Kasuga Shrine and is also the location of the Nara National Museum, an establishment dedicated to Buddhist art.

Interact with the sika deer in the park, protected by the government as a national treasure. You can buy deer crackers to feed them – they'll bow to you in return.

▶ Koya-san

The holy mountain of Koya-san, two hours from Nara, is home to a cluster of monasteries nestled in a valley enclosed by peaks. Savour the spectacular views as you discover Kongobu-ji Temple and the Garan Temple complex before wandering around Okunoin – a vast cemetery of 200,000 stupas.

Let us add an authentic experience to your itinerary – stay in the temple lodge at the summit of Koya-san with the resident monks.



Take one day to see the best bits. Day 1: Osaka Castle, Yodogawa River cruise, Kuromon-Ichiba Market, Dotonbori.

OSAKA

Long a commercial centre, Osaka has grown into Japan's third largest city and an urban hub. It is a place that is famous for its food and it's friendliness rather than particular sights but there are cultural treasures to find as well as a vibrant and 'local' streetlife which is particularly invested in the arts.



▲ Osaka Castle

Osaka Castle today is an impressive 1930s concrete reconstruction of earlier fortifications, but once you discover the history of the place – that it was razed or burnt down on a number of occasions since the early 1500s but survived World War II bombings, it's hard to not feel a little in awe of it. Inside you'll find an impressive array of art and armour, whilst next door is the Osaka Museum of History for an overview of the castle's and the city's history.

▶ Dotonbori

The Dotonbori district lines the sides of the Dotonbori-gawa Canal and is Osaka's vibrant entertainment district. Once dedicated to theatre the area has evolved into a strip of restaurants and entertainments, which include theatres and storytellers' halls. The biggest attraction is the many neon advertising signs that cover the canalside buildings.

We can add a traditional Bunraku (puppet show) onto your itinerary.



◀ Kuromon-Ichiba Market

A 600 metre covered arcade, the lively Kuromon-Ichiba Market is packed with food stalls selling all sorts of fresh produce. This is the place that locals, and particularly local chefs, come to do their shopping for meat, fish and vegetables, earning it the moniker 'Osaka's Kitchen'.

For an authentic Osaka taste experience, many of the stalls serve up fresh, inexpensive meals and there are plenty of excellent restaurants.



Take one day to see the best bits.
Day 1: Arrive in Himeji, Castle, Koko-en, depart Himeji.

HIMEJI

Himeji is the perfect visit for history lovers, being home to what many consider to be Japan's most beautiful castle. An easy day trip from Kyoto or Osaka, it is a pleasant city to explore on foot or by bike.



▲ Himeji Castle

Originally constructed in the 14th century, Himeji Castle has been remodelled several times over the years, but it is considered the best of Japan's defensive architecture. Nicknamed 'White Heron Castle', as it looks like a heron spreading its wings, the castle is both a national treasure and UNESCO World Heritage Site. You can enter the castle complex and explore the main keep, and from the top you can see out over the maze of defences and the city itself. The castle looks particularly spectacular during the cherry blossom season.



▲ Koko-en

Located right next to the castle, Koko-en is a reconstruction of Edo period gardens. There are 9 separate walled gardens altogether, each complete with waterfalls, ponds, bamboo and shrubs. Wander through the garden of a lord's residence, a tea garden, a bamboo garden and a flower garden - a lovely way to while away an afternoon.



Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Peace Memorial Park and Museum, Okonomiyaki, Hiroshima Museum of Art. **Day 2:** Miyajima.

HIROSHIMA

Hiroshima is a city that needs little introduction. Whatever expectations you may have of this city, forget them as what you'll find is a modern, vibrant metropolis with a laidback vibe and a sunny temperament. Whilst the past can be remembered at the Peace Memorial Park, Hiroshima is really a place to enjoy the present.



▲ Miyajima

The holy island of Miyajima is home to the famous Itsukushima Shrine, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, its iconic o-torii gate rising majestically from the waters of the Inland Sea. Hop on board the island's cable car to get whisked up to the lofty heights of Mt Misen for magnificent views of the surrounding islands.

Ask your guide to lead you along the rewarding, scenic hike to the summit of Mt Misen.



◀ Okonomiyaki

A hugely popular dish in Hiroshima is okonomiyaki (okonomi 'what you like' - yaki 'grilled'), a savoury pancake stuffed with meat and vegetables. A typical Hiroshima version of the dish includes layers of batter, cabbage and pork plus any optional extras - cheese, squid, octopus, plus noodles, fried egg and lashings of okonomiyaki sauce. Okonomiyaki is so popular in Hiroshima there are over 2,000 restaurants dedicated to it.



◀ Peace Memorial Park

The Peace Memorial Park is a leafy expanse full of beautiful monuments to those who died from the initial drop and aftermath of the first atomic bomb. The most striking is the A-Bomb Dome, whilst the Peace Flame, burning since 1964, will remain lit until all nuclear bombs on the planet are destroyed. The park's museum is well worth a visit.

If you have a penchant for paper cranes, visit the Children's Peace Memorial and donate any birds you've created to the extensive, colourful collection.



Take two days to see the best bits of Sapporo. Day 1: Sapporo JR Tower, Sapporo Beer Museum, Mt Moiwa Ropeway. **Day 2:** Nijo Ichiba Market, Otaru.

HOKKAIDO

The northernmost of Japan's four main islands, Hokkaido is a place with plenty of wilderness and abundant natural beauty. In the winter, it has become known as a paradise for skiers and snowboarders, thanks to the exquisite Siberian snow falls, whilst in the summer, thanks to the cool, dry climate, it's perfect for hikers, cyclists and nature lovers.



▲ Sapporo

Founded in the Meiji Period (mid-1800s) Sapporo is a modern city laid out in an American-style grid system on the advice of foreign specialists. Now Japan's fifth largest city, it is a dynamic place to be, with a big foodie scene – it's particularly famous for ramen and beer – a great café scene and an abundance of nightlife and brilliant shopping. Close to the island's fantastic ski slopes in the winter and perfectly positioned for many a nature excursion in the summer, it is a wonderfully vibrant place to spend some time.



◀ National Parks

Hokkaido has six national parks, each full of the most magnificent nature. Head to the Kushiro wetland for a huge array of flora and fauna, including the beautiful Japanese crane in the winter. Daisetsuzan National Park protects the unspoilt wilderness of Hokkaido's central mountains whilst Shikitsu-Toya encompasses volcanoes and lakes. Wherever and whenever you choose to explore Hokkaido's natural wonders, prepare to have your breath taken!

Snow Festival

Every year in February, the city of Sapporo glitters with magnificent snow and ice sculptures, part of the magical Sapporo Snow Festival. Founded in 1950, every year it gets bigger and better, now with three sites and more than 2 million visitors. Odori Park is the place to see the really big sculptures, and they are even lit up at night!



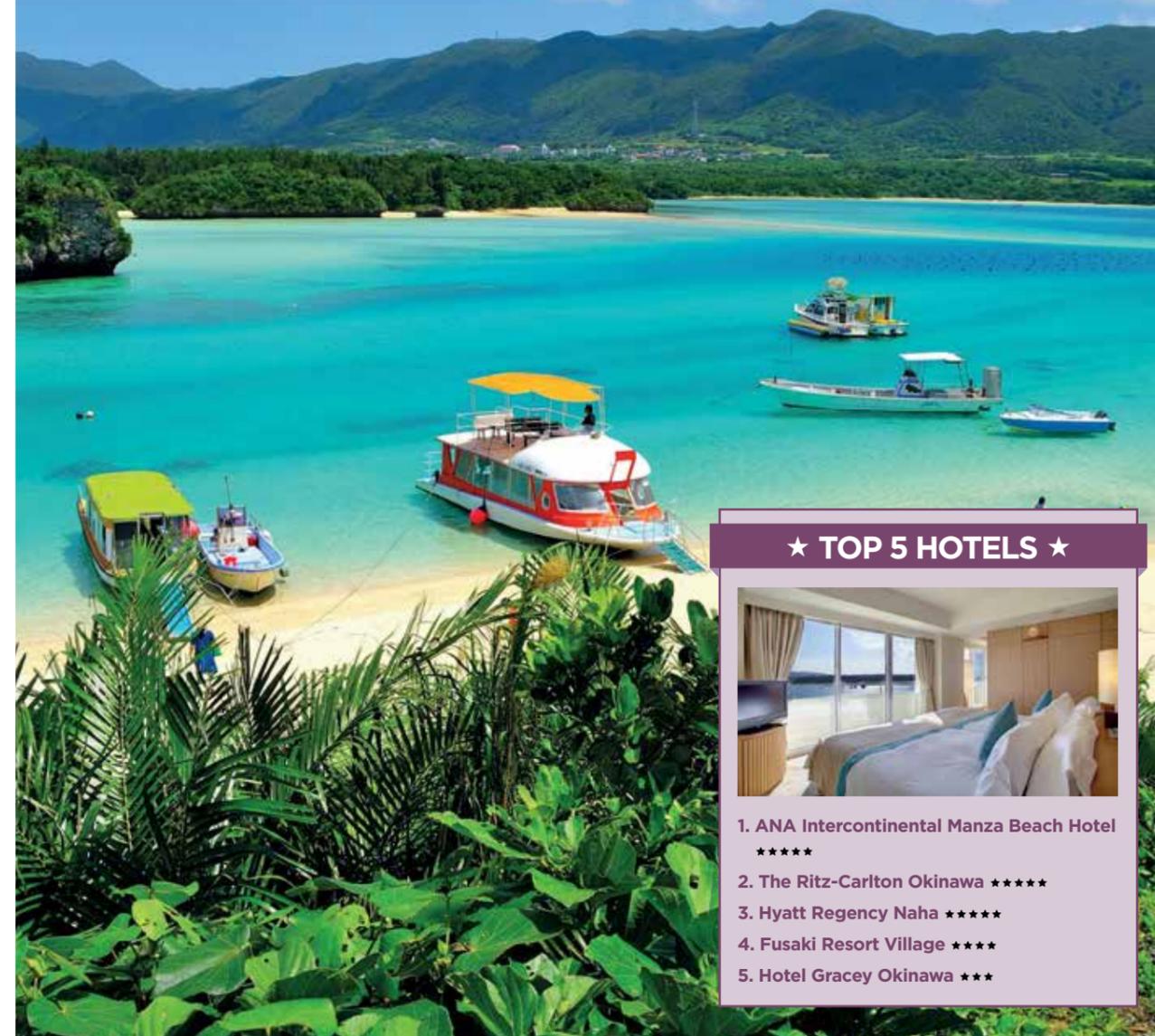
Spend at least three days in Okinawa. You can take the time to relax on its beautiful beaches and do some scuba diving or snorkel, or to explore its incredible natural beauty, or both!

OKINAWA

A subtropical island chain, Okinawa is Japan's southernmost prefecture. Consisting of crystal clear seas full of coral and fish, dramatic coastline, paradise beaches and lush forest, there is no better place to relax after your Japan explorations.



Okinawa has a distinctly different feel to the rest of the country thanks to the presence of the traditional Ryukyu culture, and it's still possible to find spots where the old ways of life are still at large. There are 160 islands in total and plenty of hotel options, especially on the main island, also called Okinawa, so it's easy to find somewhere centrally located to get out and explore or somewhere more aimed at utter relaxation.



★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



1. ANA Intercontinental Manza Beach Hotel ★★★★★
2. The Ritz-Carlton Okinawa ★★★★★
3. Hyatt Regency Naha ★★★★★
4. Fusaki Resort Village ★★★★★
5. Hotel Gracey Okinawa ★★★

SOUTH KOREA

Emerging boldly from the trials of the last century, South Korea today is one of Asia's leading lights. A country hurtling towards a bright, technology-fuelled future whilst very much revering the traditions of the past, submerge yourself in a heady combination of old Asia and new whilst exploring buzzing cities, an enthralling 5,000 year heritage and tranquil nature.



QUICK INFO



APPROX
FLYING TIME
**11 HOURS
DIRECT**



GMT
+9



VISA
REQUIRED
NO



CURRENCY
WON

OUR BEST BITS



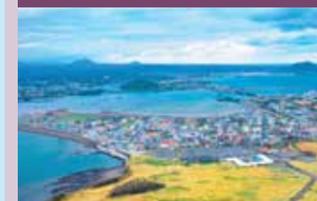
1 Gyeongbokgung
Palace, Seoul



2 Bulgaksa & Seokguram
Grotto, Gyeongju



3 Jeju Island



4 Gyeongju National
Museum



5 The DMZ



See all of our
South Korea best
bits on one
inspiring itinerary
on **page 77**

GETTING AROUND



Flying is quick
and easy - few
destinations are more
than an hour's flight.



South Korea's train network
is sleek and sophisticated -
a comfortable and simple
way to travel.



For ultimate comfort and
convenience we will supply
you with a private car and
driver for sightseeing.

WHEN TO TRAVEL



Korea has four seasons - spring is warm and fresh with the possibility of enjoying cherry blossom season. Summer is hot and humid with the monsoon causing deluges all over the country in July and August. Autumn is mild and dry - the fall colours are particularly spectacular in the national parks. The winters are long and cold, with snow but little rain, crisp air and blue skies.

| JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|-----|-----|-----|------|-------|-------|-----|-----|------|-------|-----|-----|
| ★ | ★★ | ★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★★ | ★★★★★ | ★ | ★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★★ | ★★ | ★ |

★ Travel is possible
★★ Good time to travel
★★★ Ideal travel conditions

ACCOMMODATION

South Korea has a lot of places to stay ranging from locally run motels and guesthouses to well-known international names. True five-star options can be a little harder to come across but there is at least one option in all cities (more in Seoul) and tourist centres. If you are interested in trying out the traditional Korean way of sleeping - a thin mattress and blankets on a heated ondol floor, some hotels offer a choice between 'western' and 'Korean' rooms. **Keep an eye out for our handy Top 5 hotel lists on some South Korea destination pages!**



Take two days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Gyeongbok Palace, National Folk Museum, Jogyesa Temple, Korean Folk Village, N Seoul Tower, Namdaemun Market, Insadong Alley. **Day 2:** DMZ tour.

SEOUL

As cutting edge as Seoul may be, amongst the skyscrapers and shopping malls there is an exceptional amount of culture and tradition. While Seoul's treasures old and new are must visits, the very best way to see into Seoul's soul is to stroll the narrow old streets and eat at the plethora of incredible street food stalls.



See how to add Seoul into your itinerary from page 77



▲ Gyeongbok Palace

Originally constructed in the late 12th century as the principle residence of the king, Gyeongbok was left in ruins after the Japanese occupation of the 20th century. Today the palace is being systematically restored to its former glory. The ornate two-storey main palace and the gorgeous lakeside pavilion perfectly display the elegance of Korean palace architecture and, in spite of the centuries of destruction and reconstruction, it has retained its regal air.

For even more Korean culture we can also add the National Palace Museum and National Folk Museum to your itinerary - they are both on the palace complex.



Changdeok Palace ►

Built in 1412 and occupied all the way up to 1910, Changdeok is Seoul's best preserved palace and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Set within a large park, the palace complex was adapted to fit harmoniously into the topography of the land - although heavily damaged during the Japanese occupation this design is still very much in evidence. As you wander amongst the stately buildings keep an eye out for some of the original furniture that once belonged to the royal residents. Another must is the tranquil secret garden which you reach through an entrance concealed by an arch of leaves.



◀ Insadong

Part of one of Seoul's oldest districts, the narrow lanes of Insadong are the tourist heart of Seoul. Renowned as an area for traditional arts and crafts, Insadong's streets are lined with an exciting array of art galleries, tea rooms and traditional restaurants, along with plenty of traditional wooden buildings that once housed merchants and officials.

The best way to enjoy Insadong is to wander the streets, popping in and out of galleries and teashops and soaking up the vibrant atmosphere.

Bugaksan ►

Sitting on the plain of the Han River, Seoul is backed by eight mountains - Bugak, to the city's north, is the tallest. Here you can find the remains of Seoul's old fortress wall originally constructed in the late 12th century. Keep an eye out for the wealth of wildlife that moved in when the area was closed off for years for security reasons. The views back over the city from the top are excellent.

The best way to explore is on foot - the mountain ridge trail involves hiking along a section of the wall, which has been excellently preserved.



▲ The DMZ

Running along the 38th parallel the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) splits the Korean Peninsula in two creating a buffer zone between north and south. Access is strictly controlled so visiting involves a set list of attractions including the Nuri Peace Park, the Third Tunnel of Aggression and Panmunjeom. Interestingly due to the fact that the land within the DMZ has been left completely undisturbed for many years the area has become known as one of the best preserved temperate habitats in the world and is home to many rare species.

★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



1. Lotte Hotel Seoul ★★★★★
2. JW Marriott Dongdaemun Square Seoul ★★★★★
3. Centermark Hotel ★★★★
4. Aloft Hotel Myeongdong ★★★
5. IBIS Ambassador Insadong ★★★



Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Haedong Yonggungsa Temple, Dongbaekseom Island, Haeundae Beach. **Day 2:** Busan Tower, Jagalchi Fish Market.

BUSAN

South Korea's second city and largest port Busan is a city full of character, with many of the traditional features that Seoul is losing in its rush for modernity. With mountains, beaches and temples to enjoy, exquisite seafood to taste and excellent markets to browse, Busan is South Korea's laidback city destination.



▲ Temples

Busan's two best Buddhist temples are completely contrasting in their locations. Hoedong Yonggungsa is a series of caves, grottos and shrines right on the waters of the Korean Strait – the sounds of the waves gives an added tranquillity to the atmosphere. Beomeo-Sa, whose current buildings were built in 1613, may be in the city but the mountainous backdrop and the serene atmosphere will make you feel a million miles from it.



◀ Busan Tower

To see the city from above head to Yongdusan Park in the downtown area to ascend the 118 metre Busan Tower. The summit is reached by high-speed lift and there is a little café at the top for refreshments as you enjoy the view. Yongdusan Park has plenty to explore as well.



◀ Haeundae Beach

Haeundae beach is legendary in Korea. Just 20 minutes from downtown, the beach sits in front of the affluent Haeundae district which is best known for the annual Busan International Film Festival. The beach itself is a two kilometre stretch of white sand that can get very crowded in the summer but is the perfect place to feel the sand between your toes.



Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Gyeongju National Museum, Tumuli Park, Cheomseongdae Observatory, Anapji Pond. **Day 2:** Seokguram Grotto and Bulguksa Temple.

GYEONGJU

It would be fair to say that Gyeongju has more cultural and historical relics than any other part of South Korea, earning it the nickname 'the museum without walls'. Capital of the Silla kingdom for over 1,000 years, the city has a staggering amount of tombs, temples, statues and ruins, all wonderfully well preserved.



▲ Tumuli Park

In Tumuli Park you can walk amongst royalty – 23 tombs, or 'tumuli' of Silla monarchs hidden under grassy hillocks. Located right in the centre of town, the area has been turned into a lovely tree-filled park that is the perfect place for an afternoon stroll.

Let us add the Cheonmachong tomb to your visit – this one 5th century tomb yielded about 12,000 relics.



Gyeongju National Museum

With a huge collection of relics of Silla, the National Museum gives a fantastic overview of the kingdom. Although many of the finds are not on display, the ones that are, are suitably impressive, with jewels, Buddhist works of art and even elaborate crowns given pride of place.

Don't forget to visit the Emille Bell, one of Asia's largest and most resonant bells – though unfortunately you will not be able to hear it for yourself.

▲ Bulguksa

Bulguksa is considered the paramount example of Silla architecture. Built in 528 it was partially destroyed in 1593 and left to fall into ruin until its reconstruction was ordered in the 1970s. The complex encompasses seven national treasures and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, along with Seokguram Grotto. The ponds, paths and bridges of the grounds make a popular picnic spot, whilst the striking patterns and bright colours of the buildings make for an even more impressive sight. Just four kilometres from Bulgaksa, the Seokguram Grotto, overlooking the Sea of Japan is home to some of the world's best Buddhist sculptures.



National Parks can often be visited on a day trip - to explore deeper why not spend a night or two in a nearby town or city, or within the park itself.

NATIONAL PARKS

South Korea has over 20 national parks, each designated to preserve the natural ecosystems of the country. Many are packed with craggy peaks, dense forests and native flora and fauna. A good time to visit any of the parks is in the autumn, when the rich colours are exquisite.



▲ Mount Seorak National Park

Mount Seorak National Park is a spectacularly scenic area of high, cloudy peaks, craggy bluffs and fragrant pine forest. Designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve as a habitat for many rare species of plants and animals, it is one of South Korea's most dramatic natural treasures. Hiking is the biggest pastime here – head to the Cheonbuldong Valley to ramble amongst crystal clear streams and pools. The gateway to the park is the city of Sokcho – you can take easy day trips from here to hike or simply enjoy the park's beauty, or spend longer getting deeper amongst the mountains and forests for a chance to seek out unusual flora and fauna.



◀ Mount Gaya National Park

Bisected by the Sobaek Mountains, Mount Gaya National Park is located deep inland, 60 kilometres from the city of Daegu. Whilst Mount Gaya is full of spectacular nature and home to many species of flora and fauna, this park is also known for its historical treasures. Haeinsa Temple is one of South Korea's three Jewel Temples, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a famous destination of pilgrimage. The temple houses the Triptaka Korea, a comprehensive set of Buddhist scriptures carved onto more than 80,000 printing blocks which has been here since 1398. Other popular sights in the park include Yongmun Falls and the Hongyadong Valley.



Spend at least three days on Jeju Island. Your time here will depend on how long you'd like to spend relaxing on the beach and how much exploring you want to do.

JEJU ISLAND

An emerald jewel set in the Korea Strait, Jeju Island is a volcanic paradise. The island is Korea's holiday and honeymoon island boasting gorgeous scenery of rugged peaks, lush forest, swaying palm trees, white coral sand beaches and ancient traditions, distinctly different from the mainland.



▲ Jeju City

Jeju City is a relaxed and lively capital located in the shadow of a dormant volcano on the island's north coast. Full of bars, restaurants and good shopping, the city is also well located for beaches and for explorations of Jeju's rugged volcanic beauty.

Visit the Jeju Stone Park where you'll find a range of sculptures on trails that snake across the 327-hectare site, as well as the Jeju Stone Museum to learn about Jeju Island's fiery birth.



◀ Udo Islands

One of the 62 little islands that dot the ocean just off Jeju, Udo is 3.5 kilometres off Jeju's east coast. Consisting of a lava plateau and flatlands it is incredibly green and lush – you'll see crops such as sweet potatoes, garlic and peanuts being cultivated across the island. Highlights include black lava cliffs, the lighthouse, which offers lovely views over the island, and a gorgeous white sand beach, Hongjodangoe Haebin.

◀ Beaches

Jeju's tropical greenery and volcanic crags is fringed with innumerable beaches. Whilst some beaches are backed by lively resorts, it's still not hard to find somewhere a bit more remote. Two popular and easy to reach choices are Jungmun, a lively beach of pale sands and refreshing seas on the south coast, and Iho Tewoo, close to Jeju City, which offers an unusual mix of grey and yellow sands.

Ask your guide to help you spot Jeju's 'haenyo', the 65 to 80-plus year old women who free dive to catch octopuses, squid and clams.



TAIWAN

Delightfully undiscovered, Taiwan delivers dramatic landscapes, dynamic cities, sensational cuisine and a heady cultural melting pot of Chinese, Japanese and Western influences mixed with folk traditions – an incredible diversity for one small island. So banish those outdated images of factories and exports ‘made in Taiwan’ to delve into this wonderfully rewarding destination.



QUICK INFO



APPROX
FLYING TIME
15 HOURS
INDIRECT



GMT
+8



VISA
REQUIRED
NO

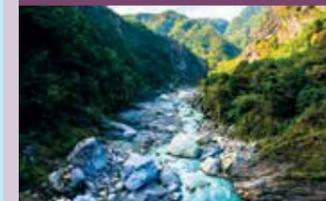


CURRENCY
**NEW
TAIWAN
DOLLAR**

OUR BEST BITS



1 Taroko Gorge



2 Historic Tainan



3 Sun Moon Lake



4 Chiang Kai Shek Memorial Hall



5 National Palace Museum, Taipei



See all of our
Taiwan best
bits on one
inspiring itinerary
on **page 77**

GETTING AROUND



There are daily flights between domestic destinations.



Taiwan's high speed railway connects major cities along the west coast travelling at 300 kilometres an hour.



For comfort and convenience we will supply a private car and driver for sightseeing and transfers.

WHEN TO TRAVEL



Taiwan has a typical subtropical climate with hot, wet summers and mild winters. The north and the south of the island have some variation in temperatures and weather conditions but as a general overview most of Taiwan's rain falls between May and September (there are two monsoons), whilst July to October is when there is a risk of typhoons, though these are usually just strong winds and heavy rain.

| JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| ★★★ | ★★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★★★ | ★★★ |

★ Travel is possible
★★ Good time to travel
★★★ Ideal travel conditions

ACCOMMODATION

Taiwan has a full range of accommodation options to suit all tastes and budgets. The big cities have all the international names, including super plush five-star options, whilst outside of the urban centres the mid-range selection offer a more than comfortable place to stay. There are also plenty of hot-spring hotels dotted throughout the country where you can make the most of Taiwan's volcanic origins with both private and public baths.

Keep an eye out for our handy Top 5 hotel lists on some Taiwan destination pages!



Take two days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Martyrs' Shrine, Taipei 101, Chiang Kai Shek Memorial Hall, Lungshan Temple, Ximending. **Day 2:** National Palace Museum, Bao-an Temple, Zhongzheng District.

TAIPEI

Nestled in a basin surrounded by mountains, Taipei is a vibrant city packed with the upmarket and ultramodern. A bastion of Taiwan's wonderfully rich heritage it boasts an intriguing mix of cultures. Spot the Chinese, Japanese and Western influences as you explore amongst neon signs, heritage streets and astounding history.



See how to add Taipei into your itinerary from **page 77**

▲ National Palace Museum

This sprawling museum houses the world's largest, and finest, collection of Chinese art and artefacts. This epic collection spans 5,000 years with a priceless treasure trove of items that once belonged to emperors. Spread over four levels, you can spend hours admiring paintings, lacquerware, ceramics and items from the daily life at court.

We can give you a guide to help you delve deeper into the culture - especially that of the famous jade cabbage!



◀ Chiang Kai Shek Memorial Hall

The Chiang Kai Shek Memorial Hall is dedicated to the man who is oft credited for the Taiwan we know today. Built in the 1980s, the hall, perched at the top of 88 steps, is an excellent example of classical Chinese architecture. Within you'll find a big statue of Chiang Kai Shek himself as well as a collection of pictures and personal effects that tell his story.

Hang around to catch the elaborate hourly changing of the guard.

Zhongzheng District ▶

Zhongzheng is the area where Taipei began, though there isn't much of the original walled city from the 1880s left after it was destroyed by the Japanese. There are, however, four of the five original Fujian-style gates remaining. Much of the architecture here now is Japanese influenced - the red brick Presidential Palace is a fascinating Japanese take of British imperial architecture. Close to the Chiang Kai Shek Memorial Hall you'll find the National Taiwan Museum with its grandiose Neoclassical façade. Inside is a huge collection, the most interesting of which is the aboriginal artefacts exhibit.



◀ Longshan Temple

Taipei's most vibrant temple, Longshan is also its oldest having been founded in 1738, although it has been destroyed and rebuilt a number of times. Displaying the unique architecture and temple arts that characterise Taiwan's folk faith, the temple is dedicated to the bodhisattva of mercy but there are over 100 deities packed in.

There is no better place to observe the Taiwanese people practicing their beliefs and traditions.

▼ Bao-an Temple

Bao-an is an exquisite temple adorned with perfect examples of traditional Taiwanese decorative arts. It was built in the early 1800s by immigrants from Quanzhou on mainland China. Following a huge restoration project in the 1990s, the temple received the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage award and is today a centre for folk arts, hosting regular festivities, performances and parades. Taipei's Confucian temple is situated opposite.



★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



1. The Landis ★★★★★
2. Regent Taipei ★★★★★
3. Howard Plaza Hotel Taipei ★★★★★
4. City Suites Taipei Nandong ★★★★
5. Swilo Hotel Daan ★★★



Take one day to see the best bits. Day 1: Chihkan Tower, Confucius Temple, Shennong Street, Anping Fort, Merchant House of Tait & Co.

TAINAN

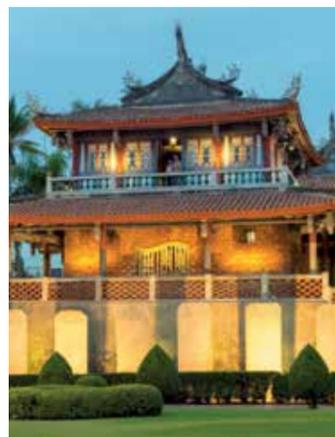
Taiwan's oldest city and capital until 1887, Tainan was originally established as a trading port by the Dutch. Today the city is renowned for its preservation of traditions and folk culture. Visit old temples, where locals worship as their ancestors did, and explore the history of the Dutch colonialists and China's Ming Dynasty.



▲ Confucius Temple

Taiwan's first Confucian temple founded in 1666, Tainan's temple is considered one of the oldest buildings on the island. Set in peaceful grounds dotted with graceful structures, the temple also served as Taiwan's first official school, becoming an important centre of the community, as it remains today.

We can help you explore the larger cultural zone that surrounds the temple, which also encompasses the Old Tainan Martial Arts Academy.



◀ Chihkan Tower

Founded by the Dutch in 1653 as Fort Provintia, the Chihkan Tower has since been in the hands of the Ming and Qing dynasties and the Japanese. On a visit today you'll find a quirky collection of artefacts including stone horses, stone weights, steles and nine stone tortoises carrying carved stone tablets on their backs.

◀ Anping

The historic district of Anping is where the Dutch East India Company established their Fort Zeelandia in the 17th century. Around the fort you'll find some of Taiwan's oldest streets – a wander down these alleys will bring you to restored brick buildings.

A fascinating sight is the Anping Tree House – originally a Tait & Co warehouse it was taken over by the aerial roots of a banyan tree!



National Parks can often be visited on a day trip – to explore deeper why not spend a night or two in a nearby town or city, or within the park itself.

NATIONAL PARKS

It's not hard to see why Taiwan was known for centuries by its nickname 'the Beautiful Isle' – everywhere you look you'll find gorgeous landscapes. Taiwan's national parks, encompass and preserve the different elements of the island's diverse and magnificent geography.



▲ Sun Moon Lake National Scenic Area

Arguably Taiwan's most scenic spot, Sun Moon Lake sits amongst forest cloaked mountains at the heart of the island. An area of abundant natural beauty, a visit to the lake provides a tranquil and idyllic escape from the city.

Walk around the lake to visit temples and pavilions, voyage across the waters by boat or use the cable car to ascend a nearby peak for spectacular views.



◀ Yangmingshan National Park

On the edge of Taipei the landscape rises up into rolling grass-covered hills and forest-covered mountains. The area was formed by volcanoes and is dotted with dormant peaks and bubbling hot springs – there are plenty of resorts where you can while away the day relaxing in the sulphur-rich waters. As well as being scenically beautiful there are also a few important historic sights to visit, Chiang Kai Shek's house for one, which is easily accessible by road if you don't fancy tackling the park by foot.

◀ Taroko National Park

Encompassing sea cliffs and soaring peaks, Taroko is home to a diverse range of geographical features and habitats. The Liwu River slices through the park to the sea, rushing through gorges and tumbling over lofty cliffs. The Taroko Gorge is the river's masterpiece and is widely considered a scenic wonder, 18 kilometres of towering marble cliffs and lush vegetation.

Get closer to the natural beauty of the gorge with one of its many easy hikes.



MONGOLIA

Whilst Mongolia may conjure up images of vast emptiness it is in fact a place of immeasurable natural beauty that has long captured the imaginations of intrepid travellers. Take a journey of discovery through the land of Genghis Khan, experiencing untamed wilderness, meeting the lovely locals and immersing yourself in a completely new and fascinating way of life.



QUICK INFO



APPROX
FLYING TIME
13 HOURS
INDIRECT



GMT
+8



VISA
REQUIRED
YES



CURRENCY
TÖGRÖG

OUR BEST BITS

1 Khongoryn Els



2 A traditional ger



3 Lake Khovsgol



4 Gorkhi-Terelj National Park



5 Flaming Cliffs



See all of our Mongolia best bits on one inspiring itinerary on **page 78**

GETTING AROUND



From Ulaanbaatar you can fly to a number of destinations across the country.



The most advantageous way to travel through Mongolia is in a suitably hardy vehicle by road.



Mongolia's railway system is mostly part on the Trans-Mongolian Railway that connects China with Russia.

WHEN TO TRAVEL



Mongolia's climate is classified as 'extreme continental', with long, cold winters and short, warm and dry summers. Mongolia has 257 cloud free days a year; when the clouds do come it is over the summer when most of the rain falls. Some of the most extreme weather occurs in the Gobi - in the winter temperatures can drop as low as minus 30° whilst in the summer then can climb as high as 40°.

| JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC | |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|---|
| X | X | ★ | ★ | ★★ | ★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★ | ★ | X | X | ★ Travel is possible ★★ Good time to travel ★★★ Ideal travel conditions |

ACCOMMODATION

Ulaanbaatar is home to the majority of Mongolia's hotels; outside of the city it is ger camps that offer both a fun and comfortable way to spend the night. Very recently a few international names have started moving into town, including the luxury brand Shangri-La and Hilton. Ger camps are a fantastic way to experience the traditional Mongolian lifestyle, the gers themselves are comfortable and well-furnished, with toilet and shower facilities in a separate block. **Visit the Asia Inspirations website to see our recommended hotel selection.**



Take two day to see the best bits. Day 1: Ganden Monastery, Chinggis Khan Square, Museum of Mongolian History, Choijin Lama Temple. **Day 2:** Bogd Khan Palace, Winter Palace, Zaisan Hill War Memorial.

ULAANBAATAR

The city of Ulaanbaatar is at the heart of one of the world's most remote and beautiful countries. The city was founded as a nomadic monastery that moved around the country before settling in its current location in 1778 – today it offers stark contrasts of shabby old and shiny new as it develops both industrially and socially.



▲ Gandan Monastery

Mongolia's largest and most important monastery, Gandan's full name 'Gandantegchinlen' means 'Great Place of Complete Joy'. Founded in the mid-19th century Gandan is one of the few religious institutions to have survived the religious purges of the communist government of the 1930s. It wasn't until the 1990s that Mongolians became free to practice Buddhism again, and it was then that the monastery was revitalised – today there are over 600 monks here. Visit the magnificent gilded statue of Migjid Janraisig – this re-casting of the original destroyed in the 1930s was paid for by contributions from the Mongolian people.



▲ Chinggis Khan Square

It was in 1921 at the centre of what is now Chinggis Khan Square that Mongolia's independence from China was announced. It was renamed for the founding father of the nation in 2003, a great expanse of open space surrounded by some of Ulaanbaatar's most important buildings. Look out for the statues of Chinggis, Ogedei and Kublai Khan.

The Cultural Palace houses the Mongolian National Modern Art Gallery.

▼ Naadam Festival

Naadam is a traditional festival that takes place in the midsummer with many Mongolians gathering to watch their fellows compete in the 'three manly sports' – horse racing, archery and wrestling. The festival kicks off with the colourful pageantry of the opening ceremony, and continues as one big party, with plenty of food to sample, music to enjoy and people to watch.



Take three days to see the best bits. Day 1: Karakorum, Erdene Zuu Khiid. **Day 2:** Tsenkher Jiguur Hot Springs. **Day 3:** Great White Lake.

KHARKHORIN & GREAT WHITE LAKE

The legendary city of Karakorum became the capital of the Mongol Empire and one of the most important cities on the Silk Road before it was abandoned with the empire's collapse. The closeby Great White Lake is one of Mongolia's most spectacular destinations.



▲ Karakorum

About 360 kilometres from Ulaanbaatar and close to the town of Kharkhorin, Karakorum was once the glorious capital of Genghis Khan. After the empire collapsed and the city was abandoned it fell into ruin – you'll find statues and relics scattered around the area. Much of the building material was scavenged to build the close by Erdene Zuu Khiid, considered to be the earliest surviving Buddhist monastery in Mongolia. After the communist purges of the 1930/40s there's not much of it left, but both it and Karakorum are part of the Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape World Heritage Site and in a beautiful setting.



▲ Great White Lake

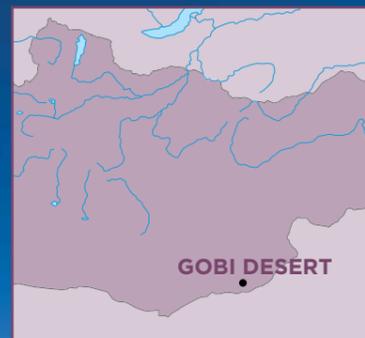
Great White Lake, or Terkhiin Tsagaan Nuur, is situated in the extensive Khorgo-Terkhiin Tsagaan Nuur National Park. This huge freshwater lake is set against a backdrop of old volcanoes and pine forests and is one of the best places in the country to hike or even swim in the lake. The park is also home to a wealth of flora and fauna. Accommodation here consists of ger camps – a must do in Mongolia!



Take four days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Gurvansaikhan National Park, nomadic family visit. **Day 2:** Yolyn Am. **Day 3:** Khongoryn Els, camel ride. **Day 4:** Flaming Cliffs.

GOBI DESERT

The Gobi Desert is both harsh and magnificent at the same time. A place where you can truly escape the modern world, the region ranges from sand dunes to stretches of barren rocks. Explore canyons and sand dunes, search for fossils, ride camels and stay in ger camps – what better place to find adventure?



▲ Khongoryn Els

Some of Mongolia's largest dunes, the sands at Khongoryn Els reach up to 300 metres in height. Walking along the edge of the dunes the views are seriously impressive. This area is also known as Duut Mankhan, or Singing Dunes, a phenomenon caused by the wind or footsteps shifting the sand and causing them to produce a sound.

A hard but rewarding climb, ascend a sandy peak to see the dunes stretching off as far as the eye can see.



◀ Flaming Cliffs

Called Bayanzag in Mongolian, the flaming cliffs were so named by American palaeontologist and adventurer Ray Chapman Andrews when he arrived in search of dinosaurs in 1922. He found plenty, including the first ever dinosaur eggs – even the untrained eye will be able to spot a fossil or two as you wander through the canyons.

We can add to your Bayanzag explorations by organising for you to ride through it on a camel.

Ger Camps ▶

When exploring the Gobi Desert, your accommodation will be in traditional ger camps, making your experience even more authentic! The ger is the traditional, movable dwelling of Mongolian nomads and has long been at the heart of Mongolian family life. In fact, half of Mongolia's population still live in one. Even the most basic ger contains a comfortable bed and stove, with a bathroom block and restaurant block closeby and have electricity. This way, you get to stay out in Mongolia's incredible wilderness, eat local food and spend time sharing stories with your fellow Gobi Desert explorers.



◀ Gurvansaikhan National Park

The 'Three Beauties' National Park is the largest in Mongolia and is located on the northern edge of the Gobi. The park encompasses the Gurvan Saikham Mountains, the eponymous 'Three Beauties' as well as areas of steppe, sand dunes and dramatic valleys – both Yolyn Am and Khongoryn Els can be found within its boundaries. Plenty of wildlife call the park home, including some endangered species, including argali sheep, snow leopard, Siberian ibex and bearded vultures.

Yolyn Am ▶

An area of rugged cliffs and narrow canyons Yolyn Am has a particularly unusual feature for a desert – an ice flow. During the winter four waterfalls rush into the canyon, whose steep narrow sides and lack of sunlight create a freezing microclimate, forming an ice flow that is several metres thick and a few kilometres long. Sheltered as it is by the sheer sides of the canyon, this ice flow remains until as late as September. A huge variety of birds soar overhead, vultures and eagles particularly.





Mongolia's National Parks need at least one day's exploration. By staying in ger camps within the parks themselves you can explore them as deeply as you like!

NATIONAL PARKS

Mongolia is all about the great outdoors, its unique beauty found in the steppes, mountains, clear lakes and deserts of its landscapes. There are a great number of national parks here, some easier to access than others but all displaying magnificent natural features.



▲ Lake Khovsgol National Park

The centrepiece of Lake Khovsgol National Park is Lake Khovsgol itself. Nicknamed the 'Blue Pearl of Mongolia' the lake's waters, reaching to depth of 262 metres, are incredibly clear and full of fish. The national park also encompasses the surrounding mountains which provide plenty of beautiful alpine meadows to tramp through. Providing one of Mongolia's most pristine environments the park is home to ibex, sable, moose, wolverine and over 200 species of birds.



◀ Gorkhi-Terelj National Park

Just two and a half hours from Ulaanbaatar, the natural beauty of the Gorkhi-Terelj National Park is the perfect place to escape the city. Here mountains, forests, hot springs, lakes and weird rock formations abound – you may also spot a brown bear and some of over 250 species of bird.

We can enhance your trip to Gorkhi-Terelj by adding on a stay in a ger camp and a guided tour on horseback.

Gurvan Saikhan National Park ▶

Stretching along the northern edge of the Gobi Desert, Gurvan Saikhan is Mongolia's largest national park, encompassing a huge range of terrains and features. It is here that you'll find the dunes of Khongoryn Els, the canyon of Yolyn Am, breathtaking mountain vistas and a series of eerie landscapes that you wouldn't find anywhere else – on this planet anyway. The park also has a surprising biodiversity, particularly plants, but is also frequented by rare and native bird species and the critically endangered Gobi bear.



▲ Hustain Nuruu National Park

Just 100 kilometres from Ulaanbaatar, making it an easy day trip, this park was set up in 1993 to protect Mongolia's wild horse, the takhi, who live in the areas steppe and forest-steppe landscapes. It is also home to a wealth of other wildlife, including Asiatic red deer, boar, wolves and lynx.

Altai Tavan Bogd National Park ▶

Remotely located in the very west of Mongolia, the Altai Tavan Bogd National Park is centred on the five peaks of the Tavan Bogd mountains and encompasses lakes, glaciers and waterfalls. The presence of ancient tribes in the area means the park boasts thousands of petroglyphs, some dating from as far back as 11,000 to 6,000 BC. Living within the park boundaries are Kazakh nomadic herders, who have preserved and still practice the ancient sport of eagle hunting. The park's beauty also makes it a haven for hikers.



ITINERARIES

These itineraries are here to guide and inspire, to give you some idea of how you can combine destinations, sights and experiences to create your perfect trip. Look out for our 'best bits' itineraries which feature our top five sights.

All itineraries include international flights, domestic transportation, accommodation, private touring and sightseeing.

Visit Asia Inspirations online for more examples of inspiring North Asia itineraries!



JAPAN - 'BEST BITS' ■ 11 DAYS ■ TOKYO - OSAKA

HIGHLIGHTS ■ Tokyo Skytree ■ Fuji views from Lake Kawaguchi ■ Kyoto's extensive heritage ■ Tea with a Maiko



Day 1: Depart UK and fly overnight to Tokyo.

Day 2: Arrive in Tokyo and be transferred to your hotel.

Day 3: Tokyo - enjoy a private guided tour of the numerous sights of this dazzling city where you set the pace. Later, head up the Tokyo Skytree to witness the panoramic views over the city.

Day 4: Tokyo - today is set aside to visit any sights you may have missed yesterday, or opt for an excursion. The two more popular picks are Nikko or Kamakura. Please note today is unguided.

Day 5: Kawaguchiko - travel by highway bus to Kawaguchiko, 1 hour and 30 minutes. The rest of the day is at leisure before dinner at your Ryokan.

Day 6: Kawaguchiko - spend the day exploring the second largest of the Fuji Five Lakes. Ideas and instructions will be provided. Today is unguided.

Day 7: Kyoto - make your way to Kyoto. The journey includes a 2 hour 10 minute bus ride to Mishima, then a 2 hour bullet train to Kyoto. The rest of the day is set aside for your leisure.

Day 8: Kyoto - enjoy a full day on a privately guided tour around the city by

public transport, exploring some of Kyoto's 17 UNESCO-listed monuments. In the evening, visit a traditional teahouse and sip tea with a Maiko.

Day 9: Hiroshima - travel by bullet train 1 hour and 40 minutes. Forever remembered as the world's first atomic bomb target. Today will be set aside to sightsee many of the historical sites.

Day 10: Osaka - choose to either continue sightseeing in Hiroshima/Miyajima today, or, depart early and stop in Himeji to visit the castle en route. The bullet train to Osaka will take 2 hours 40 minutes.

Day 11: Osaka - enjoy a morning free at leisure, before making your way to the airport. Fly from Osaka to the UK.

4★ price from: £4,190



SOUTH KOREA - 'BEST BITS' ■ 13 DAYS ■ SEOUL - SEOUL

HIGHLIGHTS ■ Gyeongbok Palace, Seoul ■ Bulguksa & Seokguram Grotto ■ Mount Gaya National Park ■ Gyeongju National Park ■ The DMZ



Day 1: Depart UK and fly overnight to Seoul.

Day 2: Arrive in Seoul.

Days 3-4: Seoul - take two days to get under the skin of this dynamic city.

Explore the past at Gyeongbok and Changdeok Palace, get a bird's eye view from the N Seoul Tower or gaze across the border to North Korea at the DMZ.

Day 5: Mount Seorak National Park - about three hours by road from Seoul, the Mount Seorak National Park is a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, full of flora, fauna and beautiful sights. Spend some time hiking or enjoying the views.

Day 6: Travel to Mount Gaya National Park, around four hours by road. En route you can stop at the Hahoe Folk Village to glimpse old folk traditions and traditional architecture.

Day 7: Mount Gaya National Park - enjoy incredible natural scenery and the UNESCO-listed Haeinsa, one of Korea's Three Jewel temples, which

houses the magnificent Tripitaka Korea. Travel on to Gyeongju, one hour by road.

Days 8-9: Gyeongju - South Korea's cultural hub, Gyeongju has a staggering amount of relics to explore, from tombs to temples. Take some time to head just out of town to the magnificent Bulguksa & Seokguram Grotto.

Days 10-11: Travel to Busan, one hour by road. In this vibrant city you can relax on the beach, explore the downtown or visit more magnificent temples. Travel back to Seoul, a one hour flight or three hours by bullet train.

Day 12: Seoul - spend a final day in Seoul doing some final sightseeing, shopping and exploring.

Day 13: Fly Seoul to UK.

4★ price from: £6,190
5★ price from: £6,890

TAIWAN - 'BEST BITS' ■ 13 DAYS ■ TAIPEI - TAIPEI

HIGHLIGHTS ■ Taroko Gorge ■ Historic Tainan ■ Sun Moon Lake ■ National Palace Museum ■ Chiang Kai Shek Memorial Hall



Day 1: Depart UK and fly overnight to Taipei.

Day 2: Arrive in Taipei.

Day 3: Taipei - you can delve into Taipei's extensive culture and visit the National Palace Museum, Chiang Kai Shek Memorial Hall, Longshan and Bao-an Temple before spending the evening sampling delicious local food in Shilin Night Market.

Day 4: Sun Moon Lake - Head up into the forest cloaked mountains to soak up the abundant natural beauty of the Sun Moon Lake National Scenic Area on a relaxing boat cruise or exploring on foot. Sun Moon Lake is three hours by road from Taipei.

Day 5: Travel to Tainan, two hours 30 minutes by road and spend the day exploring its history, including the Confucius Temple and colonial sights such as Anping Fort.

Days 6-7: Travel to Kenting National Park, two hours 30 minutes by road. Enjoy the balmy tropical climate, beautiful scenery and extensive number of birds.

Day 8: Travel to Taroko National Park, five hours 30 minutes by road, following a scenic route along the coast.

Days 9-10: Taroko - discover the spectacular landscapes and formations of this popular national park. There are plenty of both easy and challenging hikes if you want to get deeper into the beauty.

Day 11: Return to Taipei, two hours 45 minutes by road. It is possible to stop en route at the town of Jinguashi to visit the Gold Ecological Park and the Museum of Gold, housed in the former offices of the Taiwan Metal Mining Corp.

Day 12: Yangmingshan - an easy day trip from Taipei, spend a day amongst the verdant, volcanic landscapes of Yangmingshan National Park, you can even have a relaxing soak in some hot springs.

Day 13: Fly Taipei to UK.

3★ price from: £3,450
4★ price from: £3,870

MONGOLIA - 'BEST BITS' ■ 23 DAYS ■ ULAANBAATAR - ULAANBAATAR

HIGHLIGHTS ■ Khongoryn Els ■ Ger camp ■ Lake Khovsgol ■ Naadam Festival ■ Flaming Cliffs



Day 1: Depart UK and fly overnight to Ulaanbaatar.

Day 2: Arrive in Ulaanbaatar.

Days 3-7: Gobi Desert - travel to Dalanzadgad, one hour 20 minutes by air or seven hour 30 minutes by road, escape the modern world and spend five days exploring the harsh majesty of the Gobi Desert. Staying in ger camps, see Yolym Am, Khongoryn Els, the Flaming Cliffs and Ongiin Khiid.

Day 8: Mt Khongno Khan - en route to Karakorum explore the historical ruins and beautiful scenery around the foot of Mt Khongno Khan.

Day 9: Karakorum - discover the remains of the city founded by Genghis Khan in 1220 which remained capital for just 40 years before the seat of power was moved to Khanbalik (now Beijing). Today you'll find Mongolia's first Buddhist monastery here, built from the city's remains.

Day 10: Tsenkher Jiguur Hot Springs - soak in natural thermal hot springs and enjoy your beautiful surroundings.

Days 11-12: Great White Lake - more exquisite scenery formed by the Khangai mountain range with excellent bird and wildlife spotting opportunities.

Days 13-14: Lake Khovsgol National Park - one of Mongolia's most pristine environments, mountains and meadows are full of plants, birds and beasts.

Day 15: Travel to Ulaanbaatar via Moron, one hour 30 minutes by road or a one hour 20 minute flights.

Days 16-18: Ulaanbaatar - spend three days enjoying the revelries of the Naadam Festival.

Day 19: Travel to Gorkhi-Terelj National Park, two and a half hours from Ulaanbaatar. Explore beautiful alpine scenery and even visit a local nomad family to catch a glimpse of their lifestyle before spending the night in a ger camp.

Day 20: Travel back to Ulaanbaatar.

Days 21-22: Ulaanbaatar - spend two days soaking up the atmosphere and seeing the sights of Mongolia's capital. Visit the magnificent Gandan Monastery and Chinggis Khan Square or delve into the backstreets of the city for a more authentic experience.

Day 23: Fly Ulaanbaatar to UK.

4★ price from: £7,340

HERITAGE - JAPAN ■ 13 DAYS ■ TOKYO - OSAKA

HIGHLIGHTS ■ Tokyo ■ Mt Fuji ■ Kenrokuen ■ Mt Koya



Day 1: Depart UK and fly overnight to Tokyo.

Day 2: Arrive in Tokyo and be transferred to your hotel.

Day 3: Tokyo - enjoy a private guided tour of the multitude of sights in this dazzling city, where you set the pace. Later, head up the Tokyo Skytree to witness the panoramic views over the city.

Day 4: Mt Fuji - take in the spectacular views of Mt Fuji in a coach tour. Then, hop on a cruise and travel across Lake

Ashi to Hakone-en Garden, take the ropeway up Mount Komagatake to admire more panoramic views of Mount Fuji and the valley below. Take the bullet train back to Tokyo independently.

Day 5: Takayama - board the express train to Matsumoto, 2 hours and 30 minute - keep to an eye out for Mount Fuji on the left-hand side. Explore the castle in all its architectural glory, surrounding gardens and moat. After, travel a further 2 hours by highway bus to Takayama.

Day 6: Takayama - today is set aside to explore the town at your leisure. Consider hiring a bike and visiting the many temples and shrines, which earn the town the nickname, 'Little Kyoto'.

Day 7: Kanazawa - travel by highway bus, 50 minutes, to the thatched-roof village of Shirakawago. Sightsee here before boarding another bus to Kanazawa. The afternoon is at your leisure.

Day 8: Kanazawa to Kyoto - spend the day sightseeing at your own leisure. The gardens of Kenrokuen, one of the 'Three

Great Gardens of Japan', and a stroll through the 'bukeyashiki' samurai houses are a must see. In the afternoon, board your 2-hour train to Kyoto.

Day 9: Kyoto - enjoy a full day on a privately guided tour around the city by public transport. Explore some of Kyoto's 17 UNESCO-listed monuments.

Day 10: Kyoto - today is at leisure to explore any sights you may have missed yesterday, or, a day trip to nearby Nara.

Day 11: Mt Koya - travel by train 3 hours and 30 minutes to Kyoto. The afternoon is at your leisure to explore the town.

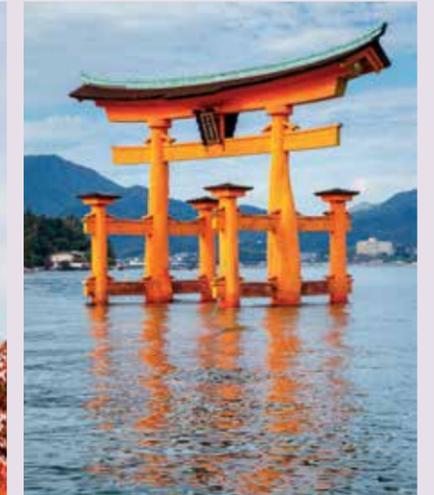
Day 12: Mt Koya to Osaka - board the train to Osaka for a 2 hour journey. Enjoy exploring the vibrant city on arrival, at your leisure.

Day 13: Depart Osaka - spend the morning at your leisure, before making your way to the airport. Fly from Osaka to the UK.

4★ price from: £4,390

BESPOKE - JAPAN ■ 22 DAYS ■ TOKYO - OSAKA

A couple approached the Asia Inspirations team to create a trip to Japan that not only incorporated the main sights, but also some places and experiences that were a little bit different. We can do the same for you.



Day 1: Depart UK and fly overnight to Tokyo.

Day 2: Arrive in Tokyo.

Day 3: Tokyo - full day private tour of the city with a local guide, using public transport.

Day 4: A free day to explore independently in or around Tokyo. Options include Kamakura, Nikko or Chichibu-Tama National Park.

Day 5: Travel to Takayama by bullet train.

Day 6: Free day in Takayama. Pop into a Sake microbrewery for a tasting.

Day 7: Travel to Kanazawa via Shirakawago.

Day 8: Free day in Kanazawa.

Day 9: Travel to Kyoto by train. This evening head to Gion for a private guided tour of this fascinating Geisha district.

Day 10: Kyoto - full day private tour of the city with a local guide, using public transport.

Day 11: A free day to explore independently in or around Kyoto.

Options for day trips include Osaka, Kobe or Himeji.

Day 12: Travel to Hiroshima by bullet train.

Day 13: Half day excursion to Miyajima.

Day 14: Travel to Osaka by bullet train.

Days 15-18: Transfer to the airport and fly to Ishigaki and spend time relaxing on its beautiful beaches and hopping between tropical islands.

Day 19: Transfer to the airport and fly back to Osaka.

Days 20-21: Travel to Koya-San by train. Spend the rest of the day and the next enjoying the peace and tranquillity of this beautiful, holy place.

Day 22: Fly from Osaka to the UK.



SOUTHEAST ASIA

VIETNAM

Vietnam emerged from decades of civil war united, full of hope and bursting with enterprising spirit. But whilst the country is modernising rapidly it has been able to retain its many charms. The vibrant cities, enchanting coastline, luscious highlands and delectable cuisine are just part of the veritable feast for the senses that Vietnam has on offer.



QUICK INFO



APPROX
FLYING TIME
**11 HOURS
DIRECT**



GMT
+7



VISA
REQUIRED
NO
(until June 2018)



CURRENCY
DONG

OUR BEST BITS



1 Halong Bay



2 Hilltribes of Sapa



3 Hoi An



4 The Mekong Delta



5 Temple of Literature, Hanoi



See all of our
Vietnam best bits
on one inspiring
itinerary on
page 144

GETTING AROUND



Flying is the
quickest way to hop
from one end of the
country to the other.



For ultimate comfort and
convenience we will supply
you with a private car and
driver for sightseeing.



The train offers atmosphere
and scenery, the Reunification
Express runs daily between
Hanoi and Saigon.

WHEN TO TRAVEL



Vietnam's climate is dictated by two monsoons. With big variations between the north and south of the country December to March sees plenty of sunshine in the south and low temperatures in the far north, July and August are hot and humid with downpours courtesy of the summer monsoon. To simplify this complex picture, you can visit in any season just prepare for anything!

| JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|-----|------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|
| ★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★ | ★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ |

★ Travel is possible
★★ Good time to travel
★★★ Ideal travel conditions

ACCOMMODATION

Hotels in Vietnam tend to be of a very high standard with a range of accommodation to suit all tastes and budgets. Particularly in Hanoi and Saigon you'll find converted colonial buildings that offer excellent character hotels, whilst the number of luxury resorts along the coast grows all the time. Basic homestays with Vietnam's hilltribes, most common around Sapa, are also available.

Keep an eye out for our handy Top 5 hotel lists on some Vietnam destination pages!



Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, One Pillar Pagoda, Temple of Literature, Fine Arts Museum. **Day 2:** French Quarter, Old Quarter cyclo tour, Hoan Kiem Lake.

HANOI

As the capital of French Indochina, Hanoi was the pinnacle of European glamour in Asia. Today whilst the city modernises and the colonial facades crumble, Hanoi's atmosphere of the exotic is stronger than ever. Strolling Hanoi's buzzing streets is the best way to really get under the city's skin.



▲ Ba Dinh District

Hanoi's cultural and historical hub, Ba Dinh can warrant a full day. Visit the Temple of Literature, a Confucian temple that is the prime example of traditional architecture; the excellent Fine Arts Museum; the One Pillar Pagoda; and learn about Ho Chi Minh at a museum dedicated to his life and the revolution.

Join the reverent crowds filtering through Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum to pay their respects.

French Quarter ►

Stroll the elegant, leafy boulevards of the old French concession, south of Hoan Kiem Lake, stopping to view many a Parisian-style mansions as you go – the grandiose Opera House particularly is a must see. The main street Trang Tien, a delightful place to while away an hour or two, is lined with bookshops, art galleries and cafés.



◀ Old Quarter

A visit to the Old Quarter isn't so much about seeing the sights, it's more about diving in and exploring. Keep an eye out for old merchant's houses and temples hidden amongst the commotion.

For an authentic Hanoi taste experience we can organise a food walking tour of the area. Or for something even more cultural, enjoy a performance of the traditional water puppets.



Spend at least two days and one night on Halong Bay – this way you'll be able to more thoroughly enjoy its beauty, and you'll get to see at both sunrise and sunset.

HALONG BAY

On Halong Bay nearly 2,000 limestone islands and peaks jut from emerald waters to create one of Vietnam's most picturesque panoramas. This UNESCO World Heritage Site, said to have been created by great dragons, is best explored by taking to the waters on a traditional junk boat.



The Au Co

Operating a three day/two night cruise, Au Co is a 5-star ship complete with modern air-conditioned cabins with balcony, spacious decks with open-air bar and a spa with jacuzzi. Dine on fresh Vietnamese-French fusion food and take part in some of the many activities provided on board. As you cruise around Cat Ba Island and through Lan Ha and Bai Tu Long bays, you can enjoy Tai Chi at sunrise, kayak to hidden caves, learn to carve fruit, swim and take a cooking class.



Paradise Cruises

Paradise Cruises has four levels of ship on which to enjoy Halong Bay, ranging from convivial 31 cabin steel boats, to a luxurious, intimate 8 suite junk. Whichever level you choose, each ship is designed in a contemporary style mixed with Vietnamese elegance, offers excellent personal service and cruises on lesser-used routes. All cabins have large windows and balconies, offer a range of experiences, delicious dining and operates two day/one night or three day/two night itineraries.

V'Spirit Cruises

An excellent three-star cruise option, V'Spirit cruise has three new wooden junk boats that meander the waters of Halong Bay. Built in the traditional style there are spacious deluxe cabins with bathroom, a sundeck bar and delicious Vietnamese food to dine on. Running day, two days/1 night and three days/2 night itineraries, V'Spirit includes plenty of activities including kayaking, paddle boarding and cooking classes as well as visits to some of Halong's many caves and bays.

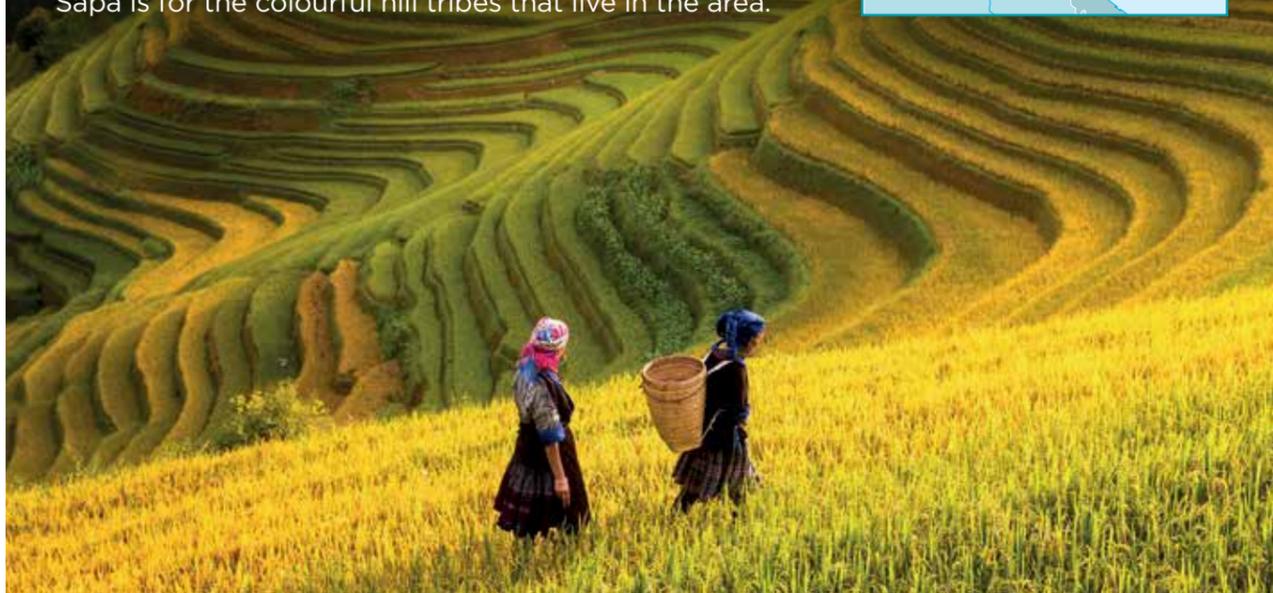




Take three days to see the best bits. Day 1: Tay Van village, rice terrace walk, Lao Chai village, batik painting class. **Day 2:** Suoi Ho village, walk to Ma Tra village. **Day 3:** Mount Fansipan cable car, Sapa Museum.

SAPA

Boasting an Alpine-esque climate and spectacular vistas over rice terraces and high, hazy peaks, Sapa perches on the edge of a high plateau in Vietnam's northern reaches. Founded as a hill station for the French in 1922 there are a few colonial buildings left, but the main reason to visit Sapa is for the colourful hill tribes that live in the area.



▲ Hill tribes

In Sapa itself and the area surrounding it live a number of ethnic minority groups, many still living the subsistence lifestyle of their ancestors. The most numerous, and the ones you are most likely to see, are the H'Mong and Dao groups. Dressed in their colourful costumes, many tribesmen and women come to Sapa to sell handmade wares.

We can add a visit to a hill tribe village and meet the residents, see how they live and talk to them about their way of life.



◀ Trekking

Gentle walks and more demanding treks through the verdant landscape are plentiful around the town. Whether you are looking to purely enjoy the scenery or to visit one of the minority villages, your guide will be able to help you make your trek as easy, hard, long or short as you like.



◀ Markets

Although originally just at the weekend Sapa's market has become so popular it is now open every day, with minority people travelling in from the surrounding villages to sell crafts, bags and clothing. The food stalls serve freshly prepared Vietnamese cuisine to order.

For those looking for a more authentic market experience, we can take you out to the weekend markets at Can Cau and Bac Ha.



Take one day to see the best bits. Day 1: Imperial Citadel, Forbidden Purple City, Royal Tomb of Minh Mang, Thien Mu Pagoda, Perfume River Cruise.

HUE

Although many of its imperial treasures were damaged during the war, Hue has managed to retain the regal air that came with being capital between 1802 and 1945. The home of many painters, poets, artists and writers, the city is considered Vietnam's cultural hub, and can also boast a particularly famous and delicious cuisine.



▲ Imperial City

Within Hue's walled citadel, built in the 19th century, you'll find the UNESCO-listed Imperial City. The former home of the imperial family of the Nguyen Dynasty, it shares a similar layout to the Forbidden City in Beijing. Although long neglected, bombed and shot at after the collapse of imperial rule in 1945, it is still easy to imagine its former magnificence as you spend a morning or afternoon wandering between the pavilions, palaces and vegetable plots.



◀ Perfume River

Hue's picturesque setting on the Perfume River is one of the city's many charms. Cruising the river is a relaxed way to see the sights both within Hue and in the surrounding countryside. Follow the river southwards to find the impressive mausoleums of the Nguyen Dynasty, each with an elaborate tomb set in peaceful wooded hills. The tombs of Tu Duc, Minh Mang and Khai Dinh are particularly of note. Another riverside delight is the Thien Mu Pagoda.

If you'd rather be more active, why not cycle along the river to see the sights instead?

Imperial Tombs ▶

Set in the pine-covered hills above the Perfume River, just south of the city, are the majestic tombs of the Nguyen Emperors. More palace than mausoleum, the emperors spared no expense in their construction, complete with lakes, pavilions and temples. The tomb of Minh Mang is particularly picturesque with 40 monuments within the complex, whilst it is obvious that Tu Duc was not the most modest of emperors!





Take three days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Japanese Bridge, Chinese Temple, market, cooking class. **Day 2:** Beach. **Day 3:** My Son.

HOI AN

A delightful town full of character, enjoy old-world charm and a scenic, riverside setting, whilst exploring Hoi An's narrow streets. Lined with wooden shop houses festooned with colourful lanterns, look out for the influence of Chinese, Japanese and European styles alongside the traditional Vietnamese architecture as you wander.



See how to add Hoi An into your itinerary from page 144



▲ Old Town

Hoi An is about relaxed wandering and soaking up the atmosphere – it's plethora of restaurants and cafés are the perfect place to sit and watch the world go by. For when you are feeling more energetic visit a museum and a tailor or two and admire the 16th-century Japanese covered bridge.

With the abundance of fresh produce grown here, Hoi An is the best place to learn about local cuisine – we can easily add a cooking class to your itinerary.



Beaches ▶

Just a few kilometres from the town you will find the lovely Cua Dai and An Bang beaches, where you can spend the day basking on the sands or paddling in the cooling waters of the East Vietnam Sea. There is also a good choice of resorts if you feel like a few days relaxing closer to these sandy shores.



◀ My Son

The intimate and atmospheric Cham ruins of My Son are shrouded in a jungle valley about one hour by road from Hoi An. Built between the 4th and 13th centuries, and a victim of bombings during the war, the temples aren't in great condition but are the prime example of Hindu architecture in Southeast Asia – exploring them with your guide is a delightful way to spend a morning.

Tra Que village ▶

In the fields surrounding Hoi An, farmers grow a plethora of fruit and vegetables to supply the many hotels and restaurants in the town. Browse the lively produce market in town to see what's growing or visit Tra Que village to stroll through gardens and see the farmers at work.

We can help you explore the lush countryside around Hoi An by bike, passing through rice paddies and meeting local farmers.



▲ Da Nang

If you are flying to Hoi An it is actually Da Nang airport that you will arrive into, just 50 minutes up the coast. With a laidback atmosphere, European vibes and a cosmopolitan nightlife, Da Nang is also a lovely place to spend a couple of days. Stroll the riverfront promenade, admire old French buildings, visit China Beach, used for the US Army's R&R spot in the war, or explore the excellent Cham Museum, full of Cham sculpture. Close by, en route to Hoi An, you will find the Marble Mountains, five rugged marble outcrops full of natural caves that now house shrines and sanctuaries.

★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



1. **The Nam Hai** ★★★★★
2. **Victoria Hoi An Beach Resort and Spa** ★★★★★
3. **Anantara Hoi An Resort** ★★★★★
4. **Vinh Hung Resort** ★★★★
5. **EMM Hotel Hoi An** ★★★



Take two days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Notre Dame Cathedral, Central Post Office, Reunification Palace, War Remnants Museum, culinary walking tour. **Day 2:** Cu Chi Tunnels, Cao Dai Temple, Bitexco Tower cocktails.

SAIGON

Saigon, or Hoi Chi Minh City, is an edgy, evocative and fast-paced metropolis. This is Vietnam's largest city and economic powerhouse, and everywhere you'll see the trappings of this new found wealth. Whilst there is still stately colonial architecture to admire Saigon is the best place to learn more about the Vietnam War.



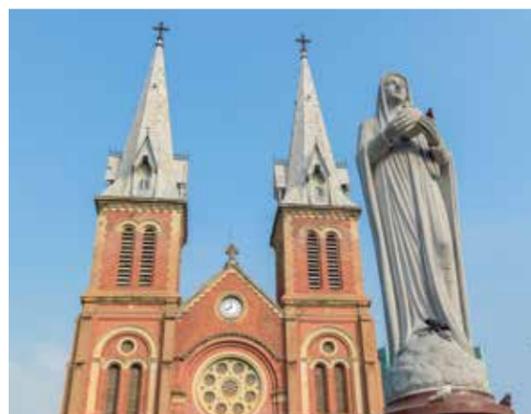
See how to add Saigon into your itinerary from page 144



▲ Notre Dame Cathedral and the Post Office

During the late 19th century, the French built a series of grandiose European-style buildings in the middle of Saigon. The neo-Romanesque edifice of Notre Dame Cathedral can only be beaten in grandeur by the former Hotel de Ville, now called Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee. The most impressive building, though, is the Gustave Eiffel-designed neoclassical Central Post Office.

We can add a unique and fun way to experience Saigon to your itinerary - a city tour by Vespa, riding classic Saigon pillion style.



War Remnants Museum and the Reunification Palace ▶

One of Saigon's most popular attractions, the War Remnants Museum documents the victims and horrors of modern warfare through displays of old planes, artillery and harrowing imagery. There is also an interesting gallery on the international opposition to the war. When tanks crashed through the gates of the then Independence Palace in 1975 it signalled the end of the Vietnam War. Now the Reunification Palace, a visit inside is a step back in time to the 1970s - head to the basement to visit the fascinating former command centre.



◀ Cu Chi Tunnels

An elaborate network of excavations used by the Viet Cong during the Vietnam War, the Cu Chi area covers 75 miles worth of tunnels which have been preserved by the Government. Dug during the French occupation in the 1940s and expanded by the VC, the tunnels were instrumental to the war effort. Used as hospitals, living quarters, a cache for food and weapons and a communications and supplies route, the Cu Chi Tunnels make for an eye opening excursion. You can even crawl through a section that has been slightly enlarged to get a feeling for what it was like. Located an hour and a half to two hours by road from Saigon.

En route we can add in a visit to Wildlife at Risk (WAR) rescue station, an animal hospital working to stop wildlife trade.

▼ Cao Dai Great Temple

The Cao Dai religion was established in 1926 in the area around where the Great Temple now stands close to the city of Tay Ninh around two hours from Saigon. The religion has about 5 million followers across Vietnam who practice through prayer, ancestor veneration, vegetarianism and nonviolence. The Great Temple is a technicolour, dragon-adorned extravaganza of a building built between 1933 and 1955.

Visit during one of the four daily prayer sessions so you can see the worshippers in all their splendour.



★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



1. Caravelle ★★★★★
2. Sofitel Saigon Plaza ★★★★★
3. Fusion Suites ★★★★★
4. Muong Thanh Saigon Centre ★★★★★
5. EMM Hotel Saigon ★★★



The Mekong Delta can be explored on a day trip from Saigon, but to discover the region farther spend the night in the cities of My Tho or Can Tho.

THE MEKONG DELTA

The Mekong Delta is known as the country's 'rice bowl' and so is both incredibly green and intensively farmed, with paddy fields and sugar-cane groves interspersed with numerous shady waterways.

▼ The Mekong Delta

The Mekong Delta is a whole floating world, with houses, restaurants and markets all on water – taking a boat is the best way to explore, waving at farmers and water buffalos as you go. The area can easily be explored on a day trip from Saigon by taking a cruise from Ben Tre or My Tho. For a more immersive experience spend a night or two in the vibrant Can Tho, the delta's biggest city, or even a night in a local farmer's house. A taste of some of the abundance of fresh fruit at one of the many chaotic floating markets is a must.



Three nights is always a good amount of time to relax on a beach after your explorations, but just tell us the amount of time you'd like flat out on the sand and we'll sort it!

VIETNAM BEACHES

With 3,260 kilometres of coastline it's not a surprise that Vietnam has some gorgeous beaches and world class resorts to boast about. There is no better way to unwind after your travels in Vietnam or Southeast Asia.



▲ Nha Trang

Nha Trang towers over its crescent shaped sweep of yellow sand, looking out over a bay dotted with tropical islands. A lively yet relaxed city, Nha Trang is the resort for those who are looking to eat well and enjoy the buzzing nightlife after a day relaxing on the beach. Having said that there are plenty of watersports options, including diving, hot springs with mud baths for extra relaxation and options to take a day trip around the offshore islands.



◀ Phu Quoc

Set in the Gulf of Thailand, Phu Quoc is a paradise island of soft sandy beaches, calm waters and swishing palms. With vast swathes still covered in tropical jungle, it is easy to escape the more developed resort areas to explore. There are also plenty of options for those looking for more than relaxed lounging on the beach, diving and kayaking to name a few. Try the seafood – it's said to be the best in Vietnam.



◀ Mui Ne

Located around four hours by road from Saigon, Mui Ne is an easy-going place to spend some beach time. Backed by yellow and red sand dunes, there are plenty of resorts lining the sea front, each with beach access and pretty gardens in which to laze. The area has long been popular with Saigon expats as a weekend escape. There are plenty of lovely beaches along this stretch of coast to explore whilst the small village of Mui Ne itself sits on a sheltered bay full of bobbing fishing boats.

MEKONG RIVER

The Mekong River, long a life-giving force, passes through some of Asia's lushest landscapes. With the banks lined with vivid green rice paddies tended by conical hatted farmers, rural riverside villages and the region's most important cities, there is no better way to discover more.

Cruising the Mekong

The Mekong winds its way down from the Tibetan plateau and through China's Yunnan Province, Burma, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, ending in the bountiful beauty of the delta at the South China Sea. Due to rapids and waterfalls along the route it isn't possible to navigate the river as a whole but vast sections in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam are cruisable, highlighting the lush rural beauty and relaxed daily life of the countries the river meanders through.

Itineraries

There are four itinerary options available on the Mekong River

- ▶ From Saigon to Phnom Penh on a three or four night itinerary
- ▶ From Saigon to Siem Reap on a seven night itinerary
- ▶ Vientiane to Chiang Khong on a 10 night itinerary (Pandaw only)
- ▶ Laos to China on a 14 night itinerary (Pandaw only)

Pandaw

A Pandaw cruise is a relaxed and convivial experience. With exceptionally personal service, these specially-designed brass and teak ships have shallow drafts that allow them to sail to places that other ships can't. Enjoy the passing panoramas from the promenade or observation deck, venture out on shore excursions, dine on cuisine that has an emphasis on local produce; and finally retire to your simple, elegant cabin for a refreshing sleep.

Jahan Cruises

A boutique hotel on the water, the RV Jahan is all about opulent cruising. It's spacious staterooms and suites boast colonial style furnishings alongside modern amenities - all have private balconies and complimentary mini bars, whilst suites also have a Jacuzzi. With plenty of cultural seminars and shore excursions for those who like to be active, the ship also has a pool and spa for those looking for a more relaxed experience. The service is as deluxe as the ship, with the option of butler service.

Mekong Prestige II

Designed in a contemporary style with all the comforts you could possibly need, the Mekong Prestige II is a spacious and indulgent ship. With a bubble pool, sundeck, a stylish dining area that serves delicious Vietnamese and Khmer food and just 32 cabins, the atmosphere is intimate and elegant. Each cabin has a private balcony, panoramic windows, air-conditioning and luxury en suite bathroom, and a range of shore excursions are included.

CAMBODIA

Just 40 years after the reign of the Khmer Rouge, Cambodia has emerged as one of Asia's most intoxicating destinations. Whilst you delve into its poignant history, the unparalleled temples of Angkor, undeveloped beaches, and relaxed cities, it will be the charms of the wonderful Khmer people that will make your holiday truly memorable.



QUICK INFO



APPROX
FLYING TIME
14 HOURS
INDIRECT



GMT
+7



VISA
REQUIRED
YES



CURRENCY
**RIEL OR
US DOLLAR**

OUR BEST BITS



1 Angkor Wat



2 Phnom Penh's Royal Palace



3 Tonle Sap



4 Sihanouville beaches



5 Angkor Thom



See all of our
Cambodia best
bits on one
inspiring itinerary
on **page 145**

GETTING AROUND



Hop between Siem Reap and Phnom Penh in just 45 minutes by plane.



Cambodia's roads have recently got much better, meaning getting around by road is easy.



For ultimate comfort and convenience we will supply you with a private car and driver for sightseeing.

WHEN TO TRAVEL



Cambodia's climate is fairly similar throughout, with April being the hottest month and the monsoon hitting from June to October, though the showers tend to be just short and sharp rather than a prolonged deluge. The dry season, November to May, is split into hot (March to May) and cool (November to February), the most comfortable but most popular time to visit.

| JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|-----|------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|
| ★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★ | ★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ |

★ Travel is possible
★★ Good time to travel
★★★ Ideal travel conditions

ACCOMMODATION

There is plenty of accommodation available across Cambodia, ranging from luxury and boutique character hotels in the most touristy destinations, such as Siem Reap, Phnom Penh and Sihanouville, to modest hotels and guesthouses in the remoter areas. With new hotels and resorts opening all the time there are plenty of options to suit any budget.

Visit the [Asia Inspirations website](#) to see our recommended hotel selection.

TEMPLES OF ANGKOR

UNESCO-listed since 1992 and covering the area that was the seat of successive Khmer Empires between the 9th and 15th century, the Angkor Archaeological Park covers an area of 400km² close to Siem Reap. Incorporating hundreds of temples which are scattered amongst lush jungle and farmland, a day will show you the main sights but take more time to really feel the rare majesty and mystery of these sublime temples.

Angkor Wat

The complex's most famous building, Angkor Wat is an awe-inspiring sight. The world's largest religious structure and the best preserved of Angkor's temples, the wat is an absolute must visit, and although busy, it is still possible to find a quiet spot to reflect on its extraordinary and intricate beauty. Sunrise, though bustling, is worth it.

Angkor Thom

Angkor Thom is the great walled city that was the heart of the Khmer Empire – the last great capital. Entered by five huge, elaborate gates each topped with four faces, within the city walls, you'll find a number of sites of interest including the enchanting Bayon at the centre, the Elephant Terrace and the Terrace of the Leper King.

Ta Prohm

The crumbling ruins of Ta Prohm is one of the most atmospheric of Angkor's temples, purposely left in a state similar to when it was discovered. With the jungle encroaching on all sides and towering trees thrusting out of the stone itself, wandering the courtyards and corridors is quite the adventure.

Grand Circuit

For those who have a bit more time to explore the temples, the Grand Circuit really shows the variety of architecture on display in the park. This leisurely 26 kilometre route takes you to the temples of Preah Khan, Neak Pean, Ta Som, East Mebon and Pre Rup, the latter also being an excellent spot for sunset.

Banteay Srei

Set about 25 kilometres outside the main temple group, the captivating temple of Banteay Srei (Citadel of Women) is a richly embellished vision in rose pink sandstone. Dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva the decorative reliefs are so delicate, it is said that they could only have been carved by the hands of women.

Outlying temples

The outlying temples give a much quieter experience. The little visited Roluos Group actually pre-dates most of Angkor's temples, whilst Beng Mealea has been left in the grips of the jungle. Get fantastic views over Tonle Sap from hilltop Phnom Krom and enjoy the tranquil nature at Kbal Spean, a site of numerous carvings in a river bed.

See how to
add Angkor
into your
itinerary from
page 145





Take three days to see the best bits. Day 1: Angkor Thom, Bayon, Ta Prohm, Angkor Wat, Cambodian Circus. **Day 2:** Kbal Spean, Banteay Srei, Banteay Samre, Pre Rup sunset. **Day 3:** Tonle Sap, Beng Mealea.

SIEM REAP

Siem Reap is riding high as the gateway to Angkor. The town is chic and charming with by far the best tourist infrastructure in the country – here you will find decadent resorts, spas and dining. The temples may be Siem Reap's main focus but you'll find the town has a number of attractions worth visiting in its own right.



▲ Tonle Sap Lake

Located about 15 kilometres south of Siem Reap, Tonle Sap offers a glimpse of a different side of Cambodia. Lakeside villages, stilted in the dry season or seemingly floating in the wet season, are home to fishermen who make a living from the lake – you can visit Chong Khneas, Kompong Kleang or Kompong Phluk to get a feeling for the way of life here.

Let us know if you have an interest in birdwatching – we can organise a visit to the Prek Toal reserve, part of the lake's UNESCO-listed biosphere.



◀ Angkor National Museum

For an overview of the art and culture of the Khmer civilisation, this archaeological museum is a must visit. Spread across eight galleries you'll find artefacts from the site itself alongside a thorough exploration of its history, pre-Angkorian relics and interactive displays.

◀ Cambodian Circus

A theatrical spectacular, the Cambodian Circus is run by the NGO Phare Ponleu Selpak who give underprivileged youths an education in the arts and a place to earn a living wage. Performances mix theatre, music, dance and acrobatics whilst addressing the big issues in Cambodian society. There are plenty of other culture shows, including traditional Apsara dancing, also available here.



Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Royal Palace, Silver Pagoda, National Museum, sunset at Wat Phnom. **Day 2:** Tuol Sleng, Killing Fields, Russian Market.

PHNOM PENH

Cambodia's charismatic capital Phnom Penh sits on the banks of the Mekong. Whilst the city still bears the scars inflicted by the Khmer Rouge, the resilience and optimism of the wonderful Khmer people is a true inspiration. Phnom Penh it is fast regaining its reputation as one of Asia's most captivating cities.



▲ Royal Palace and Silver Pagoda

The roofs of the Royal Palace are by far the most striking of Phnom Penh's skyline, constructed in the ornate Khmer style and glittering with gold gilding. Set on the riverfront, the palace is the official residence of King Sihamoni. Part of the same complex is the magnificent Silver Pagoda – within you'll find priceless Buddhas, exquisite example of Khmer artistry and a floor covered by 5000 silver tiles. Spend a morning or afternoon exploring the buildings and delightful French-landscaped gardens.



◀ National Museum

The collection housed in the elegant, traditionally-designed National Museum includes relics and artefacts from pre-history to pre-Angkorian to present day.

For more Cambodian culture, we can include a visit to Cambodian Living Arts, a not-for-profit organisation who, by putting on performances of the traditional Cambodian arts, supports local artists.

Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and the Killing Fields

For those who want an insight into the events of 1975-79, visiting Tuol Sleng and the Killing Fields is a must. A former high school which became the notorious S-21 prison, the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum is as hard-hitting as you would expect. From S-21 prisoners were taken just 8 kilometres from the city centre to the Killing Fields. In this surprisingly peaceful setting, take a moment to reflect before the memorial stupa and visit the informative museum.

At Tuol Sleng you may be able to meet and talk to a survivor of the S-21 prison.



Three nights is always a good amount of time to relax on a beach after your explorations, but just tell us the amount of time you'd like flat out on the sand and we'll sort it!

SIHANOUKVILLE

Sihanoukville occupies a headland jutting out into a bay dotted with beach-fringed tropical islands. Just four hours by road from Phnom Penh, while away a couple of days here relaxing on palm-tree-shaded white sands, exploring undeveloped islands and soaking up the laidback atmosphere.



▲ Beaches and Islands

Whilst Sihanoukville is a popular resort, the beaches here are nowhere near as developed as, say, Thailand – you'll always be able to find a spot for your towel somewhere. Sihanoukville's sprinkling of islands offer opportunities for both sunny day trips and idyllic overnight stays. Leisurely cruises can include swimming, snorkelling and relaxing on beautiful beaches.

Koh Rong, Koh Rong Sanloem and Koh Tang are beautiful. Let us know if you like white sandy beach, jungle trekking or diving and snorkeling so we can recommend the best island for you.



◀ Ream National Park

Located just 18 kilometres from Sihanoukville, Ream National Park covers an area consisting of a range of habitats and ecosystems. Within these, animals such as rhesus monkeys, dugongs and mouse-deer make their homes. You can explore the mangroves by boat, trek through the forest and spot birds, such as the grey-headed fish eagle, over the Prek Toeuk Sap Estuary.

★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★

1. Song Saa Private Island *****
2. Sokha Beach Resort ****
3. Independence Hotel ****
4. Moonlight Resort ***
5. Moon Julie Hotel ***



Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Phnom Banan, vineyard, La Maison de Coco, Phnom Sampov. Day 2: Day at leisure in Krong Battambang.

BATTAMBANG

A province in the far west of Cambodia, and its capital city, Battambang is a verdant, laidback and friendly place. The city is set amongst some of the country's lushest landscapes and is known as the hub of Cambodia's flourishing arts scene. Whether you explore the city itself, or use it as a base to explore its surroundings, Battambang is a beautiful yet undiscovered area of Cambodia.



▲ Krong Battambang

Battambang is a city, Cambodia's second largest, that has that wonderfully friendly small town feel to it. Its streets are lined with some of Cambodia's best French colonial architecture – left to gently crumble it only adds to the atmosphere. There isn't really that much to do in the city itself, it's just a nice place to be. Wander the streets, admire the architecture, try out some of the cool cafes and maybe even visit a gallery or two, to get to grips with Battambang's burgeoning arts scene.



La Maison de Coco

Phteas Toeuk Daung in Khmer, this local NGO works to provide vulnerable people, particularly children, vocational skills with which to make a living. Here, locals can learn sewing, cooking and carpentry. You can visit the classrooms, meet the students and see what they are up to, and also visit the showroom and shop, where the products made are displayed and sold.

◀ Phnom Sampov and Phnom Banan

Looming above the relatively flat plains of Battambang province, limestone Phnom Sampov is crowned with a complex of temples from which you'll get spectacular views. About halfway up the hill you'll also find the Killing Caves, now a memorial to those killed here by the Khmer Rouge. At dusk, there is a huge exodus of bats from a cave near the hills base. At the summit of Phnom Banan are the remaining towers of the 11th century Prasat Banan, almost swallowed by lush vegetation. There are 328 steps to reach the top.

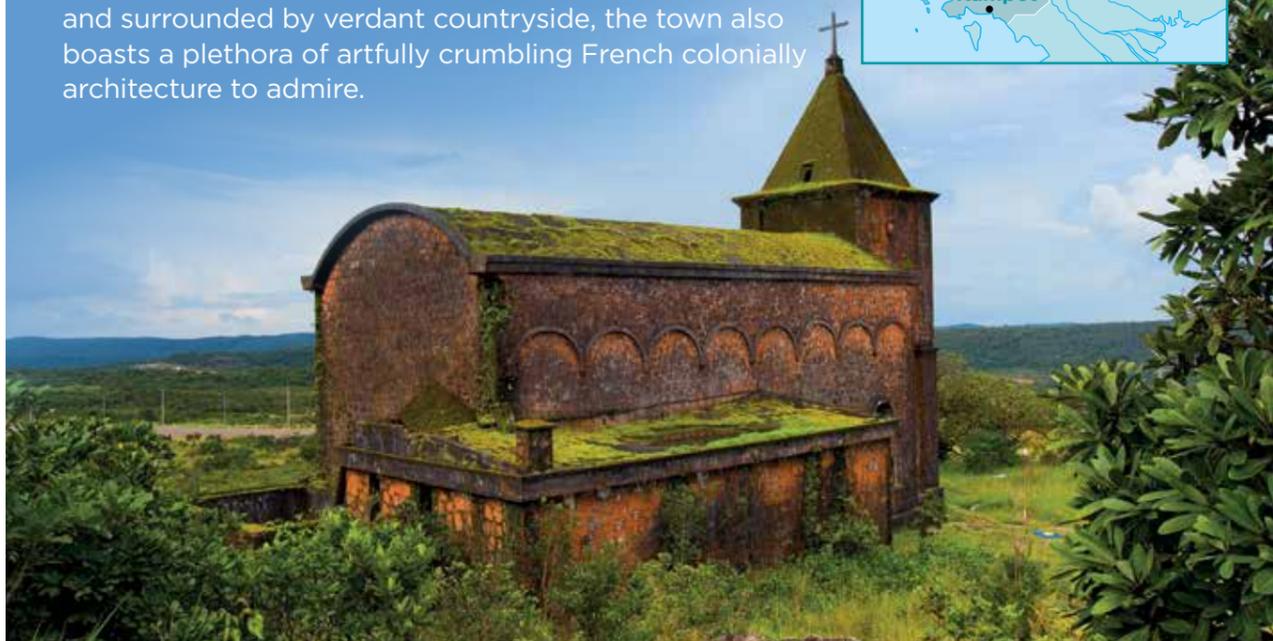




Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Phnom Chhnork, pepper plantation, afternoon in Kampot.
Day 2: Bokor National Park.

KAMPOT

Riverside Kampot is a peaceful town with a great, relaxed vibe and is full of lively restaurants and cafes perfect for whiling away the afternoon. Backed by picturesque views of Bokor and Elephant mountains and surrounded by verdant countryside, the town also boasts a plethora of artfully crumbling French colonial architecture to admire.



▲ Bokor National Park

Covered in rainforest and centred on the remains of an old French hill station, Bokor National Park offers a quirky range of attractions. The wooded areas offer cover for endangered species such as bears, gibbons and slow loris whilst perched on a cool and breezy hilltop you will find the haunting husks of a French church and casino. Sitting on the cliff edge, the crumbling casino particularly offers spectacular views down over the coast. Other sights include the Black Palace, the former holiday home of King Sihanouk, and a waterfall.



◀ Phnom Chhnork

Amongst the lush rice paddies and small village that surround Kampot is Phnom Chhnork, a Hindu cave temple dedicated to Shiva. The temple was built in the 7th century, the cave sheltering the shrines within and keeping them in excellent condition. The journey to the limestone mountains that this and several other caves hide in is worth it alone – this is a glimpse of rural Cambodia at its best.

◀ Kampot Pepper

Just outside the town, in any direction, you'll come across plantations growing the world-renowned Kampot pepper. Many of the plantations are open for visitors to tour and learn about the process of growing and producing Kampot Pepper. They will usually have a shop so you can buy some pepper or a variety of pepper products to bring home.



Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Kep National Park hike, beach, walk past mansions.
Day 2: Koh Thonsay, crab market.

KEP

Established by the French elite in 1908, its heyday lasting into the 1960s, Kep is a quiet seaside town. Relaxation is the byword here, be it on the beach, on one of the sprinkle of islands offshore or strolling past the ghostly shells of the 1930s Modernist mansions that remain in the heart of the town. Whichever you choose, Kep is a wonderful place to kick back and chill in the sun.



▲ Koh Tonsay

Also called Rabbit Island, Koh Tonsay is just 25 minutes by boat from Kep, making it a very easy day trip. The island is barely developed – not many people live here, there is no mains electricity and no motor vehicles making it the perfect escape from the hustle and bustle of the mainland. The main beach is lined with palms and has loungers and a handful of shacks selling food and drinks. The island is at its most peaceful during the week.



Kep Beach

Kep's beach is small, but it offers everything you need – soft sand, calm waters and a bit of shade up for when the midday sun is scorching. At the weekends the locals arrive to enjoy the spot for themselves, but they tend to set up their towels and tents on the promenade that runs along the back of the beach, so there is always plenty of space on the sand for visitors. The sea itself is warm, calm and generally rock free, and whilst not tropical paradise, it is a lovely place to relax.

◀ Crab Market

A visit to Kep's famous Crab Market to sample the day's catch is a must. Wander along the line of seafront shacks to see which one takes your fancy to dine in, or walk past the restaurants to the small harbour to see locals haggling over crabs straight out of the sea. We highly recommend crab cooked up with local Kampot pepper, available at any of the restaurants.



LAOS

Laos' long isolation from the world is today one of its most appealing features. Delightfully quaint and enchantingly pristine, relax into the easy pace of life as you explore it's surprising diversity from the ethnic minority inhabited hills of the north, to the lush plains and islands of the south and all the cultural treasures inbetween. Welcome to Southeast Asia's most irresistible destination.



QUICK INFO



APPROX
FLYING TIME
15 HOURS
INDIRECT



GMT
+7



VISA
REQUIRED
YES



CURRENCY
KIP OR
US DOLLAR

OUR BEST BITS



1 Luang Prabang



2 Si Phan Don



3 Plain of Jars



4 Vang Vieng



5 Pak Ou Caves



See all of our
Laos best
bits on one
inspiring
itinerary on
page 145

GETTING AROUND



Hop between
Vientiane and Luang
Prabang in just 45
minutes by plane.



The roads are quite basic
but it's easy to get around
– we'll provide cars for
transfers and sightseeing.



Laos has plenty of
waterways including the
Mekong, so travelling by
boat is also possible.

WHEN TO TRAVEL



Variations in weather in Laos are dictated by the highlands and lowlands. May to October is the wet season, with plenty of rain and high humidity. From November to January the temperatures are pleasantly warm in the lowlands and cool in the highlands. Temperatures peak in April. The best time to explore is from November to February, also the high season.

| JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|-------|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|-------|
| ★ ★ ★ | ★ ★ ★ | ★ ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ ★ ★ | ★ ★ ★ |

★ Travel is possible
★ ★ Good time to travel
★ ★ ★ Ideal travel conditions

ACCOMMODATION

Laos has a good range of accommodation options, from locally-run character properties to simple, comfortable lodges. The cities of Luang Prabang and Vientiane have a full range of hotel grades to choose from though true luxury is still hard to come by. Outside of these centres choice becomes more limited but accommodation is always clean, comfortable and offers a wonderfully warm welcome.

Keep an eye out for our handy Top 5 hotel lists on some Laos destination pages!



Take three days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Takbat, Wat Sene, National Museum, Kuang Si Waterfalls, night market. **Day 2:** Wat Xieng Thong, Pak Ou Caves, local villages. **Day 3:** Phousi Hill, free time.

LUANG PRABANG

Luang Prabang sits on the mighty Mekong in the midst of green cloaked mountains. The temples and shophouses of the old town have been UNESCO since 1995; with a rich heritage, French legacy and traditional character, wandering the peaceful streets is like a step back in time.



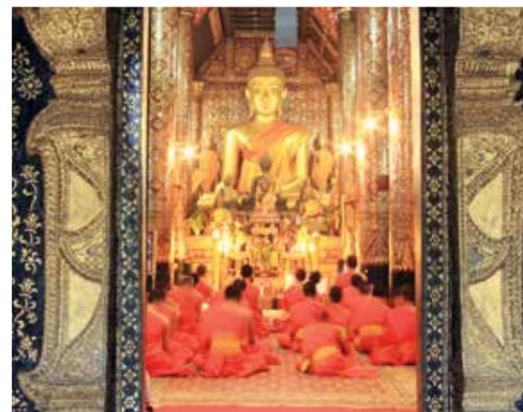
See how to add Luang Prabang into your itinerary from **page 145**



▲ Wats and Tak Bat

There are many temples and wats spread throughout Luang Prabang, their red roofs and golden flourishes are visible down every street. Whilst half of the fun is stumbling across them during your wanderings, you have to see Wat Xieng Thong. The oldest and most magnificent wat in the city, its main temple, exuberant in its wall decorations inside and out, was built in 1560.

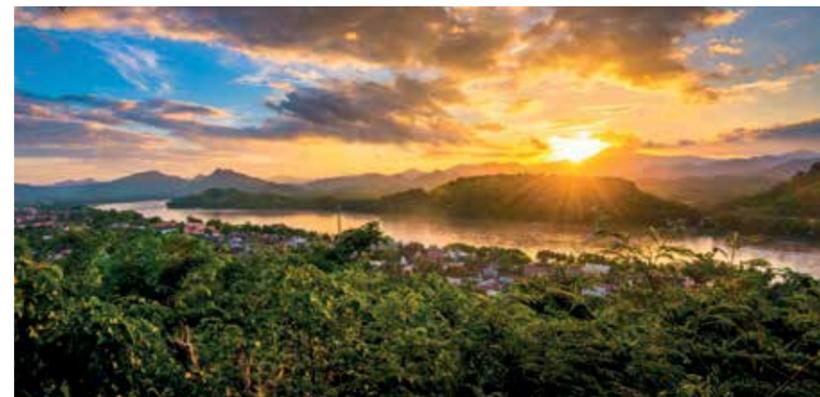
Let us wake you up early to experience the daily dawn ritual of Takbat, when Luang Prabang's resident monks collect offerings of food from the locals. The uninterrupted line of saffron-robed monks is a timeless sight.



Royal Palace Museum ▶

At the heart of the city and housed in the former Royal Palace, the collections of the Royal Palace Museum display all the trimmings of the former Lao monarchy. The building itself is a blending of French and Lao architectural design which you can admire along with catching a glimpse of Laos' most sacred Buddha, the Pha Bang.

Don't miss the five-piece Royal Palace Car Collection!



◀ Phousi Hill

Towering above the old city, ascending Phousi Hill will give you fantastic views over Luang Prabang and rivers to the mountains beyond. Popular at sunset but quieter and more atmospheric at sunrise, stand beneath the golden spire of That Chomsi at its summit and admire all the beauty of Luang Prabang and its surroundings.

Pak Ou Caves ▶

Where the Mekong meets the Nam Ou, an hour from Luang Prabang or around 1 hour 30 minutes by boat; you'll find the Pak Ou Buddha Caves. Used to store Buddhas that can no longer be used for veneration because they are damaged or outdated, the caves are full of hundreds of images of Buddha in all styles and sizes.

Stop at a village or two along the river to meet the locals and see their cottage industries.



Kuang Si Falls ▶

About 35 kilometres from Luang Prabang, Kuang Si offers an easy day trip. A multi-level waterfall set in picturesque jungle, the river tumbles through a series of brilliantly blue pools by which you can lounge and, in the lower pools, take a refreshing swim. It is also possible to climb to the top of this 60 metre falls but please be aware that it is quite steep and can be slippery.

Visit Tat Kuang Si Bear Rescue Centre whilst here, a sanctuary for beautiful Asiatic black bears (Sun Bears) rescued from the illegal wildlife trade.



★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



1. **The Luang Say Residence Hotel** ★★★★★
2. **Chitthareune Mouangluang Hotel** ★★★
3. **Xiengthong Palace** ★★★★
4. **Maison Dalabua Luang Prabang** ★★★★★
5. **Villa Maly Hotel** ★★★★



Take one day to see the best bits. Day 1: Wat Si Saket, Wat Phra Keo, That Luang Stupa, Patuxai Victory Monument, Buddha Park.

VIENTIANE

Nestled peacefully in a languid bend in the Mekong Vientiane exudes the air of an easy-going town rather than chaotic capital. Walking past old colonial mansions that line the broad, airy boulevards you could be forgiven for thinking you were in Europe, whilst the slow-pace and friendly atmosphere are quintessentially Laos.



▲ Buddha Park

Located about 40 minutes by road south of Vientiane, the Buddha Park sits in a picturesque location on the Mekong. Here you'll find sculptures depicting both Hindu and Buddhist deities scattered throughout the lush riverside meadows. This fascinating and rather eccentric place was founded in the 1950s by a holy man who merged Hindu and Buddhist philosophies.



◀ Wat Sisaket

Vientiane's oldest temple, having survived several sackings of the city, Wat Sisaket was built in 1818. Within the walls the cloisters provide atmospheric explorations, with niches full of small Buddhas with lines of their larger counterparts lining the walls, all under an elaborate five tiered roof.



◀ Pha That Luang

The national symbol, Pha That Luang is Laos' most important religious building. This gold covered stupa is located just outside of Vientiane's centre and is surrounded by cloisters that feature fascinating old images of Buddha.

Let us time your visit so you can enjoy the beauty of the stupa at sunset.



Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Pathang village, Tham Chang Cave. **Day 2:** Kayaking, hiking or relaxing.

VANG VIENG

The town of Vang Vieng stands halfway between Luang Prabang and Vientiane amongst some of Laos' most magnificent scenery. Here the Nam Song River winds through a scene of emerald paddy fields and forest-wrapped karst peaks, creating the perfect place to either relax or take part in the many outdoor activities.



▼ Vang Vieng

Outdoor activities include kayaking on the river, exploring some of the many caves that delve deep into the karst formations or climbing up their rock faces. For those looking for a more leisurely time simply walking or biking through the countryside surrounding Vang Vieng are wonderful ways to see the area.



See how to add Vang Vieng into your itinerary from **page 145**



Take three days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Wat Phou, Don Khong. **Day 2:** Khone Phapheng Waterfall, Khone Island, Lphi Waterfall. **Day 3:** Bolaven Plateau.

SI PHAN DON

With an even slower pace of life than the rest of Laos, Si Phan Don, or Four Thousand Islands, is a relaxed place to spend a few days. This river archipelago in the Mekong is still a very traditional area, isolated as it is from the rest of the country, and boasts rare flora and fauna as well as a raft of easy going outdoor activities.



▲ Dons Khong, Det and Khon

The three largest islands of the archipelago, Dons Khong, Det and Khon offer back to basics relaxation. The must visits are Khon Phapheng and Somphamit, where the Mekong rages over rocks and through crevasses to form powerful rapids and cascades. From the southern tip of Don Khon it is possible to spot the rare Irrawaddy dolphin, which you can also look for on boat trips.

We can help you get active on Don Det and Don Khon with activities such as cycling, swimming, tubing and boat trips.



◀ Wat Phou

The atmospheric Khmer ruins of Wat Phou are set picturesquely in a lush river valley at the base of Phou Kao mountain about 45 minutes by road from the town of Pakse. Originally built as a Hindu place of worship dedicated to Shiva the series of ruined temples today are used for Buddhist worship and are highly venerated by local Laotians.

◀ Bolaven Plateau

Escaping up to the cool climes of the Bolaven Plateau can be a welcome relief from the heat of Laos' southern lowlands. A verdant area, the plateau's fertile soils weren't cultivated before the French turned the area over to growing coffee, fruit and cardamom which are still grown today.

We can arrange for you to hike through this beautiful area, visiting farms, coffee plantations and ethnic minority villages.



Take one day to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Site 1, Site 2, Site 3, MAG office.

PLAIN OF JARS

Scattered over hundreds of square kilometres, Laos' mysterious stone jars have baffled archaeologists for years. Estimated to have been made between 500BC and 200AD the reason the jars were created is completely unknown. There are 90 recorded jar sites all set in a spectacular scenery.



▲ Phonsavan

Phonsavan is the gateway to the Plain of Jars. 260 kilometres from Luang Prabang and strategically placed in Central Laos, the town and its surroundings were heavily bombed during the Vietnam War - you can easily find evidence of this bombardment in the form of craters and relics - it is said this area is the most heavily bombed in the world. Caves used as shelters during the war as well as lakes, hot springs and waterfalls are easily explorable from the town.

We can arrange for you to meet the H'Mong minority group at the close by village of Muang Khoune.



MAG

More than two million tons of bombs were dropped on Laos between 1964 and 1973 and estimated that 30% of them did not detonate. MAG, the Mines Advisory Group, works to clear UXO, to train locals to clear UXO and to educate local children on UXO. Visit the MAG Information Centre in Phonsavan to learn more about their incredible work with the help of displays and a free film.

▲ Sites 1, 2 and 3

These three sites have some of the most impressive jars as well as being the most accessible. Site 1 is considered to be the most impressive of the lot and includes a jar that is over 2.5 metres tall. At site 2, trees create an atmosphere whilst the position of some of the jars on a grassy mound affords beautiful views over undulating landscapes and paddy fields. It takes an easy stroll through the paddy fields to reach site 3 where jars and jar fragments are spread across a hillside and throughout scenic woodland. Other sites are also visitable.

BURMA

A country so long closed to the world, Burma cannot help but evoke images of exotic wonders and raw adventure. This enchanting land scattered with cultural riches and enigmatic ruins has an unspoilt quality that is just crying out to be explored – and you'll find that the local people are more than willing to help introduce you to their country and culture.



QUICK INFO



APPROX
FLYING TIME
14 HOURS
INDIRECT



GMT
+6:30



VISA
REQUIRED
YES



CURRENCY
KYATS

OUR BEST BITS



1 Bagan



2 Rangoon



3 Inle Lake



4 Cruising the Irrawaddy



5 Mandalay



See all of our
Burma best
bits on one
inspiring itinerary
on **page 145**

GETTING AROUND



Fly between Rangoon and Mandalay in one hour 20 minutes.



The Irrawaddy is a relaxed and easy way to travel – cruise from Mandalay to Bagan to Rangoon.



For comfort and convenience we will supply a private car and driver for sightseeing and transfers.

WHEN TO TRAVEL



Burma's climate is thoroughly tropical, with seasonal monsoon rains falling from May to October. The cooler, drier season runs from November to February makes for the most comfortable period to travel as the temperatures build up to a very hot period from March to May where they can reach 40 degrees.

| JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|
| ★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ |

★ Travel is possible
★★ Good time to travel
★★★ Ideal travel conditions

ACCOMMODATION

As Burma has grown in popularity, the number of travellers visiting the country has somewhat overwhelmed the hotels on offer. However the situation is improving all the time, with the main tourist destinations offering a range of accommodation options from simple hotels and guesthouses to wonderful boutique hotels that offer an experience as well as a bed for the night. The further from the tourist trail you go, the fewer accommodation options you will have. **Keep an eye out for our handy Top 5 hotel lists on some Burma destination pages!**



Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Central Post Office, Strand Road, Pansodan Street, National Museum, Shwedagon Pagoda. **Day 2:** Bogyoke Aung San Market, Botataung Pagoda, Chinatown.

RANGOON

Rangoon (also known as Yangon) remains Burma's cultural and spiritual centre as well as its largest city, its turbulent heritage making it a fascinating place to explore. Wandering the streets you cannot help but be struck by its charms - whether it's the dilapidated grandeur of the colonial architecture, the vibrancy of the bustling streets or the magnificent Shwedagon Pagoda.



See how to add Rangoon into your itinerary from page 145



▲ Shwedagon Pagoda

The 99 metre tall, gold leaf-encrusted Shwedagon Pagoda dominates Rangoon's skyline from its perch atop Singuttara Hill. This is Burma's most sacred landmark, said to enshrine 8 hairs of Buddha, its crown encrusted with diamonds and rubies. Whilst a pagoda has stood on this spot for hundreds of years it has had to be rebuilt on a number of occasions - the current incarnation is 17th century.

For pure peace and tranquillity, visit the pagoda at dawn or admire the flaming red reflections of the setting sun in the evening.



Sule Pagoda ►

Located in the heart of Rangoon's downtown, legend says Sule Pagoda is around 2,500 years old. The pagoda is, oddly, part of a huge roundabout but still manages to offer a fairly peaceful atmosphere within its walls. This particular pagoda has been a focal point of politics with both the 1988 uprising and the Saffron Revolution of 2007 using the sacred space as a meeting point for anti-government/pro-democracy protestors.



◀ Colonial sights

Even with all the turmoil Rangoon has witnessed since Burma gained its independence in 1948, there is still plenty of magnificent colonial architecture in the city to enjoy. In the area around the Sule Pagoda you'll find the old City Hall and a former department store that was nicknamed the 'Harrods of the East'. See the High Court and the Internal Revenue Department with its Art Deco touches.

We can add a pit stop at the Strand Hotel, built in 1901, for you to enjoy cold drinks and good atmosphere in the Strand Bar.

National Museum of Myanmar

For a fascinating journey through Burma's art, history and culture spend an hour or two perusing the treasures of the National Museum. An excellent showcase for the country's heritage, admire a collection that ranges from ancient artefacts and ornaments to art and inscriptions.

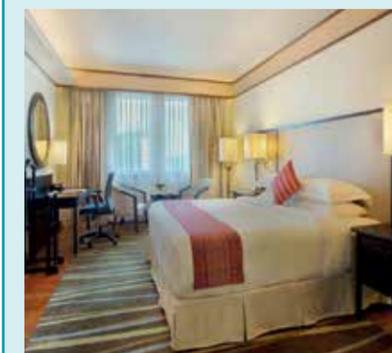


▲ Bogyoke Aung San Market

A huge covered market made up of over 2,000 stalls and shops, Bogyoke Aung San Market is a souvenir and handicraft heaven. Selling everything from textiles to jewellery, a walk through the market will have all of your souvenirs sorted.

Shopping will help you work up a hunger giving you the perfect excuse to visit the market's excellent food stalls.

★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



1. Park Royal Hotel ★★★★★
2. The Strand ★★★★★
3. Belmond Governor's Residence ★★★★★
4. Summit Parkview Hotel ★★★★
5. Inya Lake ★★★



Take two days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Mahamuni Pagoda, Golden Palace Monastery, Kuthodaw Pagoda, Irrawaddy Cruise, Mandalay Hill. **Day 2:** U Bein Bridge, Sagaing Hills, Inwa.

MANDALAY

Immortalised in a poem by Rudyard Kipling and once known as the 'Golden City', the image painted of the Mandalay of times gone by was of a timeless and exotic place on the banks of the Irrawaddy River. The city today still offers a wealth of rich history to explore. Burma's cultural capital, you'll find plenty of treasures, including pagodas, churches and mosques.



See how to add Mandalay into your itinerary from **page 145**



▲ Mandalay Hill

Legends tell that Buddha visited Mandalay Hill and prophesied that a great city would be built at its feet. Today the hill from which the city takes its name is a major pilgrimage site for Burmese Buddhists, and for travellers to enjoy the sunset from its summit. You can climb one of the staircases to the top passing a number of temples, shrines and souvenir stalls as you go to reach the pagoda at the top from where you will get fantastic views down over the city and Mandalay Plain. You can also reach the summit by road.



Mahamuni Pagoda ▶

Home to one of the most worshipped Buddha images in the country, the Mahamuni Pagoda is Mandalay's biggest pilgrimage site. Said to be the only true likeness of Gautama Buddha, the statue is honoured by being covered in gold leaf by male devotees and with a ritual face washing and teeth cleaning every morning at dawn.

This is the perfect place to see the authentic devotion to Buddhism that the majority of Burmese people have.



◀ Inwa

For rich history with less of the crowds, head 30 minutes out of Mandalay to the former royal capital of Inwa. The city was abandoned in 1839 after being home to kings and queens on three separate occasions from 1364 and was sacked and rebuilt numerous times. The traditional way to explore the magnificent remains of temples, towers and stupas is by horse and cart, though the five kilometre circuit is an easy walk and makes it easier for you to admire the beauty of the rural landscapes. Make sure you visit Bagaya Monastery, built in 1593 completely out of teak wood.

◀ U Bein Bridge

Stretching across the Taungthaman Lake, at just over a kilometre long the U Bein Bridge is the world's longest teak bridge. Located in Amarapura, a township of Mandalay, the bridge was built in 1850 with wood recycled from a former royal palace in Inwa.

Stroll over the bridge and we can organise a boat to bring you back across the lake to get a different view.



★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



1. Eastern Palace Hotel ****
2. Mandalay Hill Resort Hotel ****
3. Hotel by the Red Canal ****
4. Yadanarpon Dynasty Hotel ***
5. Ayarwaddy River View Hotel ***

BAGAN

Burma's central plains have hosted many old kingdoms. The legacy of these kingdoms is one of Burma's most spectacular sights, an expanse strewn with temples of all shapes and sizes. There isn't time to see them all but you can certainly see the best and these are the ones that we recommend. Two days is a good amount of time to explore.

Shwezigon Pagoda

Shwezigon is one of Burma's most sacred buildings and said to be the stupa on which many later stupas, including Shwedagon in Rangoon, are modelled. Constructed in the 11th century on a site that legend tells a white elephant chose, it was built soon after Buddhism arrived in Bagan, to house a number of sacred Buddha relics. Today it is gilded with gold and surrounded by a complex of fascinating shrines and temple buildings.

Htilominlo Pagoda

Built between 1211 and 1231 during the reign of King Htilominlo, Htilominlo is a red brick mammoth of temple towering to 46 metres tall. It was once completely covered in white stucco and elaborate plaster moldings, some of which you can still see today. Inside Htilominlo you'll find many small Buddhas enshrined in arched recesses as well as beautiful, colourful murals and frescos of Buddha, many of which are still in reasonable condition.

Ananda Pagoda

Built in the year 1091, Ananda is Bagan's best known, largest and most beautiful temple. Stories say that its builder, King Kyanzittha, met 8 monks who told him about legendary Nanadamula Cave in the Himalayas and Ananda is his attempt to recreate what he heard. Distinguishable due to its golden spire, Ananda is particularly important due to the four magnificent Buddha images that reside within it. The temple is still in constant use today.

Shwesandaw

Best known as a sunrise or sunset viewing spot, come here out of these hours and you'll have this delightful pagoda to yourself. Believed to have been built in the year 1057 this pagoda, along with 4 others, is believed to give Bagan spiritual protection. The name means 'golden holy hair' and it's thought that it enshrines a Buddha relic – a strand of hair. This circular structure has five levels of terraces, each giving a better and better view over the plains.

Thatbyinnyu Temple

Towering over many of the surrounding monuments, Thatbyinnyu is a 60-metre-tall two level temple. Built in the mid-12th century and said to be of a transitional style between Early Style and Late Style buildings, Thatbyinnyu is home to a large number of seated Buddhas, whilst on the second level is a huge Buddha image sat on a throne. The terrace is a good place to head for views out over the plains to the Irrawaddy River beyond.

Mt Popa

Not part of Bagan but close by and well worth a visit, Mt Popa is an extinct volcano that rises 1,518 metres out of the Myingyan Plain. It is the spiritual home of the 37 nats, part of the Burma's pre-Buddhist animist religion and a much-visited pilgrimage spot. Its most impressive feature is the sheer volcanic plug roughly half way up the the summit that is topped by a Buddhist temple which can be reached by climbing 777 steps. Watch out for the macaques!





Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Floating gardens, Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda, Nga Phe Monastery and Inn Paw Khon weaving village. **Day 2:** Inthein, cottage industry workshops.

INLE LAKE

A serene and naturally resplendent place to visit, Inle Lake gives a glimpse of a different side of Burmese life. The Intha people live close to or on the water in stilt villages – trek through traditional settlements around the shore or take a boat trip to see the unique leg rowing technique and innovative floating gardens.



▼ Inle Lake

Sights around the lake include: Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda, a tiered pagoda on the lakeside sheltering five ancient Buddha images covered in offerings of gold leaf; Inthein, a village overlooked by old overgrown stupas and hilltop pagodas; and stop at one or two of the lakeshore villages, many of which have a weekly market.



See how to
add Inle Lake
into your
itinerary from
page 145



Three nights is always a good amount of time to relax on a beach after your explorations, but just tell us the amount of time you'd like flat out on the sand and we'll sort it!

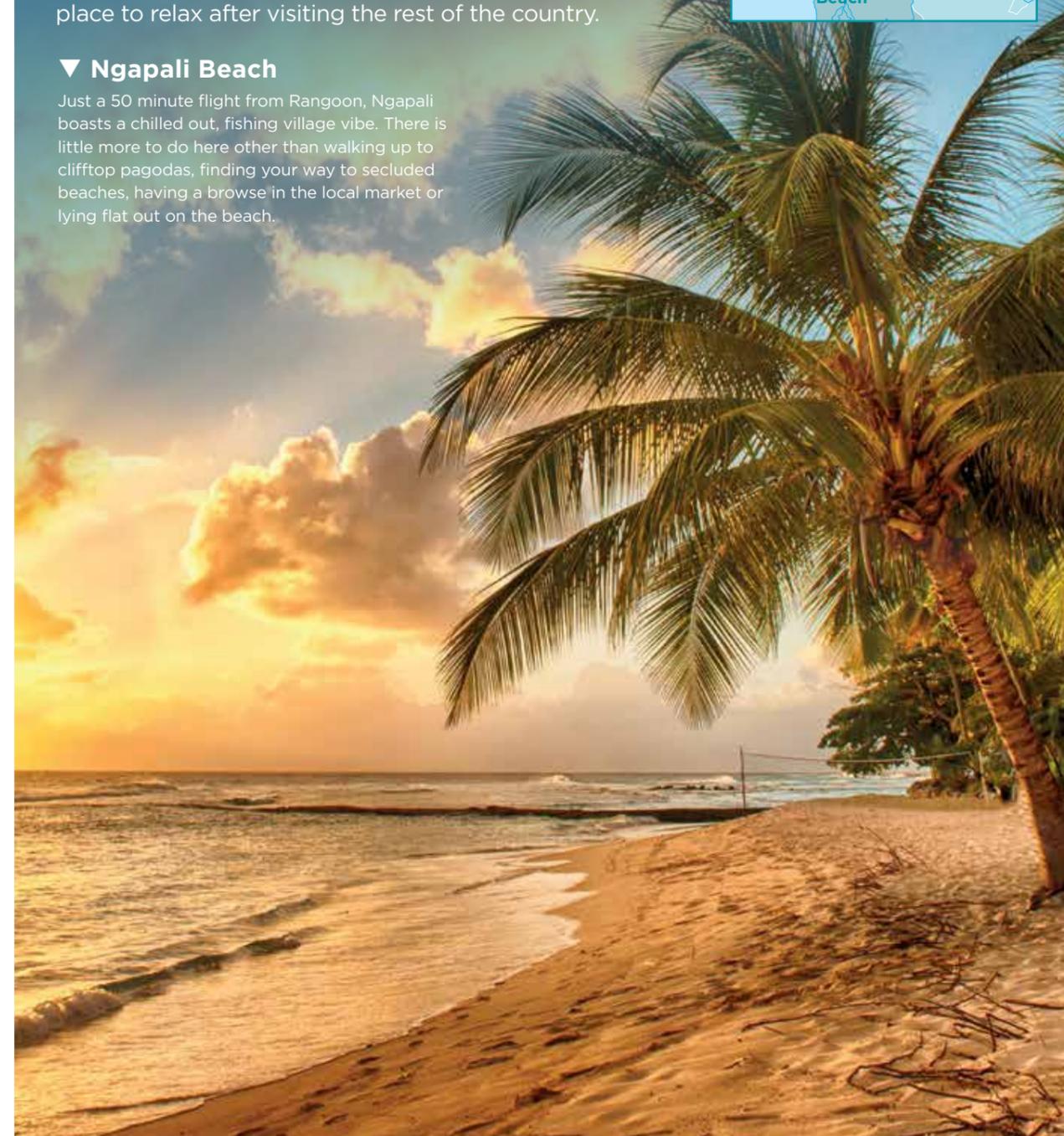
NGAPALI BEACH

Pure white sands, swaying palms and clear blue seas are perhaps not what you would expect to find in Burma, but Ngapali Beach ticks all the boxes. Sat on the Bay of Bengal, this 15 mile stretch of coast hosts a range of well spaced-out sophisticated hotels, so there is no better place to relax after visiting the rest of the country.



▼ Ngapali Beach

Just a 50 minute flight from Rangoon, Ngapali boasts a chilled out, fishing village vibe. There is little more to do here other than walking up to clifftop pagodas, finding your way to secluded beaches, having a browse in the local market or lying flat out on the beach.



IRRAWADDY RIVER

The Irrawaddy River is Burma's lifeline – a commercial waterway for centuries, providing water for irrigation, drinking and a more spiritual link to other communities. A relaxed way to travel, a cruise also gives you a glimpse of rural life and the opportunity to stop at out of the way villages to interact with the friendly locals.

What is an Irrawaddy River cruise?

Flowing 1,350 miles through the centre of the country, the Irrawaddy River is an essential element of Burma's history, culture and economy. The banks of the river are busy with communities who farm or fish for a living – cruising leisurely past you can catch a glimpse of authentic Burmese life, you can even stop off and pay a visit. Some of Burma's most important heritage is also close to the water – Bagan's temples and cultural hub Mandalay to name a few. Cruising the Irrawaddy is to voyage through Burma's enchanting heartlands.

Itineraries

Cruise on the Irrawaddy for up to 20 days on itineraries such as the following:

- ▶ From Mandalay to Bagan on a three night itinerary;
- ▶ From Bagan to Mandalay on a seven night itinerary;
- ▶ Cruise north from Mandalay and Bagan to the Irrawaddy Gorges;
- ▶ Cruise all the way from Rangoon to Kalay on the Upper Chindwin River.

Chindwin River

A major tributary of the Irrawaddy, the Chindwin is becoming a river cruise destination in its own right. More isolated so less explored, only ships with shallow drafts can venture up this mysterious waterway, and when they do, they find lush jungle, sheer cliffs and misty mountains. Many tribal villages sit on the river banks, many reachable only by river, and it's in these communities you'll find Burma's age old customs and local traditions still alive and strong.

Sanctuary Ananda

The Sanctuary Ananda perfectly combines utmost comfort and luxury with traditional Burmese style. Voyaging various routes between Bhamo and Rangoon (and occasionally the Chindwin) this all-suite ship offers a wonderful cruising experience. The ship was built by local craftsmen and comes complete with a plunge pool and spa, 20 suites, each with balcony, and a full range of complimentary onboard activities and shore excursions.

Pandaw River Cruises

Operating a number of traditionally-designed ships built by traditional craftsmen that ply the Irrawaddy and its tributaries, including the Chindwin, Pandaw makes cruising the Irrawaddy relaxed and convivial. With exceptionally personal service, enjoy the passing panoramas from one of the promenade decks or the observation deck; dine on cuisine with an emphasis on local produce; and retire to your teak and brass-finished cabin.

Belmond River Cruises

Belmond operates two ships on the Irrawaddy and Chindwin, the *Road to Mandalay* and *Orcaella*. On the *Road to Mandalay* watch Burma slide by from the observation deck or from beside the pool and dine on acclaimed east-meets-west delicacies. On the luxurious *Orcaella* relax and savour exceptionally personal service and learn about traditional Burmese life with lectures and local performances.

See how to add an Irrawaddy River Cruise into your itinerary from **page 145**



THAILAND

Thailand offers an irresistible combination of bustling cities, pristine beaches and tropical forests. This is Southeast Asia's most popular destination, yet Thailand has managed to keep its own rich culture fully intact making it easy to find an authentic Thai experience away from the resorts and bright city lights.



QUICK INFO



APPROX
FLYING TIME
**12 HOURS
DIRECT**



GMT
+7



VISA
REQUIRED
NO



CURRENCY
BAHT

OUR BEST BITS



1 Ayutthaya



2 The Grand Palace, Bangkok



3 Chiang Mai



4 Blissful beaches



5 Riding the Death Railway



See all of our Thailand best bits on one inspiring itinerary on **page 146**

GETTING AROUND



Flights between Bangkok and major destinations takes around an hour.



For ultimate comfort and convenience we will supply you with a private car and driver for sightseeing.



Trains are a relaxed, slow and scenic way to get between some of the major destinations.

WHEN TO TRAVEL



Thailand has three distinct seasons – cool, hot and rainy. November to March is the cool season, although temperatures can still reach 30 degrees, which is followed by the hot season from March to May when temperatures and humidity go up. The rainy season lasts from roughly June to October which is characterised by downpours in the afternoon or at night. There are some regional variations in temperatures.

| JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|-----|------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|
| ★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★ | ★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ |

★ Travel is possible
★★ Good time to travel
★★★ Ideal travel conditions

ACCOMMODATION

Thailand has an extensive range of accommodation from rural homestays all the way up to the most luxurious high end brands. The majority of these luxury hotels and resorts can be found in Bangkok and at the major resorts, particularly those by the beach. There are also plenty of family-run boutiques and characterful guesthouses to choose from and if you were to venture off of Thailand's tourist trail there is always a comfortable hotel in which to stay.

Visit the Asia Inspirations website to see our recommended hotel selection.



Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Wat Pho, Grand Palace, Chinatown, Chao Phraya River cruise, Pak Khlong Talat Flower Market. **Day 2:** Ayutthaya.

BANGKOK

Thailand's capital is a potent clash of chaos and sophistication; an energetic metropolis full of character. The name Bangkok conjures up images of the exotic, and you'll certainly find it if you look in the right places. Spend your days flitting between golden temples, a forest of gleaming skyscrapers and the authentic Asia you'll find on Bangkok's bustling streets.



See how to add Bangkok into your itinerary from page 146

▲ Grand Palace & Wat Phra Kaew

A complex filled with glittering spires, vivid coloured pavilions and peaceful courtyards and gardens, the Grand Palace and its adjoining royal temple Wat Phra Kaew are must visits in a city packed with beautiful temples. Wat Phra Kaew is Thailand's most sacred temple and home to the Emerald Buddha, Thailand's most important image. The complex's original buildings were built in 1782 when Thailand's capital was moved to Bangkok from Thonburi - successive monarchs have added their own structures over the years giving you an excellent insight into the progression of Thai architectural styles.



▲ Wat Pho

Set in eight hectares right next door to the Grand Palace, Wat Pho is a lively and vibrant jumble of extravagant structures. This is the oldest temple in the city and has an extensive collection of Buddha images - by far the most impressive of them all is the 46 metre long, 15 metre high Reclining Buddha.

Wat Pho is also an important centre of traditional Thai medicine and incorporates a massage school; it has long been regarded as Thailand's first university. What better place to enjoy a Thai massage for yourself?

▲ Ayutthaya

A sacred city and former royal capital, Ayutthaya is a crumbled kingdom that has retained its bygone magnificence. Amongst these atmospheric ruins you'll find some fully functioning and some fully restored temples to explore. Located 80 kilometres north of Bangkok and an easy day trip or as a stop off on your way northwards.

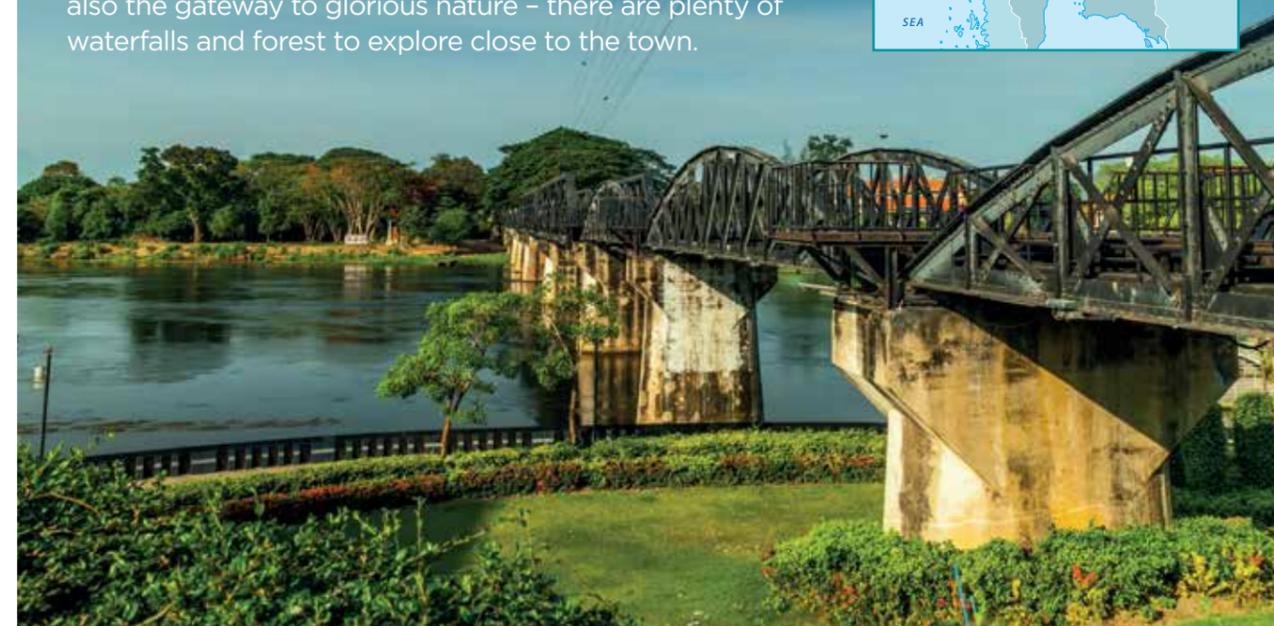
For those looking for a more active and intimate experience, Ayutthaya can be explored by bike, taking you off the tourist paths and onto the local trails.



Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Bridge over the River Kwai, Allied Cemetery, War Museum. **Day 2:** Hellfire Pass, Death Railway train ride.

KANCHANABURI

Kanchanaburi sits peacefully on the confluence of two branches of the River Kwai. A laidback town today, Kanchanaburi's past is its biggest attraction - it is here you'll find the infamous bridge over the River Kwai. The town is also the gateway to glorious nature - there are plenty of waterfalls and forest to explore close to the town.



▲ World War II sights

Kanchanaburi's best known sight, the bridge over the River Kwai gained symbolic status thanks to the 1952 novel and 1957 film. You can walk across the bridge, or take one of the trains that pass over it and along the Death Railway to the terminus in Nam Tok. The Thailand-Burma Railway Centre Museum explains the town's role in World War II and documents the suffering of the thousands of POWs and conscripted Asian labourers who worked on the railway. Visit the Allied War Cemetery to reflect on the tragedy further.

◀ Hellfire Pass

A day trip from Kanchanaburi, the Hellfire Pass, a railway cutting, is a memorial walk and excellent museum as a part of the Death Railway that saw the harshest conditions and greatest loss of life.

Rent an audio guide featuring surviving POWs and walk along the former railway track bed.



◀ Around Kanchanaburi

Kanchanaburi town is just three hours from Bangkok, making it the perfect natural getaway from the city. The Kanchanaburi province has seven national parks within its borders and a great amount of beautiful nature including waterfalls, caves and forest.

We can help you get out into beautiful nature by organising hikes, visits to waterfalls and atmospheric cave temples.





Take three days to see the best bits. Day 1: Wiang Kum Kam, Wat Chedi Luang, Wat Phra Singh, handicraft village. **Day 2:** Cooking class, Wat Doi Suthep. **Day 3:** Day trek.

CHIANG MAI

The easy going city of Chiang Mai sits on a lush plain watched over by its two sacred mountains, Doi Suthep and Doi Pui. The city perfectly balances culture and nature, its old city the site of 30 temples that have endured from its days as capital of the Lanna Kingdom, whilst the surrounding countryside offers trekking and historical day tripping.



See how to add Chiang Mai into your itinerary from page 146

▲ Doi Suthep

Rising from the plain to Chiang Mai's west is Doi Suthep, a mountain crowned by one of northern Thailand's most sacred temples. Wat Phra That Doi Suthep was founded in 1383 its location, according to legend, decreed by a white elephant. Whilst you can reach a certain point on the mountain by road, the final few hundred metres can be completed by tram or on foot up 300 steps flanked by fearsome Nagas. The views from the top, over the city and the plain, are spectacular and the temple itself beautiful making this a Chiang Mai must do.



◀ Trekking

There is no better way to explore Chiang Mai's spectacular surroundings and mist-cloaked mountains than on foot. There are many different trekking options, whether you are looking for a day of easy wandering through forests, harder trekking with a night spent in a hilltribe village or getting lost in the wilderness for three or four days.

Fancy an extra adrenaline rush? We can arrange rafting, kayaking and zip lining in the Chiang Mai area.

◀ Historical centre

Chiang Mai's old centre, built by the Lanna kings, retains many of its traditional old houses and peaceful gardens. The main reason to visit is the vast number of temples, 30 in total, built in a variety of styles all elaborately ornamented. The must visit wats include the classically Lanna-style Phra Singh, the 14th/15th century Chedi Luang and Chiang Mai's oldest temple, founded around 1296, Chiang Man.

We can send you for some local cultural education at the Chiang Mai City Arts and Cultural Centre.



Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Wat Phra Kaew, Wat Rong Kung, Oub Kham Museum, Night Bazaar. **Day 2:** Golden Triangle.

CHIANG RAI

Chiang Rai, in the far north, is one of Thailand's most ethnically diverse provinces thanks to the number of hill tribes that call it home. Chiang Rai city is full of laidback small town charm and is the gateway to the plethora of outdoor activities in an area abundant in beautiful scenery.



▲ Wat Phra Kaew & Wat Rong Khun

Wat Phra Kaew and Wat Rong Khun offer vastly different temple experiences. Wat Phra Kaew is the city's most revered temple and displays aspects of the Lanna architectural style. It was also the original home of the revered Emerald Buddha that now resides in Bangkok's Wat Phra Kaew. Wat Rong Khun is the eccentric, contemporary creation of Thai artist Chalermchai Kositpipat, who designed and funded it himself. Completely white and incorporating mirrored pieces to make it sparkle.



◀ Hill tribes & trekking

Trekking is one of the main reasons to visit Chiang Rai thanks to its location in the northern Thai highlands and the abundance of ethnic minority villages in the area. Trekking can range from flat, gentle hikes along the river to full-on climbs up the mountains. There are also settlements, such as Ban Lorcha, an Akha tribe village, which are run as sustainable tourism projects that are beneficial to the community.

Let us know if you are looking for a truly authentic experience - we can arrange a night with a hill tribe family.

Golden Triangle

The Golden Triangle is the name given to the area where Thailand, Burma and Laos meet at the confluence of the Mekong and Ruak rivers. Once the world's largest opium producer, today the area is a lot more visitor-friendly with opportunities to trek through the countryside, meet a diverse mix of ethnic minorities and explore what remains of what was once a stronghold of the Lanna Kingdom.

Take a longtail boat from Sop Ruak and cruise up the mighty Mekong.

THAILAND'S BEACHES

Thailand is well known for its many gorgeous beaches and warm, crystal-clear seas. Add a few days on one of these little pieces of paradise onto the end of your Southeast Asian adventure – what better way to relax before heading home?



Add a Thailand beach stay onto any Southeast Asia itinerary!

Phuket

With its excellent climate and miles of pristine beaches Phuket is justifiably Thailand's most popular resort destination. With a wide range of dining options, family entertainment and excellent hotels – whatever you want from your holiday experience, Phuket will be able to deliver it.

Koh Samui

An oasis of natural beauty, Koh Samui offers everything you'd expect from an idyllic, tropical beach break. Situated in the Ang Thong National Marine Park amongst many uninhabited islands Samui is renowned for its excellent scuba diving and snorkelling.

Hua Hin

Just three hours from Bangkok, Hua Hin is perfect for those not wanting to travel too far. A little more traditional than the more popular sunshine spots, Hua Hin is city meets beach with miles of yellow sands plus colourful markets and local culture.

Koh Lanta

Located just off the Andaman coast in Krabi Province, this island remains relatively untouched by tourism. This is not the place to go for big resorts and entertainment but for those looking for long languid strolls on empty beaches and peaceful evenings – this place is heavenly.

Krabi

For those who like a bit of gorgeous scenery in their eye line as they sunbathe, Krabi is as magnificent as they come. Along a coastline lapped by crystal-clear waters, mangroves and dramatic limestone headlands are punctuated with golden sand beaches.

Koh Chang

Although it is developing quickly, Koh Chang still feels that little bit wild. This island of jungle-cloaked peaks is fringed by white sand beaches and has plenty of wilderness to explore, whether it is hiking the interior or under the coral-filled waters.



MALAYSIA & BORNEO

Separated by a stretch of the South China Sea, Malaysia's two regions offer vastly different travel experiences. Whilst Peninsular Malaysia boasts a rich heritage, beautiful sweeps of sandy beach and a sensational gastronomy, the provinces of Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo offer tribal traditions, wild jungle and a wonderful range of activities to delve into.



QUICK INFO



APPROX FLYING TIME
13 HOURS DIRECT



GMT
+8



VISA REQUIRED
NO



CURRENCY
RINGGIT

OUR BEST BITS

1 Semenggoh Nature Reserve, Sarawak



2 Georgetown, Penang



3 Sarawak Cultural Village



4 Mt Kinabalu, Sabah



5 Petronas Towers



See all of our Malaysia & Borneo best bits on one inspiring itinerary on **page 146**

GETTING AROUND



There are many flights between Malaysia and Borneo – from KL it takes approx two hours.



Malaysia's road network is excellent, whilst in Sarawak you may want to travel by boat.



For comfort and convenience we will supply a private car and driver for sightseeing and transfers.

WHEN TO TRAVEL



Apart from when the monsoon strikes, the weather in Malaysia stays reasonably constant. You can expect high temperatures and humidity. The monsoon hits the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia and Sarawak from November to February whilst the west coast and Sabah is wettest in September and October. It is reasonable to holiday in Malaysia at any time of year.

| JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|-----|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|
| ★ | ★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★ |

★ Travel is possible
★★ Good time to travel
★★★ Ideal travel conditions

ACCOMMODATION

Malaysia's range of accommodation options has something for everyone. For those looking for an even more Malaysian experience there is the possibility to stay in a homestay, whilst those staying in Sarawak can spend the night in a traditional longhouse. Hotels range from characterful to the utmost in luxury, particularly in the cities, and a plethora of beach resorts cater for the lively, families and those looking for something a bit quieter and more secluded.

Keep an eye out for our handy Top 5 hotel lists on some Malaysia and Borneo destination pages!



Take two days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Petronas Towers, Bukit Bintang, Merdeka Square, City Gallery, Central market, Chinatown. **Day 2:** Melaka.

KUALA LUMPUR

The dynamic gateway to Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur has evolved into one of the most exciting metropolises in the world. Here ethnic Malays, Chinese, Indians and European expats bustle past futuristic skyscrapers and traditional temples, each bringing their own cultural charms to the mix.



See how to add Kuala Lumpur into your itinerary from **page 146**



▲ Merdeka Square

At the heart of KL's colonial district, Merdeka Square is the place that independence from colonial rule was declared in 1957. The square is surrounded by a number of landmark buildings - the Sultan Abdul Samad Building, its Mughal design by A.C Norman, the former Natural History Museum and Kuala Lumpur Railway Station are also in the vicinity.

Visit the perfectly manicured cricket green, once the pitch of the Selangor Club, at the heart of Merdeka Square.



◀ Lake Gardens

A huge lush space at the core of the city created by the British in 1888, the Lake Gardens offers a wide range of nature-based activities. As well as manicured gardens through which to stroll there is a butterfly park, planetarium, orchid garden and bird park.

Golden Triangle ▶

The Golden Triangle is the beating heart of modern KL, a district of high rise buildings and hedonistic pleasures. The Golden Triangle encompasses KLCC where you'll find the shimmering Petronas Towers, as well as Bukit Bintang which is home to the city's best malls, markets, hotels, restaurants and nightlife. Ascend the Petronas Towers - there's the skybridge on the 41st floor and the observation deck on the 86th.

We can include the Petronas Towers in your city panorama by sending you up the Menara KL Tower.



◀ Chinatown

The area in which the city was originally founded by Chinese tin miners, southeast of the bustling Central Market, KL's Chinatown is an atmospheric place to wander. A labyrinth of narrow streets lined with shophouses and temples, Chinatown's main artery is Petaling Street, where you'll find a great range of restaurants and food stalls as well as a lively market. On the edge of Chinatown you'll also find Jamek Mosque, one of the city's oldest, and Sri Mahamariamman Temple, KL's oldest and most elaborate Hindu temples.

Central Market ▶

Housed in an Art Deco building, the Central Market is the place where you will find all of your arts and crafts needs. Packed with stalls selling all sorts of products from souvenirs to local handicrafts, it is the perfect place to browse before heading to the excellent food court to snack on local flavours. The market building also houses shops, restaurants and a museum.



▲ Melaka

About 2 hours by road from KL, the old port city of Melaka was once the centre of some of the world's most important trade route. Portuguese for a bit, then Dutch, then British, it isn't difficult to imagine the city's rich heritage. Packed with riverfront warehouse, colonial ruins, fascinating museums and fantastic food, Melaka is a worthy day trip and an easy place to while away a couple of days.

★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



1. Mandarin Oriental ★★★★★
2. Traders Hotel Kuala Lumpur ★★★★★
3. Renaissance ★★★★★
4. Swiss-Garden Hotel Bukit Bintang ★★★★★
5. Impiana KLCC Hotel ★★★★★



Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Fort Cornwallis, Little India, Chinatown, Royal Selangor, Wat Chayamangkalaram, Penang State Museum. **Day 2:** Batu Ferringhi.

PENANG ISLAND

The first foothold of the British on the Malay peninsula, Pulau Penang is a laidback and fascinating place to visit. The island's main city Georgetown is a vibrant mix of influences whilst the rest of the island is a series of coastal parks, beaches, and sleepy fishing villages.



▲ Georgetown

Georgetown was established in 1786 by a trader from the British East India Company, the city you see today sprawling out from old Fort Cornwallis. The area around the fort makes up the city's well-preserved colonial core which is UNESCO-listed. Close by you'll find the atmospheric old streets of Chinatown whilst other neighbourhoods include Little India and the Muslim Quarter.

For the ultimate fun and quirky Georgetown tour, hop in a 'becak' to explore the historic core.



◀ Batu Ferringhi

A picturesque 40 minute drive around the coast from Georgetown, Batu Ferringhi is Penang's biggest beach resort. A stretch of white sand and palm trees backed by a strip of big hotels, shops and restaurants, Batu Ferringhi is a great place to relax after touring the city - whether it's just for a day or for several.

◀ Penang National Park

Penang National Park covers 1,213 hectares and is home to a number of different habitats including mangroves and beach. From the carnivorous pitcher plants to mouse deer, 417 species of flora and 143 species of fauna can be found here whilst a number of turtle species use the beaches to lay their eggs.

There are two excellent walking trails through the park, as well as a 15 metre high canopy walk.



Four days is always a good amount of time to relax on a beach after your explorations, but just tell us the amount of time you'd like flat out on the sand and we'll sort it!

LANGKAWI

The largest island of a mostly uninhabited archipelago in the Andaman Sea, Pulau Langkawi is a dream of white sand, crystal waters and lush jungle - everything a tropical island should be. This heavenly environment is conducive to lazing on the beach with the occasional dip in the sea but there is also plenty to explore.



▼ Langkawi

Langkawi has many charms but what makes it a little bit different as a beach destination is that if you venture off the main beaches you'll still find oodles of rural charm amongst the local villages, where the locals get on with life as usual. You can also take a mangrove cruise which will showcase the biodiversity of the islands - look out for sea eagles, monkeys, kingfishers and lizards.

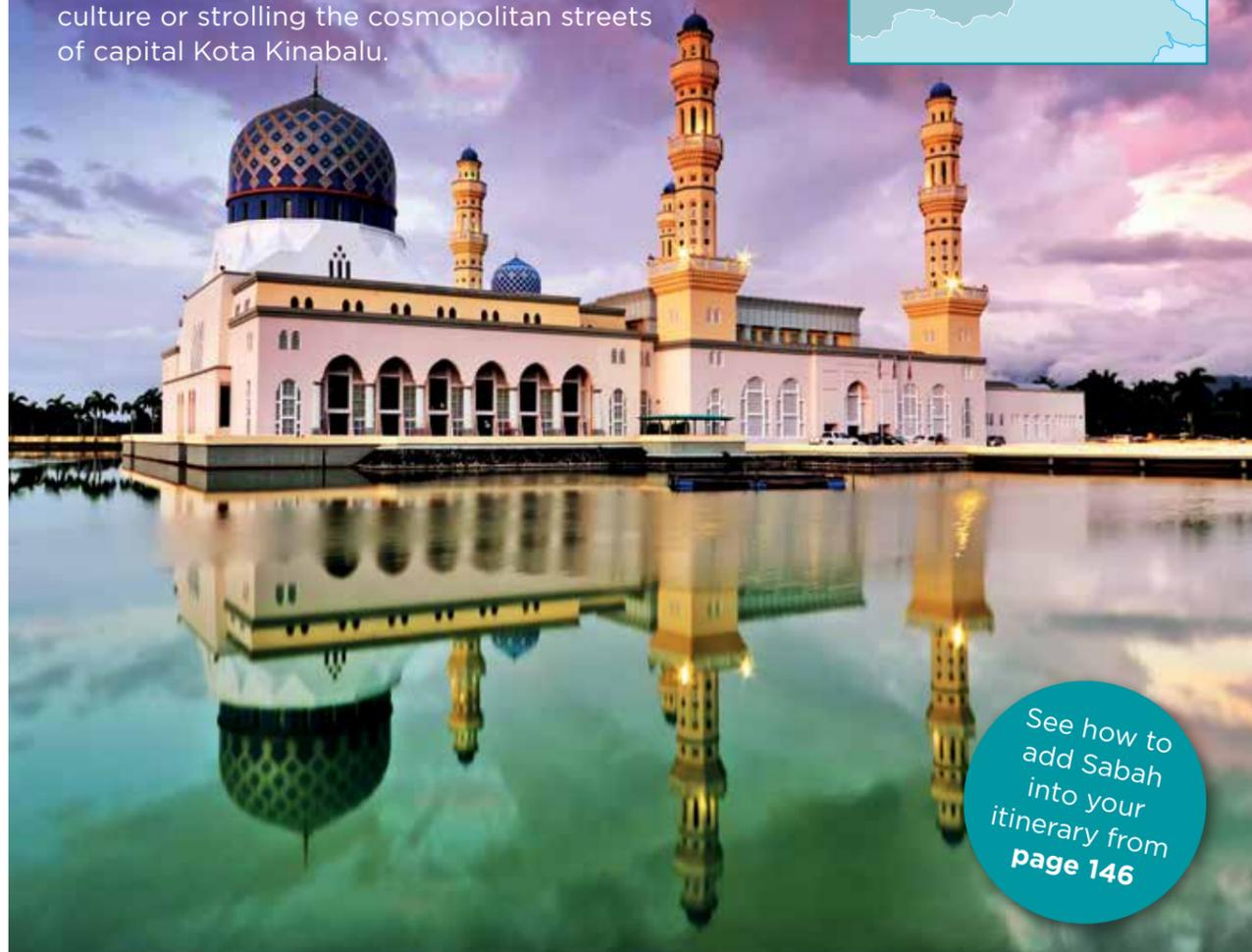




Take seven days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Kota Kinabalu. **Day 2:** Mt Kinabalu Park. **Day 3:** Sandakan. **Day 4:** Sepilok, Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre. **Days 5-6:** Kinabatangan River. **Day 7:** Kota Kinabalu.

SABAH

Sabah is a vast natural treasure trove of deep rainforest, tall mountains and an abundant oceanic world. This is a place where it is easy to find adventure, whether it's wildlife spotting, discovering the local culture or strolling the cosmopolitan streets of capital Kota Kinabalu.



See how to add Sabah into your itinerary from page 146

▲ Kota Kinabalu

Sabah's vibrant, welcoming capital is an atmospheric place to while away a few days. Head to the waterfront to browse the wares of the excellent markets – the huge night food market is particularly excellent.

Before heading out to explore, let us take you to the Sabah State Museum where you can learn about all of Sabah's major tribes and the diverse heritage of the state.



Mt Kinabalu & Kinabalu National Park ▶

Mt Kinabalu dominates Sabah's skyline. Thrusting 4,095 metres skyward, it is revered by some tribes as the home of the spirits of the dead, whilst to others it is just there to be conquered. The centrepiece of the UNESCO World Heritage listed Kinabalu National Park, for those who aren't looking to climb to the granite spires at the mountain's peak, there are a range of excellent nature trails that showcase the national parks diverse ecology and geology.

From Kinabalu's summit, on a clear day, the views over the coastal plains are spectacular. We can arrange for you to climb the mountain year round.



◀ Sepilok Orang-utan Rehabilitation Centre

Established in 1964 and located 25 kilometres from Sabah's second city Sandakan, Sepilok rehabilitates and trains orphaned and injured orang-utans so they can be re-introduced back into the forest. Feeding times give a guarantee to see these beautiful creatures up close, but there are also trails through the forest that may give another chance at a glimpse. Catch the video in the Nature Education Centre to get more information on what the centre does. Visit Sepilok's companion sanctuary, Labuk Bay Proboscis Monkey Sanctuary, to see more of the native proboscis monkey.

▼ Beaches & diving

Sabah is best known for its outstanding rainforests and wildlife but there is also plenty of opportunity to take some time to relax on tropical beaches. Tropical islands dot Sabah's coastline – the easiest to access are the five paradise islands of the Tunku Abdul Rahman Park just off Kota Kinabalu, which you can visit on a day trip or spend a few days of total relaxation. On Eastern Sabah you will find some of the world's best diving, accessible to both beginner and experienced divers alike.

Palau Sipadan is at the heart of one of the richest marine habitats in the world and home to thousands of species of fish and corals. For those who don't dive, the nearby islands of Palau Kapalai offers great snorkelling.



Kinabatangan River

Sabah's longest river provides some of the best wildlife viewing opportunities in the state. Cruise on the river in a little boat scouring the surrounding forest for all sorts of local fauna from hornbills to orang-utans. An area made up of lakes, mangroves and swamps the range of wildlife here is extensive enough for it to be declared the Lower Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary. It is possible to stay overnight in a lodge here, amongst this beautiful nature.

★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



1. Shangri-La Rasa Ria Resort ★★★★★
2. Shangri-La Tanjung Aru Resort ★★★★★
3. Hyatt Regency Kinabalu ★★★★★
4. Kinabatangan Riverside Lodge ★★★★
5. Abai Jungle Lodge ★★★



Take six days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Kuching. **Day 2:** Sarawak Cultural Village. **Day 3:** Bako National Park. **Day 4:** Semenggoh Nature Reserve. **Day 5:** Batang Ai National Park. **Day 6:** Kuching.

SARAWAK

Exploring Sarawak means you are never far from incredible flora and fauna, whilst its vast cave systems are nothing short of astounding. The state's ethnic diversity is just as impressive – discover more about Borneo's numerous tribes, including the notorious Iban 'headhunters', in the fascinating longhouses that still exist deep in the rainforest.



See how to add Sarawak into your itinerary from **page 146**

▲ Kuching

Borneo's largest and purportedly Malaysia's most relaxed and charismatic city, Kuching's picturesque setting on the Sarawak River only adds to its charms. A juxtaposition of colonial and contemporary, stroll the maze of narrow lanes at its core to admire the old architecture. Kuching is the ideal base for exploring Sarawak's spectacular nature.

We can add a visit to the fascinating Sarawak Museum to help you get to grips with the region's rich and varied culture.



◀ Sarawak Cultural Village

Located 32 kilometres from Kuching, the Sarawak Cultural Village works to keep the cultures and traditions of Sarawak's many tribes and ethnicities alive. You can visit the seven traditional dwellings on the site as well as being able to watch representatives from each ethnic group demonstrating traditional daily activities and handicrafts.

Watch the twice daily cultural show of music and dance for a glimpse of old traditions.

▶ Semenggoh Wildlife Centre

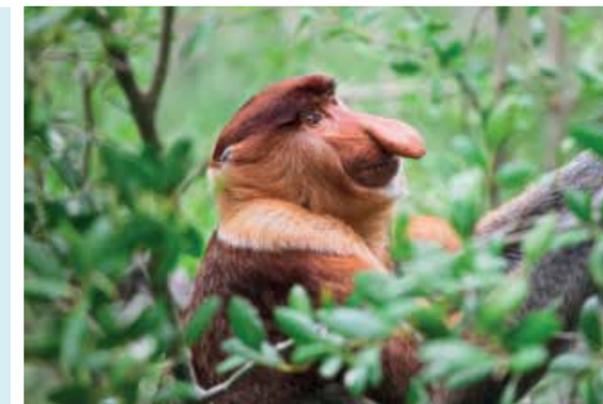
Semenggoh is the place in Sarawak to see orang-utans – set in a nature reserve its residents are a mixture of those rescued from captivity or were orphaned at a young age and those born in the centre. Whilst some of the orang-utans are wild enough to be able to feed themselves, most swing by to the hour long feeding that happens twice daily. Semenggoh tends to receive fewer visitors than Sepilok in Sabah and has two lovely trails that will take you through lush primary rainforest.



▶ Bako National Park

A 37 kilometre hop from Kuching, Bako is Sarawak's oldest national park. Displaying a biodiversity that is epic even for Borneo, Bako is home to almost every sort of flora that you find on the island. This is one of the best places to see rainforest wildlife in their natural habitat, particularly the native proboscis monkey. Day trips from Kuching are possible but we recommend an overnight stay.

For a more adventurous experience take one of the hiking trails that lead alongside jungle streams, across sandstone plateaus and past mangrove swamps to secluded coves.



▲ Mulu National Park

Mulu encompasses the world's largest limestone cave system. At the heart of the park are the mountains Mulu and Api – Api is a popular trek due to the fifty-metre-high pinnacles, formed by millennia of rainfall, at its peak. A three-day trek is necessary to view this rare and incredible sight. The four big 'show' caves are must sees.

We can provide a guide who can take you to the very best spot to see the incredible mass exodus of bats from Deer Cave at sunset.

★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



1. **Hotel Pullman Kuching** ★★★★★
2. **Hilton Kuching Hotel** ★★★★★
3. **Mulu Marriott Resort** ★★★★★
4. **Grand Margherita** ★★★★
5. **Aiman Batang Ai Resort & Retreat** ★★★

ITINERARIES

These itineraries are here to guide and inspire, to give you some idea of how you can combine destinations, sights and experiences to create your perfect trip. Look out for our 'best bits' itineraries which feature our top five sights.

All itineraries include international flights, domestic transportation, accommodation, private touring and sightseeing.

Visit Asia Inspirations online for more examples of inspiring Southeast Asia itineraries!



VIETNAM - 'BEST BITS' ■ 21 DAYS ■ SAIGON - HANOI

HIGHLIGHTS ■ Halong Bay ■ Sapa ■ Hoi An ■ Mekong Delta ■ Temple of Literature



Day 1: Depart UK and fly overnight to Saigon.

Day 2: Arrive in Saigon.

Day 3: Saigon - take a day to explore the city's sights which can include Notre Dame Cathedral, Central Post Office, Reunification Palace and the War Remnants Museum.

Days 4-5: Travel to the Mekong Delta, about three hours by road. Spend your time here cruising on the waterways of the delta, exploring floating markets and sampling the local produce. Return to Saigon.

Day 6: Saigon - continue your explorations or take a day trip out of the city to visit the Cu Chi Tunnels and the Cao Dai Temple.

Days 7-8: Travel to Nha Trang, a one hour flight. Spend a couple of days relaxing on the beach, diving and snorkelling or cruising around the offshore islands.

Day 9: Travel to Hoi An, a one hour flight via Da Nang.

Days 10-11: Hoi An - a walking tour is the perfect introduction to the town and a great way to see the sights. This is also a great place to do a cooking class.

Day 12: Travel to Hue, three hours by road. Why not take a cyclo up to the Imperial Citadel to explore?

Day 13: Hue - use the day to cruise on the peaceful Perfume River and visit a royal tomb or two.

Day 14: Travel to Hanoi, a one hour flight or an overnight train. Start exploring the city - the Temple of Literature is a must see.

Day 15: Hanoi - take the time to explore Ba Dinh District and the French and Old Quarters to see all the sights. And don't miss a performance of the water puppets!

Days 16-17: Travel to Halong Bay by road and board an overnight junk boat cruise. The next day, return to Hanoi and board an overnight train to Sapa.

Days 18-20: Spend two days amongst the mountain scenery in Sapa, walking through rice terraces and meeting ethnic minority hilltribes. Return to Hanoi.

Day 21: Fly Hanoi to UK.

4★ price from: £4,290
5★ price from: £5,190

CAMBODIA - 'BEST BITS' ■ 9 DAYS ■ SIEM REAP - PHNOM PENH

HIGHLIGHTS ■ Angkor Wat ■ Phnom Penh ■ Tonle Sap ■ Sihanoukville ■ Angkor Thom



Day 1: Depart UK and fly overnight to Siem Reap.

Day 2: Arrive in Siem Reap.

Day 3: Siem Reap - use your day to visit the magnificent temples of Angkor, including Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom, or to head out onto the waters of Tonle Sap to see the floating villages.

Day 4: Travel to Sihanoukville, a 50 minute flight.

Days 5-7: Sihanoukville - take three days to relax and/or explore this pleasant seaside town. Chill on the beach, cruise around the offshore islands or visit Ream National Park.

Day 8: Travel to Phnom Penh, four hours by road. Spend the afternoon exploring this charming capital.

Day 9: Fly Phnom Penh to UK.

4★ price from: £2,290
5★ price from: £2,590

LAOS - 'BEST BITS' ■ 14 DAYS ■ BANGKOK - PAKSE

HIGHLIGHTS ■ Luang Prabang ■ Si Phan Don ■ Plain of Jars ■ Vang Vieng ■ Pak Ou Caves



Day 1: Depart UK and fly to Bangkok.

Day 2: Arrive in Bangkok and stay overnight.

Day 3: Fly to Luang Prabang and transfer to the hotel.

Day 4: Luang Prabang - rise early to witness Takbat. Visit traditional

villages, walk to the beautiful Kuang Si Waterfalls for a picnic. Stop at Ock Pop Tok Weaving Centre on your return.

Day 5: Luang Prabang - hop on a Mekong cruise to the sacred Pak Ou Caves. Also visit rural villages on the return voyage.

Day 6: Luang Prabang - take your time wandering the quaint streets of this enchanting city. Climb to the top of Phousi Hill for panoramic views. Later, visit Wat Visoun and Wat Aham.

Day 7: Travel to Phonsavan. Drive Phoukhoun for a market and lunch. Continue, stopping at Tham Phra Cave and Non Tang Lake to see local villagers fishing. Arrive in the late afternoon.

Day 8: Phonsavan - spend the day at the mysterious Plain of Jars.

Day 9: Travel to Vang Vieng - 7 hours drive. Stopping en route at Pathang

Village. Spend the afternoon exploring the magnificent Tham Chang Cave.

Day 10: Travel to Vientiane - 3 hours 30 minute drive. You can take the rest of the day to see the sights of Laos' capital.

Day 11: Travel to Pakse, a one hour and 15 minute flight. Make a stop at the World Heritage-listed Wat Pho before continuing to Khong Island.

Days 12-13: Khong Island - spend a couple of days relaxing and visiting the sights of Si Phan Don. Admire the Tad Yuan and Tan Fane waterfalls, and visit a coffee plantation. Return to Pakse.

Day 14: Fly Pakse to the UK via Bangkok.

4★ price from: £3,790

BURMA - 'BEST BITS' ■ 14 DAYS ■ RANGOON - RANGOON

HIGHLIGHTS ■ Bagan ■ Rangoon ■ Inle Lake ■ Irrawaddy ■ Mt Popa



Day 1: Depart the UK and fly to Rangoon.

Day 2: Arrive in Rangoon.

Day 3: Rangoon - spend the day soaking up the sights and sounds of this delightful city. The Shwedagon Pagoda and a stroll through Bogyoke Market are musts.

Day 4: Travel to Mandalay, a 50-minute flight, around eight hours by road or about 15 hours by train. Visit Amarapura and the U Bein Bridge, and even the old city of Inwa depending on your time of arrival.

Day 5: Mandalay - soak up the atmosphere of this legendary city whilst visiting the sights. Ascending Mandalay Hill is a must!

Day 6: Mandalay - sail up the Irrawaddy River to visit the magnificent Mingun.

Day 7: Travel to Bagan, three hours by road, though it is also possible to travel by river.

Day 8: Bagan - spend the day exploring beautiful temples. We highly recommend taking the time to enjoy a sunrise or sunset.

Day 9: Bagan - take a day trip out to the fascinating Mt Popa (one hour by road).

Day 10: Travel to Heho, a 30 minute flight or five hours by road. Transfer to Pindaya to visit the Shwe U Min limestone caves, a famous Buddhist pilgrimage site.

Day 11: Travel to Inle Lake, one hour 30 minutes by road. Spend the rest of the day on and around the water visiting floating markets, stilt houses and the local leg-rowing fishermen.

Day 12: Inle Lake - why not use the day to visit the crumbling Insein Pagoda complex? There are also plenty of lush fields and rural villages around Inle that you can walk through.

Day 13: Travel to Rangoon, a 45 minute flight or seven hours by road.

Day 14: Fly Rangoon to UK.

4★ price: £3,770



MALAYSIA & BORNEO - 'BEST BITS' ■ 17 DAYS ■ KUALA LUMPUR - KOTA KINABALU

HIGHLIGHTS ■ Semenggoh Nature Reserve ■ Penang ■ Petronas Towers ■ Mt Kinabalu ■ Sarawak Cultural Village



Day 1: Depart UK and fly to Kuala Lumpur.

Day 2: Arrive in Kuala Lumpur.

Day 3: Kuala Lumpur – spend the day seeing the sights of the city, including the striking Petronas Towers.

Day 4: Travel to Penang, a 55 minute flight or three hours 40 minutes by road.

Days 5-6: Penang – take a day in Georgetown, admiring the colonial architecture and sampling the delicious local food. On your second day you could head to the beach or the National Park.

Day 7: Travel to Kuching, a two hour flight.

Days 8-11: Sarawak – four full days in Sarawak gives you the freedom to relax and explore. Enjoy some beach time or head to one of the many national parks to enjoy the native flora and fauna. We highly recommend visits to Sarawak Cultural Village and Semenggoh Wildlife Centre.

Day 12: Travel to Kota Kinabalu, a one hour 20 minute flight.

Days 13-16: Sabah – take four full days in Sabah to see the sights or take some time to relax. Spend some time in vibrant Kota Kinabalu, head out to the Poring Hot Springs and on to Kinabalu National Park, get a second dose of orang-utans at Sepilok or find a patch of sand on a glorious stretch of beach.

Day 17: Fly Kota Kinabalu to UK.

4★ price from: £3,940
5★ price from: £4,290

THAILAND - 'BEST BITS' ■ 15 DAYS ■ BANGKOK - KOH LANTA

HIGHLIGHTS ■ Grand Palace, Bangkok ■ Ayutthaya ■ homestay in Chiang Mai ■ Koh Lanta's beaches



Day 1: Depart UK and fly overnight to Bangkok.

Day 2: Arrive in Bangkok.

Day 3: Bangkok – spend the day exploring this vibrant city. Visit the Grand Palace an impressive example of Thai architecture as well as the Reclining Buddha at Wat Pho Temple. Browse the local markets and sample plenty of delicious street food. Later, enjoy a canal tour in the afternoon.

Day 4: Kanchanaburi – transfer 3 hours to the town where the rest of the day is at your leisure.

Day 5: Kanchanaburi – Visit the famous 'Bridge over the River Kwai', the War Museum and War Cemetery before taking a train ride on the notorious Death Railway.

Day 6: Ayutthaya – spend the day exploring the Historical Park and magnificent city ruins. Board an overnight train to Chiang Mai.

Day 7: Chiang Mai – spend the day exploring this cultural city. This includes a visit to the top of Doi Suthep Mountain for gorgeous views.

Days 8-10: Chiang Mai – use these additional three days to travel or trek up into the hills surrounding the city to spend the night with one of the ethnic minority tribes that call the area home.

Day 11: Travel to Koh Lanta, a two hour flight via Bangkok and transfer from Krabi to your hotel.

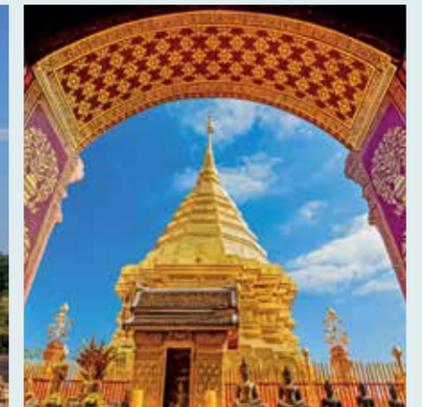
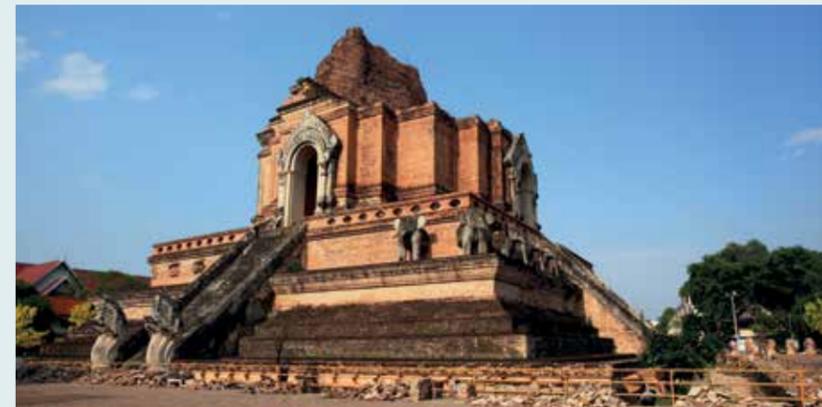
Days 12-14: Koh Lanta – stroll the stunning empty beaches and explore the waters of the Mu Koh Lanta Marine National Park.

Day 15: Fly Koh Lanta to UK.

4★ price from: £3,390
5★ price from: £3,790

BESPOKE - THAILAND ■ 17 DAYS ■ BANGKOK - BANGKOK

A family group of six adults and six children asked the Asia Inspirations team to create a once-in-a-lifetime-tour to Thailand. We can do something similar for you.



Day 1: Depart UK and fly overnight to Bangkok.

Day 2: Arrive in Bangkok.

Day 3: Morning city tour of Bangkok including Wat Pho and the Grand Palace, longtail boat ride on Chao Phraya River and explore the Pak Klong Talaat Flower Market. Dinner with a traditional theatre show.

Day 4: Day at leisure in Bangkok.

Day 5: Early morning visit to Damnoen Saduak Floating Market before experiencing the unique Railway Track Market. Return to Bangkok for an afternoon at leisure. Board the overnight train to Chiang Mai.

Day 6: Arrive in Chiang Mai, spend the day at leisure.

Day 7: Visit Wat Doi Suthep and Wat Chedi Luang. Enjoy a traditional lunch of Khao Soy Noodles. The afternoon is at leisure.

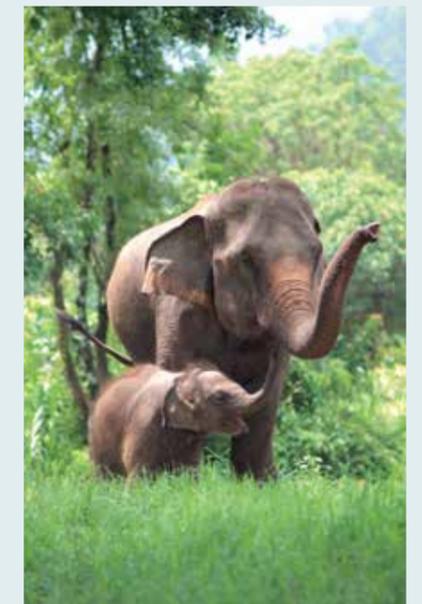
Day 8: Morning visit to Thai Elephant Care Centre before taking a gentle ride down the Ping River by bamboo raft. Enjoy an evening cultural show.

Day 9: Fly to Krabi and transfer to Koh Lanta.

Days 10-15: Days at leisure on Koh Lanta.

Day 16: Fly back to Bangkok.

Day 17: Fly Bangkok to UK.

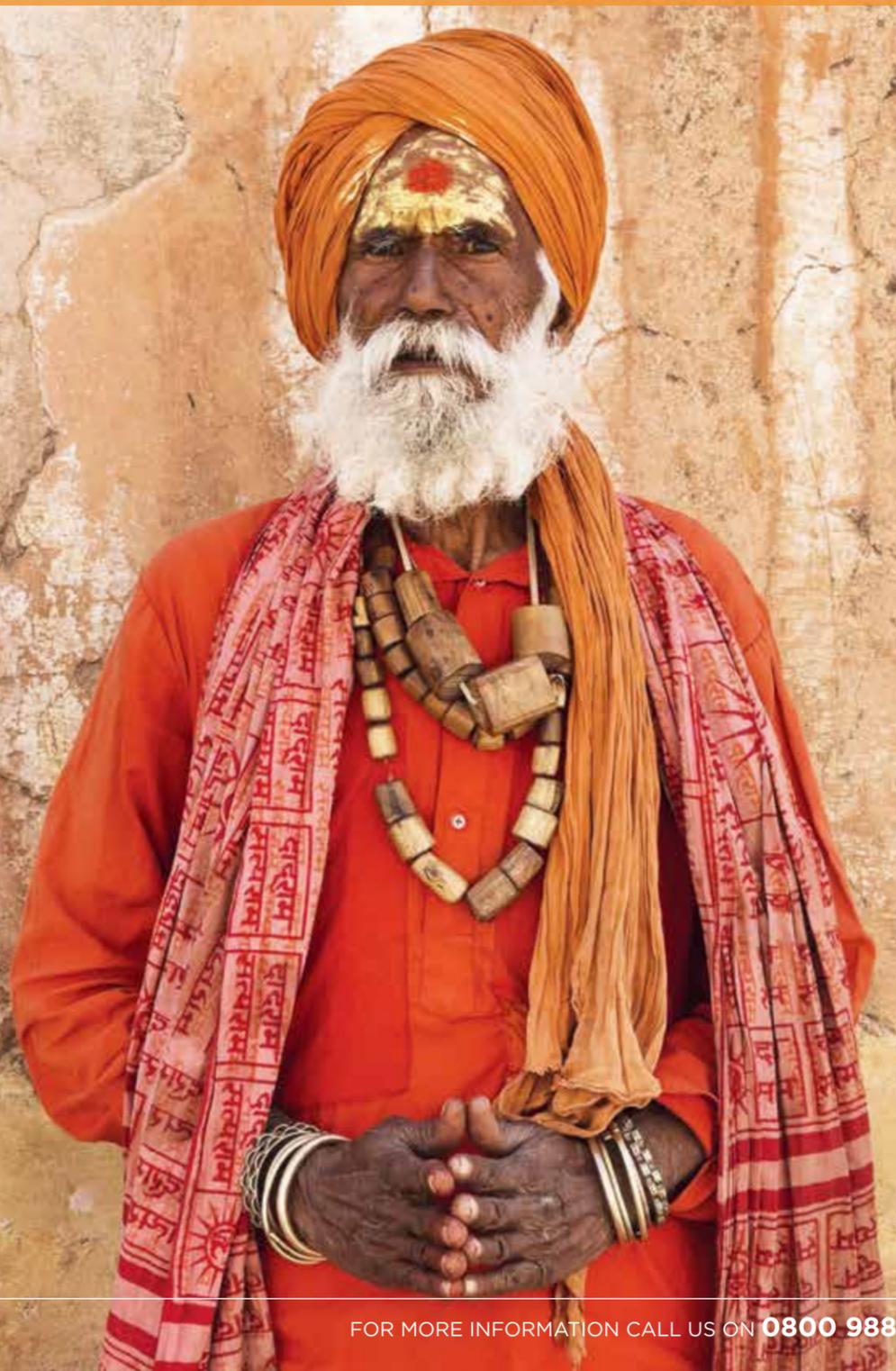




INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

INDIA

Reaching from the lofty peaks of the Himalayas to the sparkling blue of the Indian Ocean, India's cultural landscapes, as well as its natural ones, are incredibly diverse. Submerge yourself in scenes of extravagant temples, mountain-backed monasteries, rice paddies and spectacular beaches – you'll find colonial echoes entwined with historical Indian culture in a compelling and vivacious mix.



QUICK INFO



APPROX
FLYING TIME
**9 HOURS
DIRECT**



GMT
+5.30



VISA
REQUIRED
YES



CURRENCY
RUPEE

OUR BEST BITS



See all of our India best bits on one inspiring itinerary on **page 192**

GETTING AROUND



Flying is the easiest way to get about. Delhi to Kerala takes three hours.



For ultimate comfort and convenience we will supply you with a private car and driver for sightseeing.



Travelling by train is the Indian experience. You get to see and experience a lot of Indian life as you go.

WHEN TO TRAVEL



India's weather is extremely varied. The climate is dominated by the monsoon. Working northwards from May to October, it brings downpours, humidity and bursts of hot sunshine. The east coast gets more rain between October and December but once this has passed, most of the country enjoys clear skies and good temperatures. Winter means cold winds in the north but is a scorcher in the south.

| JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|
| ★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ |

★ Travel is possible
★★ Good time to travel
★★★ Ideal travel conditions

ACCOMMODATION

Mid-range and high end options offer all of your creature comforts, and there are plenty of luxury hotels, ranging from smart, western-style places to the top international names. For a more Indian experience, stay in one of the many fantastic heritage properties that dot the country. Forts, palaces, hunting lodges, colonial bungalows and more have all been converted into comfortable, atmospheric accommodation, perfect for those looking for a taste of a golden age. **Keep an eye out for our handy Top 5 hotel lists on some India destination pages!**



Take two days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Red Fort, Chandni Chowk Bazaar, Jama Masjid, Narayan Hindu Temple, Humayun's Tomb, Connaught Markets. **Day 2:** India Gate, Rajpath, Gandhi Smriti, Qutub Minar, Lodi Gardens.

DELHI

Delhi is endowed with a roguish charm; a mishmash of different eras, from Mughals to colonials, there is a wealth of forts, temples and bazaars to explore. Pass along the stately Rajpath through the legacy of the British in New Delhi and dive headlong into the colourful chaos of Old Delhi in a city that offers the perfect introduction to India.



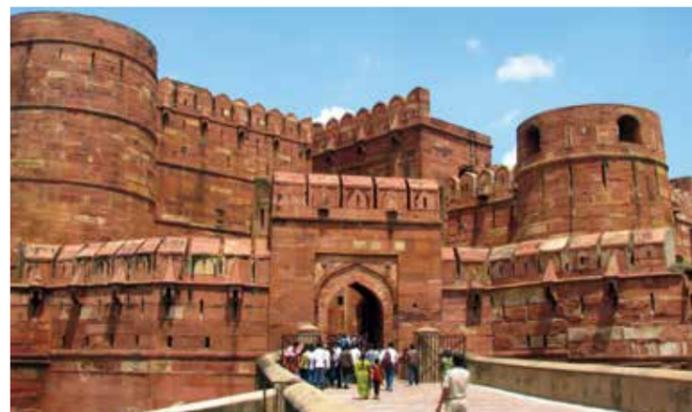
See how to add Delhi into your itinerary from page 192



▲ Red Fort

Considered the very pinnacle of Mughal architectural vision, the Red Fort, constructed in red sandstone, was completed in 1648 by Emperor Shah Jahan as a paradisiacal complex of palaces, pavilions and landscaped gardens. The last Mughal emperor was forced to leave in 1857. The complex today is just as delightful - some buildings now house museums.

Learn more about the fort's history with the evening sound and light show.



Jama Masjid ►

India's largest mosque, with a courtyard able to hold 25,000 worshippers, Jama Masjid sits above old Delhi on its hilltop perch. Built between 1644 and 1658 by Shah Jahan, the mosque is magnificently constructed of layered red sandstone and crowned with three huge white marble domes.

Climb one of the two 20 metre minarets flanking the main prayer hall for excellent views over the city (women can only ascend accompanied by a man).



◀ Chandni Chowk

The area known as Old Delhi today roughly corresponds to the city built by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan. A vibrant and chaotic place to explore, Chandni Chowk is Old Delhi's main thoroughfare and most famous shopping strip. Full to bursting with stores selling everything from saris, to souvenirs to electronics.

We can add a night walking tour of the area into your time in Delhi - you'll see the city at its most alive and get to taste a range of delicious Delhi treats.



Lutyens' Delhi ►

In 1912 the British decided to move their seat of power from Calcutta to Delhi. Planned by Sir Edwin Lutyens, New Delhi was finally completed in 1929. Admire the Rashtrapati Bhavan, the official residence of India's president, designed by Lutyens as the centre piece, before strolling down the Rajpath (or King's Way) through a vast, green open space to Lutyens' India Gate.



▲ Lodi Gardens

A welcome escape from Delhi's sensory assault, the beautiful Lodi Gardens was landscaped by Lady Willingdon, the wife of India's Governor-General, around a number of tombs and temples of the Sayyid and Lodi rulers. The wonderfully atmospheric structures scattered throughout the park were built in the 15th century and, in their crumbling grandeur are rare examples of the architecture of pre-Mughal Sayyid and Lodi dynasties. This is also the place to people watch - a lot of Delhiites use the park to exercise, relax and meet friends.

★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



1. Maidens Hotel ★★★★★
2. Le Meridien New Delhi ★★★★★
3. The Surya ★★★★★
4. The Royal Plaza ★★★★
5. The Manor ★★★



Take two days to see the best bits.

Day 1: Taj Mahal, Agra Fort, Sadar Bazaar. Day 2: Fatehpur Sikri.

AGRA

The city of Agra is best known for the Taj Mahal, a building that is as beautiful as the stories suggest. Whilst seeing the Taj Mahal is an absolute must, Agra has so much more to offer. Once the capital of the empire, the Mughal's left behind a magnificent legacy in the form of a fort, tombs and mausoleums.



See how to add Agra into your itinerary from **page 192**

▲ Taj Mahal

It's not often that you find that the hype surrounding a major sight is true, but the Taj Mahal is as beautiful as the stories say. This is India's most iconic building; a monument to love built by Shah Jahan as a mausoleum for his third wife Mumtaz Mahal.

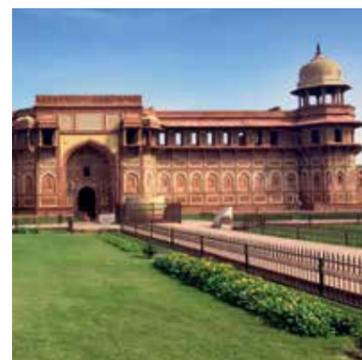
Let us add a guided dawn visit to the Taj Mahal - it is the least busy time and you can glimpse the white marble edifice reflecting the moods of the sky as the sun rises.



Agra Fort ►

This magnificent 16th-century Mughal monument dominates the bank of the Yamuna River a kilometre upstream from the Taj Mahal. Built in red sandstone, this was the imperial city of the Mughal rulers when Agra was their capital. Within the huge two kilometre round walls you'll find intricate palaces, spacious audience halls and two exquisite mosques.

Return in the evening for the sound and light show - the commentary guides you through Mughal history.



◀ Fatehpur Sikri

Located 40 kilometres from Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, the City of Victory, was founded in the late 16th century to replace Agra as the Mughal's capital. This honour only lasted 14 years for reasons that aren't fully understood and the city was abandoned. The architecture of Fatehpur Sikri is magnificent, a fusion of Muslim and Hindu styles, and the best preserved Mughal architecture in India. It is also home to one of India's largest mosques, which is still in use today.



National Parks can often be visited on a day trip - to explore deeper, why not spend a night or two in a nearby town or city.

RANTHAMBORE



There are two national parks easily accessible from the Golden Triangle route - Ranthambore and Keoladeo Ghana. Ranthambore is India's most famous and accessible park for spotting Bengal tigers whilst Keoladeo Ghana is a bird spotters' paradise. Both can add a little extra excitement to your India itinerary.



▲ Ranthambore National Park

One of India's most famous and popular national parks, Ranthambore is best known for its population of Bengal tigers. There are around 50 of these majestic creatures here and they are known for being relatively easy to spot amongst the wilderness of the park. Perfectly located and easily accessible near Jaipur, the park is also home to plenty of other wonderful animals, including leopards, nilgai, sloth bear and over 300 species of bird. The park is open from 1 October to 30 June annually.



▲ Keoladeo Ghana National Park

A duck hunting reserve in the 1850s, the Keoladeo Ghana National Park is today seen as one of the world's most important breeding and feeding grounds for birds. About 360 different species have been spotted here, but it's in October to February particularly that the wetlands are full of migratory birds, including the rare Siberian crane. Located close to Agra, the park has been UNESCO-listed since 1985.



Take twelve days to see the best bits. Day 1: Alsisar. Day 2: Bikaner. Days 3-4: Jaisalmer. Day 5: Thar Desert. Days 6-7: Jodhpur. Days 8-9: Udaipur. Day 10: Pushkar. Days 11-12: Jaipur.

RAJASTHAN

The 'Land of Kings', Rajasthan is India's largest state. Largely desert, the starkness of the land only serves to make the bright colours of the state shine more radiantly, be those hues from the ornate saris of local women, the stalls of bustling bazaars heaving with cloth and spices or the buildings of the cities themselves. Crowned with colossal hill forts and jewelled with opulent palaces, Rajasthan is India at its most exotic.



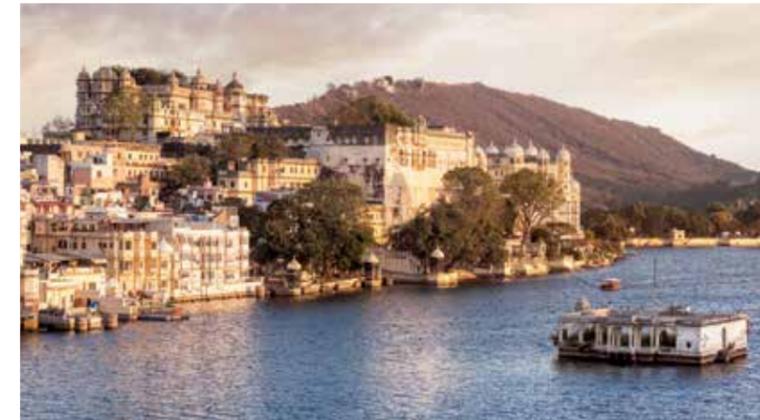
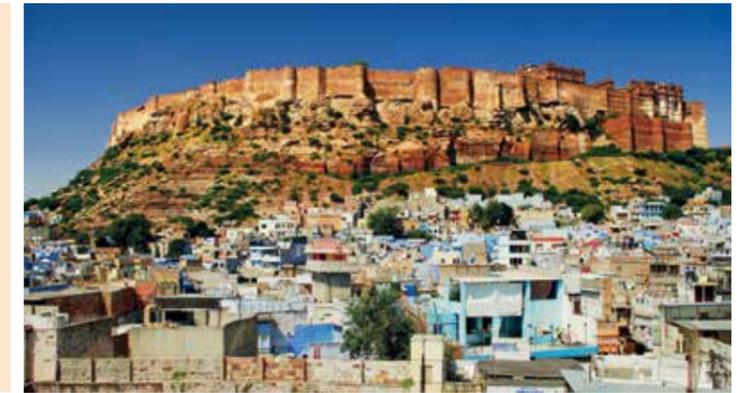
▲ Jaipur

Rajasthan's capital, Jaipur is the third corner of India's fabled Golden Triangle. A city of extravagant architecture, many of Jaipur's buildings are painted pink, earning it the moniker the 'Pink City'. It also has a vibrant street life, especially at its heart in the old walled quarter. The iconic Hawa Mahal, the City Palace complex and UNESCO-listed Jantar Mantar are also must see whilst just outside of the city is one of Rajasthan's most famous hillforts, the magnificent Amber Fort.



Jodhpur ►

The 'Blue City' of Rajasthan, Jodhpur clusters around its magnificent fort, Mehrangah. It sits on a sandstone plinth with Jodhpur's medieval old city bustling around its base, a jumble of streets crammed with houses, shops, bazaars and spice markets. Outside of the old walls, the modern city sprawls out into the Thar Desert, where there are plenty of opportunities to experience rural Rajasthani life or to even take a camel safari.



◀ Udaipur

Set on the shores of Lake Pichola, Udaipur is considered India's most romantic city. Admire the intricate palaces and temples from a boat on the lake - you'll cruise past the fairytale Lake Palace, whilst wandering the narrow, colourful streets is a busy but rewarding way to explore. Head into the City Palace, an expanse of towers, balconies and lovely gardens for a taste of the elaborate life of Udaipur's maharanas.

Pushkar ►

Built on the shores of a holy lake, Pushkar has a delightful air of the mystical. As a popular Hindu place of pilgrimage, it boasts over 500 temples and 52 huge ghats on the waterfront for ritual bathing. When the camels come to town for the world's largest camel market (annually in November) it's a one of a kind experience.



▲ Jaisalmer

A vision of a golden citadel rising out of the sands of the desert within Jaisalmer's walls are a maze of streets full of beautiful 18th and 19th century havelis. These surround a spectacular royal palace, all built from golden sandstone. Amongst the bustling markets and bazaars, you'll mix with the brightly garbed locals, whilst outside the city you can explore the desert, even taking a camel safari if you fancy!

★ TOP 5 HERITAGE HOTELS ★



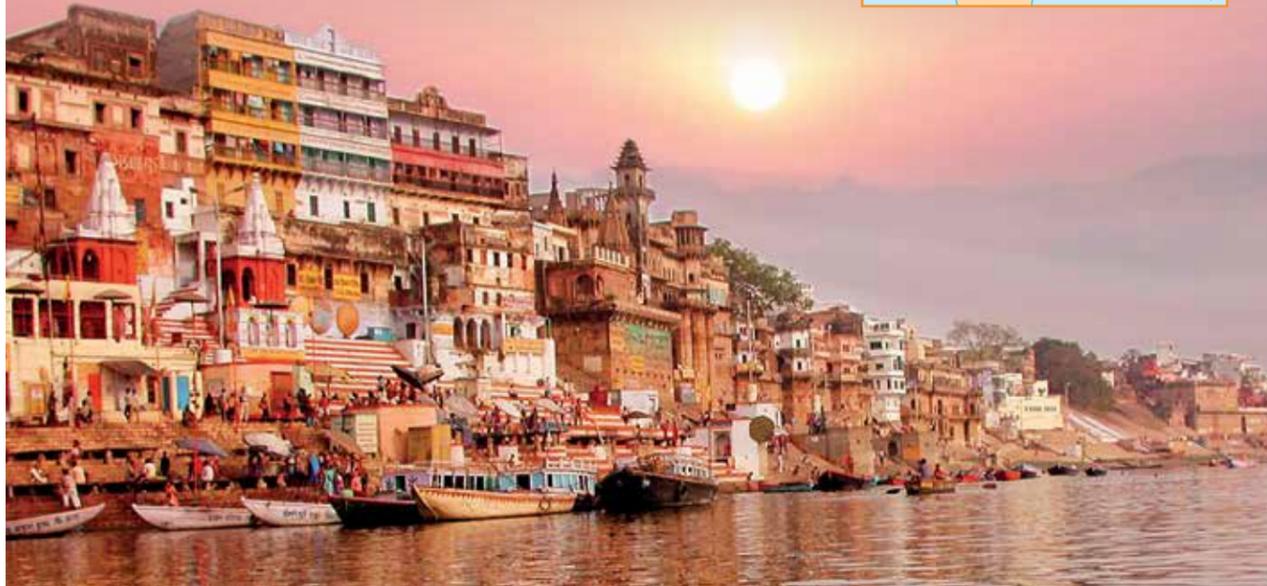
1. Taj Rambagh Palace, Jaipur ★★★★★
2. Umaid Bhawan Palace, Jodhpur ★★★★★
3. Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur ★★★★★
4. Samode Haveli, Jaipur ★★★★★
5. Gorbandh Palace, Jaisalmer ★★★



Take two days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Ghats, rickshaw ride through streets, puja ceremony. **Day 2:** Dawn Ganges boat trip, Bharat Mata Mandir, Durga Temple, Sarnath.

VARANASI

The sacred city of Varanasi, sat on the holy River Ganges, is one of the world's oldest settlements. Stumbling back from its great riverfront ghats in a series of ancient labyrinthine alleyways this is a rich and magical place to explore, laying life, death and ritual starkly bare.



▲ Ghats

The ghats are the most vibrant area of Varanasi, offering an introduction to the rituals and traditions of the city. There are about 87 ghats running the length of the west bank of the Ganges, used for bathing, puja ceremonies and cremation – Varanasi is the most auspicious place for Hindus to be cremated. A boat trip on the Ganges is the best way to experience the sights and sounds of the ghats and appreciate the variety of architecture on the waterfront – sunrise is a particularly good time.

Visit Dashashwamedh ghat at sunset to see the nightly river worship ceremony (Ganga aarti).



◀ Temples

It is estimated that there are a staggering 23,000 temples in Varanasi. The most important temple is Vishwanath which was built in 1776 and has 800 kilograms of gold covering its tower and dome. Whilst many of the temples are closed to visitors, part of Varanasi's appeal is exploring the old alleyways – this way you'll come across a colourful, bustling temple on every corner.

Sarnath ▶

Just 10 kilometres north of Varanasi, Sarnath was the site of Buddha's first ever sermon after he found enlightenment. Religious tensions and invasion in the 12th century caused it to disappear. Rediscovered in 1835, Sarnath is once again thriving.

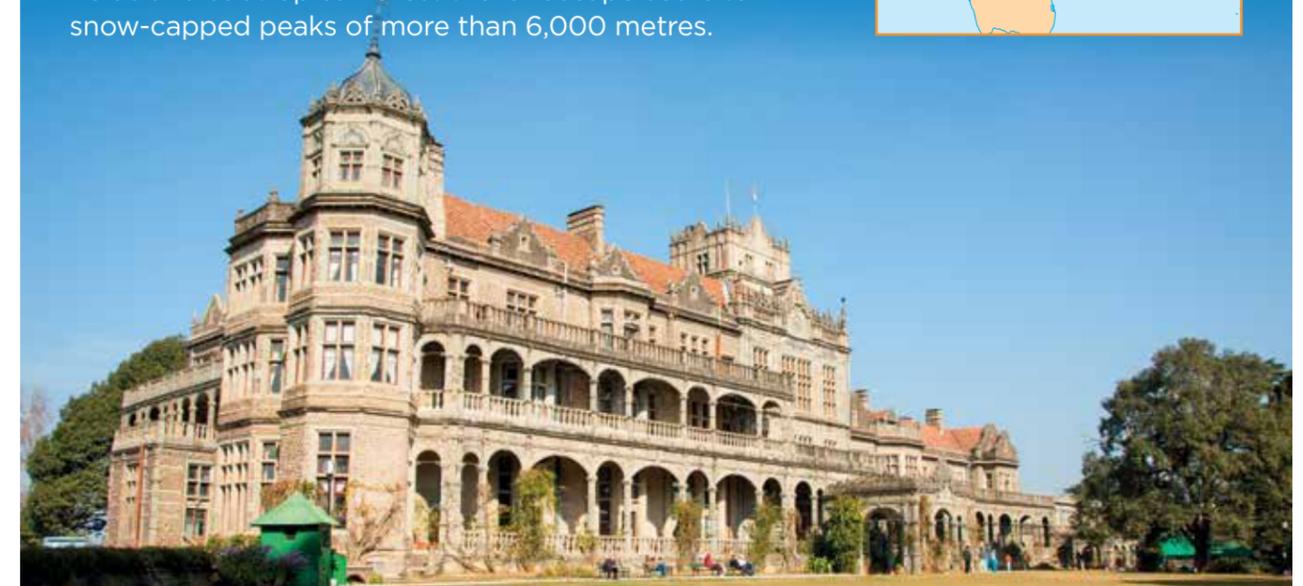
We can add on entrance to the Archaeological Museum, where you can admire many ancient treasures.



Take twelve days to see the best bits. **Days 1-2:** Amritsar. **Days 3-5:** Dharamsala and McLeod Ganj. **Days 6-8:** Manali. **Days 9-10:** Shimla. **Days 11-12:** Rishikesh.

HIMACHAL PRADESH

The northern state of Himachal Pradesh is much acclaimed for its abundant natural beauty - from lush fields and subtropical forest the landscape soars to snow-capped peaks of more than 6,000 metres.



▲ Shimla

Himachal Pradesh's capital, Shimla sprawls over a ridge deep in the spectacular Himalayan foothills. India's largest hill station, the British made it their official summer capital, their legacy found in colonial architecture and a quaint atmosphere. Along the main street, The Mall, there are a number of excellent examples of colonial architecture. Stroll the gardens of Viceregal Lodge, the official summer residence of the British Viceroys, and wander up to Jakhu Temple, dedicated to the monkey god Hanuman, where resident rheus macaques like to wreak havoc.



◀ Manali

A chilled out town set at the head of Kullu Valley and surrounded by orchards, pine forests and snowcapped peaks, Manali has been a traveller's haven since the 1970s. Whilst its hippie roots are gradually fading, the reasons for visiting Manali are still prominent – the thermal springs and mountain views.

Manali is an excellent base for trekking in the Himalayan foothills – we can organise a trekking guide for you.

Dharamsala & McLeod Ganj

In 1960, on fleeing Tibet, the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government set up in Dharamsala. This former British hill station spread across the woody ridges of the Dhauladhar Mountains is now home to a large Tibetan population and the largest temple outside of Tibet, Tsuglughang. Whilst Lower Dharamsala has little of interest, four kilometres and 1,000 metres farther uphill, Upper Dharamsala, or McLeod Ganj, is a popular place to stay, it's relaxed and friendly atmosphere well known. As well as the Tsuglughang Monastery, there is a fascinating little museum on the history of Tibet and plenty of spectacular views to admire.



Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Fort area, Heritage Mile, Flora Fountain, Kala Ghoda.
Day 2: Gateway of India, Marine Drive, Chhatrapati Shivaji Vastu Sangrahalaya, Dhobi Ghat, Crawford Market.

MUMBAI

Since the opening of the Suez Canal, Mumbai has been India's economic powerhouse. Also home to the world's largest film industry, the trappings of the city's success can be seen everywhere, juxtaposing sharply with its vibrant shanty towns.



▲ Colonial Mumbai

Mumbai's collection of architecture is India's most eclectic, but it is the colonial edifices that are most impressive. You'll find Victorian Neo-Gothic in the Fort area, including the magnificent Victoria Terminus and many a masterpiece on the Heritage Mile in the old city. Then there's the iconic Gateway of India and plenty of beautiful Art Deco apartment blocks along Marine Drive.



◀ Museums and Galleries

Mumbai is home to some of India's best museums and galleries. Wander the traditional arts district of Kala Ghoda and visit the National Museum of Modern Art, try the decorative arts at Dr Bhaw Daji Lad Mumbai City Museum, whilst you shouldn't miss the biggest and best museum, Chhatrapati Shivaji Vastu Sangrahalaya.

◀ Ajanta and Ellora Caves

Close to the city of Aurangabad, 50 minutes by plane or 7 hours by train from Mumbai, hide two of India's artistic treasures. Ajanta's Buddhist frescoes were created over 2,000 years ago, whilst nearby Ellora's series of monasteries, temples and chapels contain some of the most intricate and remarkably detailed carvings by Buddhist, Hindu and Jain monks.



Three nights is always a good amount of time to relax on a beach after your explorations, but just tell us the amount of time you'd like flat out on the sand and we'll sort it!

GOA

India's smallest state, lapped by the gorgeous waters of the Arabian Sea, Goa is a little slice of paradise. A Portuguese enclave until 1961, the rhythms of life still reflect these colonial days, whilst the laidback and languid atmosphere is truly tropical.



▼ Goa beaches

For those moments inbetween lying-flat-out-on-golden-sands-in-the-shade-of-swaying-palms, Goa has a wealth of culture and heritage to keep you entertained. Visit fragrant spice plantations, take a relaxed hike to a waterfall or head into one of the little old towns to nose around centuries-old churches and colonial buildings. One interesting visit is Old Goa, the former Portuguese capital which was abandoned in the 17th century. Although little remains you are able to visit the tomb of St Francis Xavier in the Basilica of Bom Jesus.

Add a few days in Goa on any India itinerary





Take four days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Pelling. **Day 2:** Khecheopalri Lake, Kanchenjunga Falls. **Day 3:** Travel to Gangtok, Tashiding Monastery. **Day 4:** Gangtok.

SIKKIM

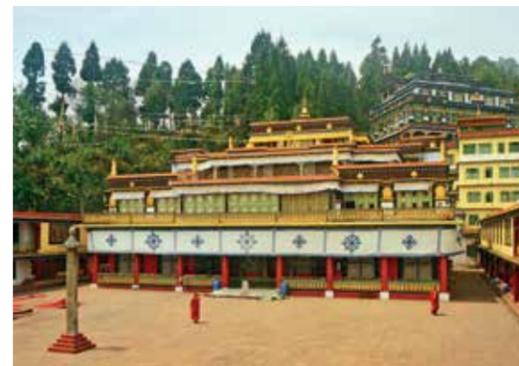
Encompassing deep rhododendron-filled valleys to sky-scraping peaks, the state of Sikkim sits amongst the colossal Himalayas. Formerly an independent Buddhist kingdom, the religion's presence is still prominent in everyday life with over 200 monasteries dotted amongst the unspoiled landscapes.



▲ Gangtok

Sikkim's capital is no ordinary city. Perched on a mountain ridge, Gangtok tumbles down a hillside of steep tiers and on a clear day has fantastic mountain views, including of mighty Khangchendzonga. Gangtok's Buddhist roots are deep, lending it a laidback and colourful atmosphere – it is the perfect place to relax after the heat and bustle of India's lowland cities. Head 24 kilometres out to Rumtek, Sikkim's largest and most important 'gompas' or Tibet monastery.

We'd recommend the excellent collection of Tibetan and Buddhist artefacts at the Institute of Tibetology.



◀ Pelling

Sitting at an altitude of 2,150 metres, travellers are just starting to catch on to Pelling's tour de force – its Himalayan views. Head to the lookout point at dawn or dusk for the very best views. Nestled on a high ridge above forested hills this hill station is charmingly quiet. Just two kilometres away is Pemayangtse another of Sikkim's most important monasteries. The views and its position amongst tracts of woodland add to the monastery's tranquillity.

Pelling has easy access to a number of walks and treks in the surrounding virgin landscapes.



Take six days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Kolkata. **Day 2:** Travel to Siliguri. **Days 3-4:** Darjeeling. **Day 5:** Kalimpong. **Day 6:** Gorumara National Park.

DARJEELING & WEST BENGAL

West Bengal stretches from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal, encompassing tea plantations and hill stations, swamps and cities. The state flourished under British rule, producing some of India's greatest intellectuals.



▲ Darjeeling

The archetypal Indian hill station, Darjeeling nestles amongst tea plantations on a high ridge, watched over by the many faces of the Himalayas. During the British Raj Darjeeling was one of the most glamorous destinations in India. There are walks ranging in difficulty, and the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute is fascinating.

We will add the unmissable Darjeeling Mountain Railway (Toy Train) onto your itinerary!

Kalimpong

Offering a different hill station experience, Kalimpong is a bustling bazaar town. Walking in the landscapes around Kalimpong may bring you face-to-face with the indigenous Lepcha community, whilst the local horticultural industry is blossoming. You can also visit Dr. Graham's home, an orphanage and school founded in 1900.



◀ Kolkata

Kolkata sprawls along the Hooghly River on the plains of the lower Ganges Delta, 600 kilometres from Darjeeling. During the British Raj this was the great colonial city of the Orient. Today it exudes all the noise, colour and chaos of any Indian city, with a laidback and cosmopolitan twist. Considered India's cultural capital – discover grand colonial architecture, join the local people in the Maidan and enjoy the eclectic collection of the Indian Museum.

We can help you get off the tourist trail with a walking tour that takes you deep into the heart of the city.



Take seven days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Munnar. **Day 2:** Eravikulam National Park, Thekkady. **Day 3:** Periyar National Park. **Days 4-5:** Backwaters. **Days 6-7:** Kochi.

KERALA

Kerala is India's most dazzling state – from the lush green of its landscapes to the vivid colours of the traditional rituals and festivals. Arriving here is to see the pace slow down – with a 600 kilometre coastline of beaches lapped gently by the Arabian Sea it's easy to drop into the rhythm.



See how to add Kerala into your itinerary from **page 192**

▲ Kerala's backwaters

Gliding leisurely through Kerala's fabled backwaters gives a fascinating glimpse of daily life in this unique area – a web of lakes, lagoons, canals and rivers. The waters are best explored in a traditional kettuvalam (houseboat). Primarily used for the transportation of goods, today these boats are an integral part of the Kerala experience.

We highly recommend spending the night on a houseboat and enjoying the authentic cuisine cooked fresh by your host.



Kochi ▶

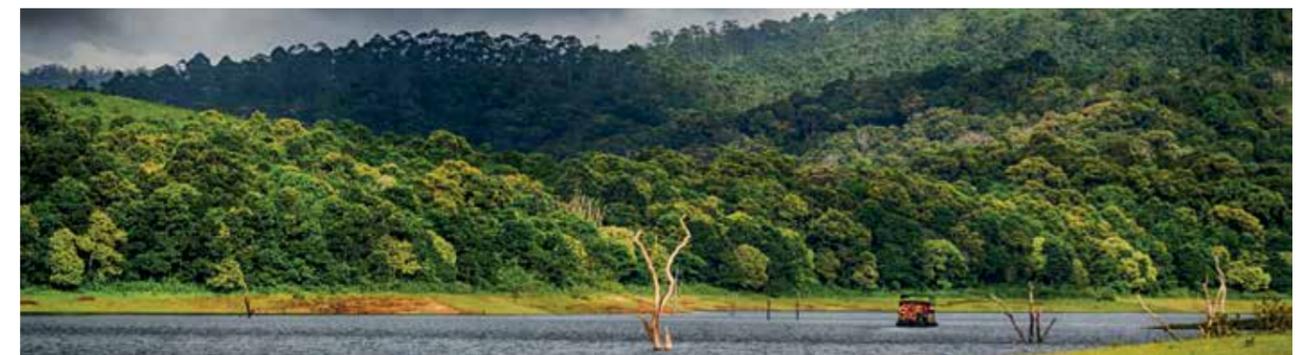
Strung across islands and peninsulas between the Malabar Coast and the backwaters, all linked together by bridges and ferries, Kochi is one of India's most delightful cities. Founded by the Portuguese and consolidated by the Dutch East India Company as a trading port, the old Fort Cochin district is a patchwork of world influences, from Chinese fishing nets to Raj to Portuguese houses.

Kochi is a centre of Kerala arts, let us organise you a visit to watch an elaborate performance of kathakali dance-drama.



◀ Kovalum

Kerala's top, and most developed beach resort, Kovalum's four golden sandy bays and excellent range of accommodation options are what makes this spot so popular. It is also just 30 minutes by road from the state capital Trivandrum and perfectly positioned to explore the Ayurveda treatments offered in the surrounding area.



▲ National Parks

Kerala has many sanctuaries and parks, each protecting some aspect of the state's biodiversity and multiple habitats. Periyar National Park is Kerala's largest – set in the Cardamom Hills, it is first and foremost an elephant and tiger reserve. Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary encompasses Vembanad Lake and wetlands and it particularly good for spotting migratory birds. Eravikulam National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and 26 species of mammal call its high rolling hill plateau home. And these are just our favourites!

★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



1. **Vivanta by Taj** ★★★★★
2. **Spice Village** ★★★★★
3. **Malabar House** ★★★★★
4. **Abad Whispering Palm** ★★★★★
5. **Travancore Heritage** ★★★★★

SRI LANKA

Travellers have long been enthralled by Sri Lanka's beauty. An island of incredible diversity, delve into a unique culture that draws from Portuguese, Dutch, British, Malay and Arab influences whilst exploring wildlife-rich jungle and timeless ruins. Sri Lanka's fringe of paradisiacal beaches offer the perfect opportunity for total relaxation at the end of your adventures.



QUICK INFO



APPROX
FLYING TIME
**11 HOURS
DIRECT**



GMT
+5.30



VISA
REQUIRED
YES



CURRENCY
RUPEE

OUR BEST BITS



1 Anuradhapura



2 Yala National Park



3 Dambulla



4 Galle



5 Beaches



See our
Sri Lanka best
bits on one
inspiring itinerary
on **page 193**

GETTING AROUND



Travelling by train, though slow, is easy and relaxed.



New highways are opening across Sri Lanka, making travel by road much easier and quicker.



For ultimate comfort and convenience we will supply you with a private car and driver for sightseeing.

WHEN TO TRAVEL



For not a particularly big island, Sri Lanka's weather is a little complicated but it's reasonably safe to assume that there is some good weather somewhere year round. Temperatures are constant, averaging 26° to 30°. Between May and August the west and southwest of the island is hit by the southwest monsoon, whilst between October and January the east is hit by the northeast monsoon.

| JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| ★★★ | ★★★ | ★★★ | ★★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★★ |

★ Travel is possible
★★ Good time to travel
★★★ Ideal travel conditions

ACCOMMODATION

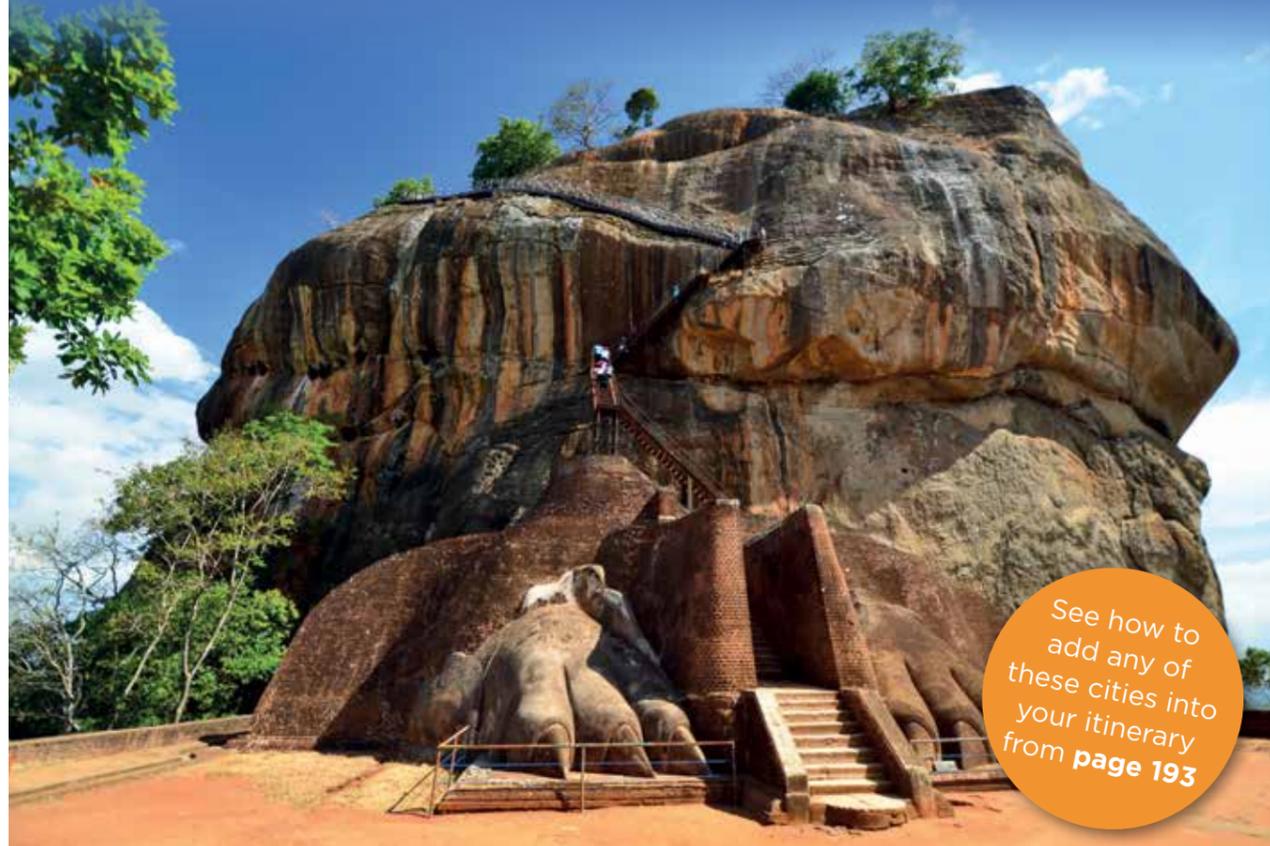
Sri Lanka has a fantastic range of accommodation in all price brackets, from quaint guesthouses to all-out luxury resorts. There are a large number of high-end resorts popping up across the island, some of which are housed in gorgeous colonial mansions, whilst there are also plenty of modern offerings, in architecture designed by local Geoffrey Bawa. Eco-orientated hotels are a concept that is growing fast, and there are already some good options. **Keep an eye out for our handy Top 5 hotel lists on some Sri Lanka destination pages!**



Take four days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Sigiriya Lion Rock. **Day 2:** Polonnaruwa, Gal Vihara rock temples. **Day 3:** Anuradhapura, Isurumuniya rock temple. **Day 4:** Dambulla.

CULTURAL TRIANGLE

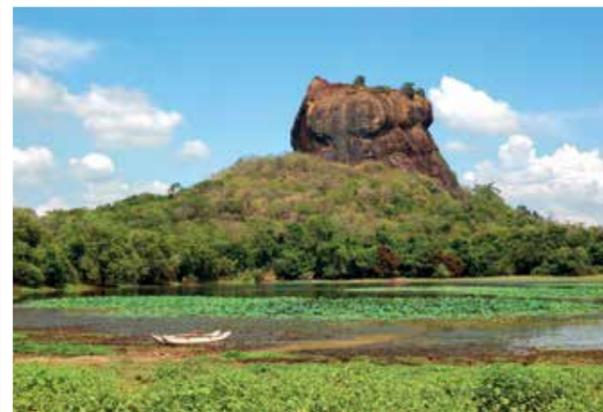
Sri Lanka's cultural triangle stretches between the city of Kandy and the ruins of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, an area traditionally known as The King's Land. Incorporating the ruins of the ancient Sinhalese civilisation this is some of Asia's most richly rewarding and impressive heritage.



See how to add any of these cities into your itinerary from **page 193**

▲ Sigiriya

Sigiriya Rock (or Lion Rock) rises sheer out of Sri Lanka's central plains, towering to 180 metres over the surrounding landscape. On the top of the rock you will find the ruins of the palace of King Kassappa who reigned over a short-lived kingdom from 477 to 495AD. Reached by passing between two giant paws and making your way through a series of galleries and up staircases, stop to admire the magnificent frescoes as you ascend. Around the base of the rock you'll find the remains of Kassappa's pleasure gardens whilst the site museum is excellent. Sigiriya was made a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1982.



Polonnaruwa ▶

Established in 993 AD, the ancient capital of Polonnaruwa reached its peak in an age of magnificence in the 12th century when it was a thriving garden city. It was abandoned and left to the jungle after successive rulers bankrupted themselves with excess and threats of invasion came from southern India. The ruins are excellently preserved, an extensive archaeological park packed with hundreds of ancient structures with the royal palace at its heart, giving an intriguing peek at a medieval Sri Lankan kingdom.



◀ Anuradhapura

An expansive complex of architectural and archaeological treasures, Anuradhapura has a magic all of its own. The city prospered for over 1,300 years and was the hub of the golden age of Sinhalese culture – at its peak it was one of the world's greatest monastic cities. Abandoned in 993, the ruins aren't as well preserved as Polonnaruwa but there is an added vibrancy in the fact that some structures are still used for worship and pilgrimage.

▼ Dambulla

Dambulla is home to a cave monastery that has been a holy place of Buddhist worship for 22 centuries. Located at the heart of the cultural triangle, within five cave sanctuaries you'll find Sri Lanka's most important Buddha images, in the form of murals and statues. As well as being an essential cultural visit that perfectly highlights Sri Lanka's devotion to Buddhism, the caves are also an excellent place to enjoy some peace and tranquillity.



★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★



1. Aliya Resort & Spa ★★★★★
2. Heritage Kandalama ★★★★★
3. Amaya Lake ★★★★★
4. Kassapa Lions Rock Resort ★★★
5. Hotel Sigiriya ★★



Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Botanical Gardens, Temple of the Tooth, National Museum, evening puja. **Day 2:** Mahaweli River expedition, Ceylon Tea Factory.

KANDY

Set tranquilly amongst the forests and plantations at the heart of the island, Kandy is far and away Sri Lanka's cultural capital. The city has its own unique music, dress and architecture, a legacy of years resisting the colonial rule of the Portuguese and Dutch, and is home to Sri Lanka's most sacred place of worship – the Temple of the Tooth.



▲ Temple of the Tooth

Set on the lakeshore east of Kandy's centre, the Temple of the Tooth is resplendent with its gold roof. This is Sri Lanka's most important Buddhist shrine, originally built in the 16th century to house an object of devotion – Buddha's tooth. Rebuilt and embellished many times, the temple you see today is an amalgamation of additions made over the centuries, however the devoutness though is just as strong as it has always been.

Visit the World Buddhism Museum on the temple complex.



◀ City centre

Head to the National Museum to learn about Sinhalese life, browse the busy street markets and wander through the Udawattakelle Sanctuary, a forest of huge trees, monkeys and good bird spotting.

We can help you experience Kandyan dancing and drumming whilst you're here – the iconic Sri Lanka performing art.

◀ Around Kandy

There are a number of interesting sights just outside of Kandy that are worth a visit. Just four kilometres south of the city is the Ceylon Tea Museum housed in the 1925 Hantana Tea Factory, containing tea-based exhibitions and vintage tea processing equipment. Head west from Kandy for five kilometres and you'll find the Botanical Gardens, renowned for an extensive number of orchid species. As a whole, over 4,000 different types of plant are cultivated here.



Take one day to see the best bits. Day 1: Fort District, Pettah Market, Dutch Church of Wolfendhall, Kelaniya Buddhist Temple, Davatagaha, Colombo Museum, Natural History Museum.

COLOMBO

Colombo is the perfect introduction to contemporary Sri Lanka whilst also offering a glimpse of times gone by. Whilst not the most picturesque city, Colombo's coastal location and brash character make it a delight to explore – from the bustling bazaars and the chic new eateries, galleries and museums of the old quarters.



▲ Colonial Colombo

Ruled by the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British, Sri Lanka and particularly Colombo has a treasure trove of colonial architecture. The old Fort area, now the city's CBD, was the centre of administration for both the Dutch and English – many of the grand old buildings are used by the present day government. The Old Dutch Hospital is an early 17th-century complex beautifully restored and today full of shops, cafés and restaurants, whilst just two kilometres away you'll find the 1749 Wolfendael Church.



Museums

The National Museum is packed with artefacts of ancient Ceylon, giving a fascinating glimpse into Sri Lanka's eventful past – look out for the throne and crown of the Kandyan monarchs. Housed in a 17th-century Dutch residence, the Dutch Period Museum houses lovely Dutch colonial furniture, whilst for contemporary Sri Lanka art, you should head for the Saskia Fernando Gallery.

The Traditional Puppet Art Museum, an old entertainment in Sri Lanka villages, you'll find a number of beautifully decorated puppets on display.

▲ Pettah

As cosmopolitan as Colombo may be becoming, there is still a taste of a vibrant past amongst the streets of the bazaar district of Pettah. This neighbourhood is home to mostly Tamils and Muslims giving it a different flavour and is a colourful place to explore. Set out in a typical bazaar layout, each street is dedicated to a different trade – in-between stalls and shops you'll find old mosques, Hindu temples and churches.

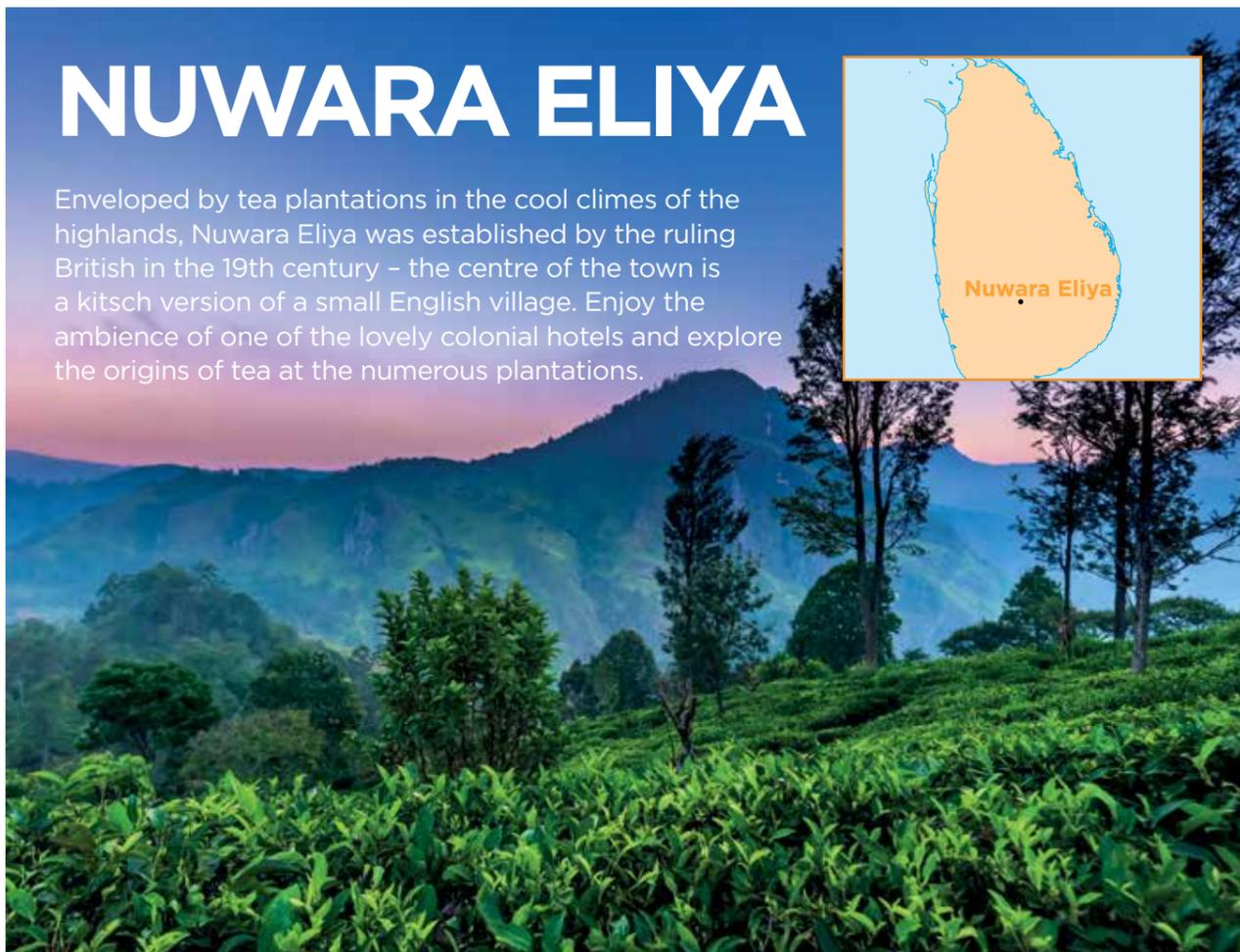
We can add a trip to a local market, to admire the teetering piles of luscious produce.



Take two days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Tea plantation, tea factory, Victoria Park, stroll colonial centre. **Day 2:** Day at leisure to savour the views.

NUWARA ELIYA

Enveloped by tea plantations in the cool climes of the highlands, Nuwara Eliya was established by the ruling British in the 19th century – the centre of the town is a kitsch version of a small English village. Enjoy the ambience of one of the lovely colonial hotels and explore the origins of tea at the numerous plantations.



▲ Tea

Nestled amongst vast tracts of tea-covered hills and valleys, occasionally broken by waterfalls and lush vegetation, Nuwara Eliya is the hub of Sri Lanka's tea production thanks to its cool climate and lashings of rain. Generally, the factories are the originals built in the late 19th century, adding a little heritage to the mix.

Let us add on a guided tour of one of the town's many tea factories – you can walk through the fields, see the machinery and sample a freshly brewed cup.



◀ Town

Nuwara Eliya sits at an altitude of 1,868 metres, founded by the British in the 19th century. As you explore the town you'll see architectural gems such as the Post Office, General's House and the Grand Hotel, where you can have afternoon tea out on the lawn. Victoria Park and Haggala Botanical Gardens are lovely to while away an afternoon, whilst there are also plenty of waterfalls in the surrounding mountains to discover.

◀ Adam's Peak

About 75 kilometres from Nuwara Eliya, Adam's Peak is a celebrated place of pilgrimage – it is believed that a depression at the peak is a footprint, Buddha's to Buddhists, Adam's for Muslims and Shiva's for Hindus. Start climbing the peak's many steps at about 2am to reach the summit for a spectacular sunrise.



Horton Plains National Park and World's End can be visited as a day trip from Nuwara Eliya.

HORTON PLAINS

On a high-altitude plateau at the edge of Sri Lanka's hill country, just 32 kilometres from Nuwara Eliya, the Horton Plains National Park encompasses a unique and fascinating eco-system. The highlands end dramatically at World's End, where sheer cliffs plummet to the lowlands below, giving spectacular views.



▲ Horton Plains National Park

The Horton Plains National Park is a world apart from the rest of Sri Lanka. Encompassing wild, almost barren grassland and pristine cloudforest, at 2,000 metres altitude it is cool, rainswept and often misty but eerily beautiful. Incredibly biodiverse, there are species in the area that can only be found in this area – something to keep an eye out for if you decide to do some hiking here, a popular way to explore. There is a small population of leopards within the park alongside sambar deer and bear-faced monkeys whilst the birdwatching is some of Sri Lanka's best.



▲ World's End

Sri Lanka's hill country simply ends, falling away to the lowlands below – that's where you'll find World's End, 880 metre sheer drop and one of Sri Lanka's most spectacular views. It's a 4 kilometre walk to get here, and the trail loops back a different way past a waterfall, making the entire route 9.5 kilometres. You need to get to World's End pre-9am for the view – you should be able to see the ocean 80 kilometres away, any later and you might hit a wall of mist.



National Parks can often be visited on a day trip – to explore deeper, why not spend a night or two in a nearby town or city.

UDAWALAWE NATIONAL PARK

Udawalawe National Park is all about elephants, and is one of the best places in the world to see them. Centred around the Udawalawe Reservoir, the park's vast stretches of grassland and bush forest means that it is an excellent national park for spotting game, particularly the resident pachyderms. This park is not to be missed!



▲ Udawalawe National Park

Here, you are pretty much guaranteed to see at least one elephant tramping about the vast stretches of grassland. Alongside around 600 elephants, there are also a great many raptors, such as the serpent eagle, herds of wild buffalo and sambar deer that call the park home. If you are exceptionally lucky you might even spot a leopard! The park is best explored on a jeep safari.



▲ Elephant Transit Home

Close to the national park is the wonderful Elephant Transit Home, supported by the Born Free Foundation. The project takes in and prepares orphaned juvenile elephants to be returned to the wild, generally releasing them straight into the national park. The home is open to visitors at feeding time where you can see the boisterous youngsters having their milk and then milling around playing and relaxing.



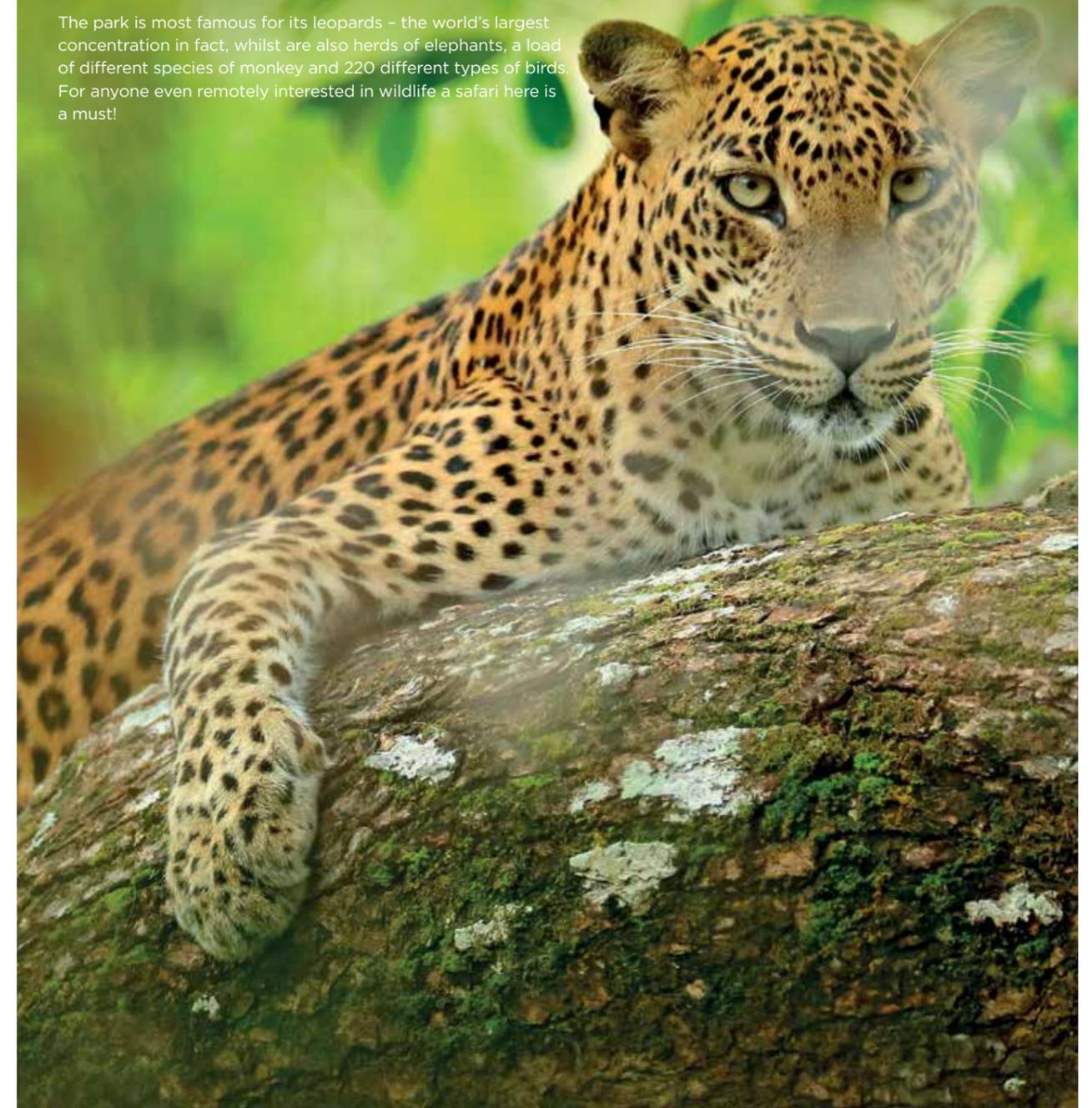
National Parks can often be visited on a day trip – to explore deeper, why not spend a night or two in a nearby town or city.

YALA NATIONAL PARK

Sri Lanka's premiere national park, located on the southeast coast of Sri Lanka, Yala is a huge expanse of dry woodland and open grassland dotted with rocky outcrops and lakes.



The park is most famous for its leopards – the world's largest concentration in fact, whilst there are also herds of elephants, a load of different species of monkey and 220 different types of birds. For anyone even remotely interested in wildlife a safari here is a must!





Take three days to see the best bits. Day 1: Dutch Fort, Galle Lighthouse, Dutch Reformed Church. Days 2-3: Beach time!

GALLE

Galle is a classical European fort plonked in a tropical setting. Once the greatest port of Ceylon, the great bastions of the fort, built by the Dutch, keep the old and the new separate. Built on a promontory, it is a delightful place to wander – the colonial villas and narrow streets offering an atmospheric and old world escape.



▲ Galle Fort

Galle's UNESCO-listed fort is considered the greatest example of a European built fortified city in South Asia. Begun by the Portuguese, strengthened by the Dutch and taken over by the British, the fort has seen a lot of history. Make a circuit of the walls before heading down to street level to see the old gates. Wander the narrow streets to spot Dutch and English colonial architecture before settling down in one of the many cafes.

Make your way to Flag Rock in the early evening to watch the sun drop into the Indian Ocean.

★ TOP 5 HOTELS ★

1. **The Fortress Hotel** ★★★★★
2. **Jetwing Lighthouse** ★★★★
3. **Citrus Hikkaduwa** ★★★★
4. **Hikka Tranz** ★★★★
5. **Calamander Unawatuna Beach** ★★★★



Galle

Galle has a diverse range of sights to enjoy. The Marine Archaeological Museum tells of the town's maritime past - this, along with the National Museum, housed in a 1686 Dutch building, are both within the fort's walls. Outside, try the Dutch Market with its 300 year old columned roof, or the charming St Mary's Cathedral, founded by Jesuits at the end of the 19th century.

If you are in Galle between Nov and Apr, let us add a whale watching trip to your itinerary to allow you to catch whales and dolphins on their annual migration.



Three nights is always a good amount of time to relax on a beach after your explorations, but just tell us the amount of time you'd like flat out on the sand and we'll sort it!

BEACHES

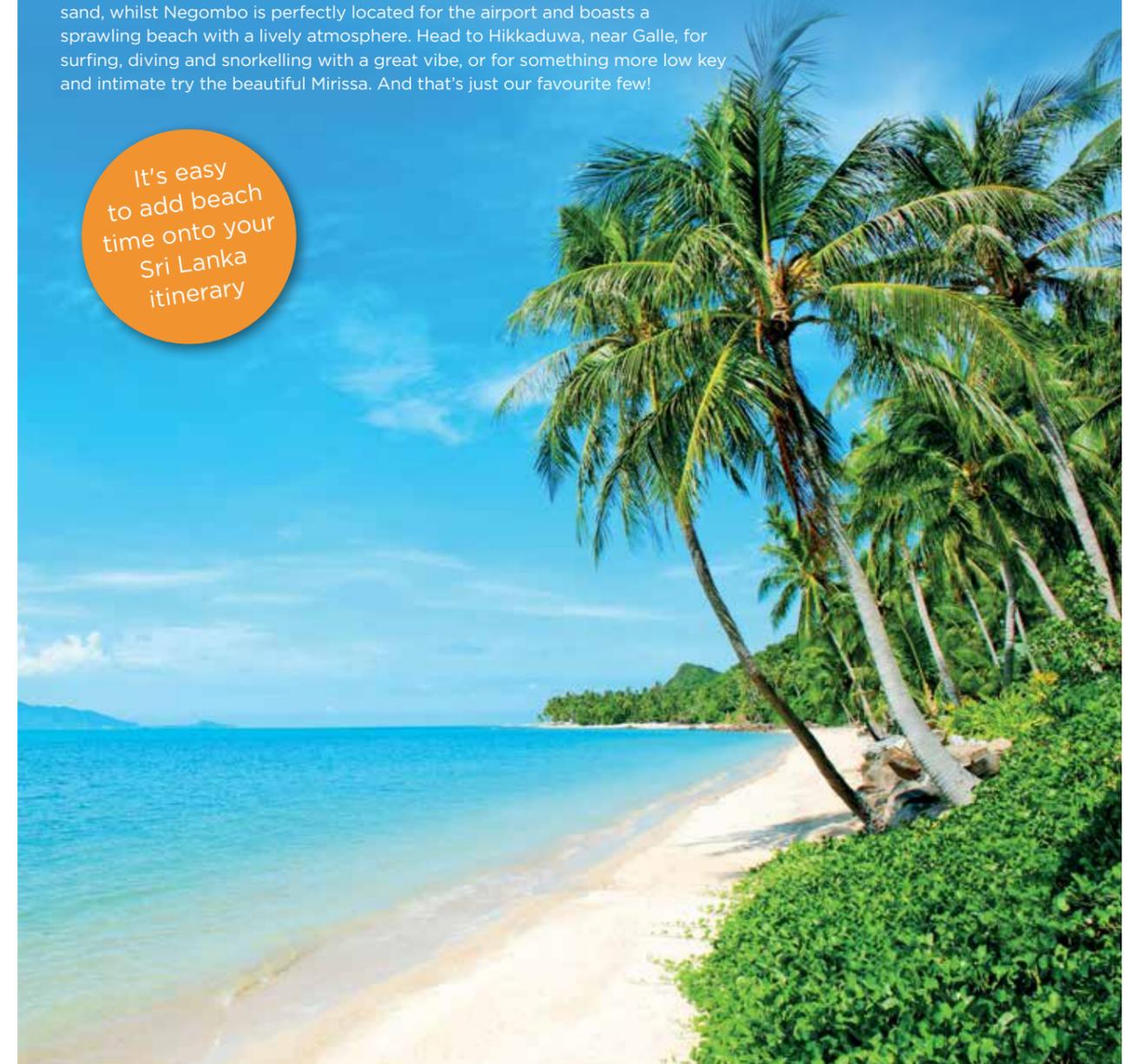
Sri Lanka can boast swathes of gorgeous beaches, ranging from stretches of golden, palm backed sands to untamed, surf-battered and rocky. Head to the west coast for lively, more developed resorts, whilst the south coast offers an altogether quainter, quieter experience.



▼ Beaches

Bentota sits on the relaxed waters of Bentota lagoon on the west coast – popular with package tourists there are a good choice of hotels and plenty of sand, whilst Negombo is perfectly located for the airport and boasts a sprawling beach with a lively atmosphere. Head to Hikkaduwa, near Galle, for surfing, diving and snorkelling with a great vibe, or for something more low key and intimate try the beautiful Mirissa. And that's just our favourite few!

It's easy to add beach time onto your Sri Lanka itinerary



NEPAL

From its towering Himalayan peaks down through the foothills to the steamy, lowland plains of the Terai, Nepal deals one jaw-dropping vista after another. Its heritage is just as diverse and delightful as its landscapes – very little touched by the outside world, the Nepalese people are fiercely proud of their culture. Together these make Nepal both a unique and mesmerising destination.



QUICK INFO



APPROX
FLYING TIME
12 HOURS
INDIRECT



GMT
+5.45



VISA
REQUIRED
YES



CURRENCY
RUPEE

OUR BEST BITS

1 Kathmandu's Durbar Square



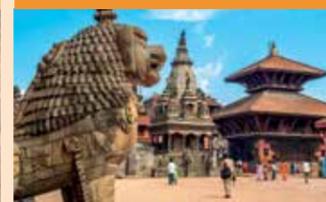
2 Pokhara



3 Chitwan National Park



4 Bhaktapur



5 Bodhnath stupa



See all our Nepal best bits on one inspiring itinerary on **page 193**

GETTING AROUND



There is a good network of domestic flights within Nepal.



The roads are poor but distances are small so driving is still the most convenient way to travel.



For comfort and convenience we will supply a private car and driver for sightseeing and transfers.

WHEN TO TRAVEL



Nepal in autumn (Sep to Nov) sees weather that is clear for great mountain views; in winter (Dec to Jan) it is very cold in the highlands but perfect temperatures in the Terai; spring (Feb to April) is good for wildlife spotting but mountain views can be hazy. Just before the monsoon Nepal gets hot and humid – during the monsoon itself though, the country is at its lushest and most vibrant.

| JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|-----|------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|
| ★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★ | ★★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ |

★ Travel is possible
★★ Good time to travel
★★★ Ideal travel conditions

ACCOMMODATION

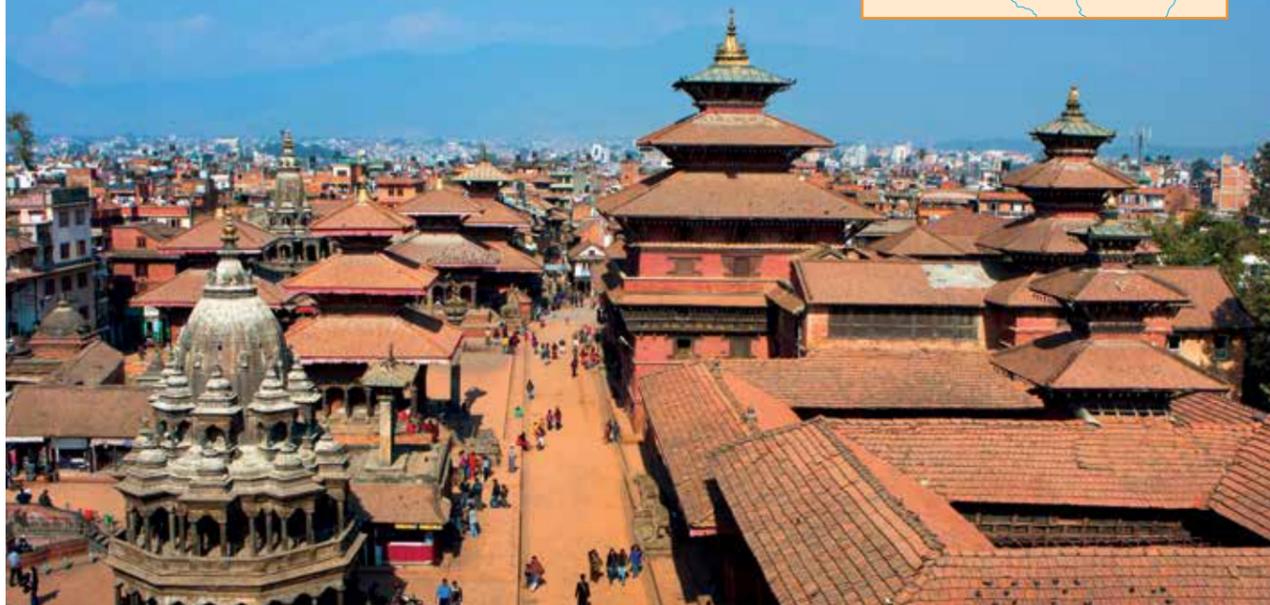
Whilst Nepal has a lot of accommodation; there isn't a whole lot of variety. Guesthouses offer simple, comfortable rooms, whilst higher end hotels are the usual international brands, or they offer something unique such as historic buildings or exquisite location. Jungle lodges are the top high-end option around the wildlife parks. Homestays in out-of-the-way traditional villages are becoming increasingly popular for those looking for a more authentic experience. **Visit the Asia Inspirations website to see our recommended hotel selection.**



Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Swayambhunath Temple, Durbar Square, rickshaw tour, Thamel Market, Boudhnath. **Day 2:** Dakshinkali Temple, Patan Royal Palace, Patan Durbar Square.

KATHMANDU

Kathmandu is a modern day assault on the senses, a hub of cultural heritage and a monument to the medieval era. The narrow streets of the old town buzz with life, from the dozens of ethnic groups that call the city home, to the habitual sacred cow wandering through the chaos.



▲ Old Quarter

Kathmandu's old quarter is a web of narrow alleyways centred on the Durbar Square, the heart of the city. Wandering these alleyways, lined with temples and crumbling old architecture, is a hair raising but rewarding experience! The Durbar Square itself is flanked by the old royal palace (durbar) and filled with some of Nepal's best traditional architecture, hence it being a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Whilst here you should find a spot by one of the old temples or monuments, sit yourself down and watch the world go by.



◀ Patan

Once a powerful capital of an independent kingdom, Patan has now been all but engulfed by Kathmandu. The oldest city in the valley, the Durbar Square here, on a smaller scale than Kathmandu's, is considered to have the best collection of architecture in Nepal.

Patan is home to many artisans and craftspeople – look out for their workshops as you explore.

◀ Boudhanath and Swayambhunath

Boudhanath dominates Kathmandu's skyline; it is one of the world's largest stupas, and Nepal's most sacred. With Buddha's eyes looking out over the city, Boudhanath is enchanting. Swayambhunath sits on a hilltop to the west of the city. Called the 'Monkey Temple' due to the monkeys that live on the hill.

We can take you to a small Tibetan settlement and monastery that has grown up around Boudhanath.



Take one day to see the best bits. Bhaktapur is an easy day trip from Kathmandu. **Day 1:** Golden Gate, Palace of 55 Windows, Taumadhi Tole Square, Potter's Square, Temple of Changu Narayan.

BHAKTAPUR

One of the three medieval city states of the Kathmandu Valley, Bhaktapur is the best preserved and most atmospheric. With cobblestone streets just crying out to be aimlessly wandered, you'll stumble across old courtyards, temples and artisans busy at their craft.



▲ Durbar Square

The third of the Kathmandu Valley's Durbar Squares, Bhaktapur's is actually made up of four distinct squares all full of magnificent historic sights. Must-sees include the Palace of 55 Windows with its intricately carved wooden balcony; the Golden Gate. This magnificent portal into the Royal Palace complex demonstrates impressive metal work, whilst the Lion Gate was produced by local artisans. Along with the many temples, you'll also find the National Art Gallery in the area, housed in the Royal Palace, which includes an excellent collection of tantric cloth paintings.

We can add the Woodcarving Museum and Brass & Bronze Museum to give you an insight into Nepal's traditional crafts.



▲ Temple of Changu Narayan

Located on a ridge six kilometres north of Bhaktapur, the sacred temple of Changu Narayan is considered the oldest temple in Nepal. A complex full of Hindu deities, the history of the place dates back to around the 4th century AD – the statuary here is particularly magnificent, with mythical beasts and gods carved in intricate detail, as well as the carvings from the Licchavi era. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, one of the most appealing things about this temple is the fact it receives fewer visitors and so enjoys a tranquillity sometimes lost.



Take two days to see the best bits. There is plenty of accommodation in and around the park so you can spend these days heading out on safari and spotting as much wildlife as possible!

CHITWAN

Considered some of the best wildlife viewing in Asia, Chitwan National Park offers refuge to many rare and native species amongst its dense jungle and tall grass. Located in the subtropical Terai lowlands, the area is rich in flora and fauna whilst the valleys surrounding the park offer a glimpse of rural life in Nepal.



▼ Chitwan National Park

Originally established as a rhino sanctuary, Chitwan is home to over 500 of the one-horned beast which you can attempt to spot on canoe trips, jungle walks and jungle safaris. There is also a chance, if you are incredibly lucky, to see Bengal Tigers (there are just over 100 of them here), whilst deer, monkeys, sloth bears and wild elephants are amongst the other residents. There are a massive amount of different bird species in Chitwan, over 500, so bring your binoculars.

See how to add Chitwan into your itinerary from **page 193**



Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Spend the day strolling the village, admiring the architecture and trying a café or two. **Day 2:** Venture out on a hike of the surrounding countryside.

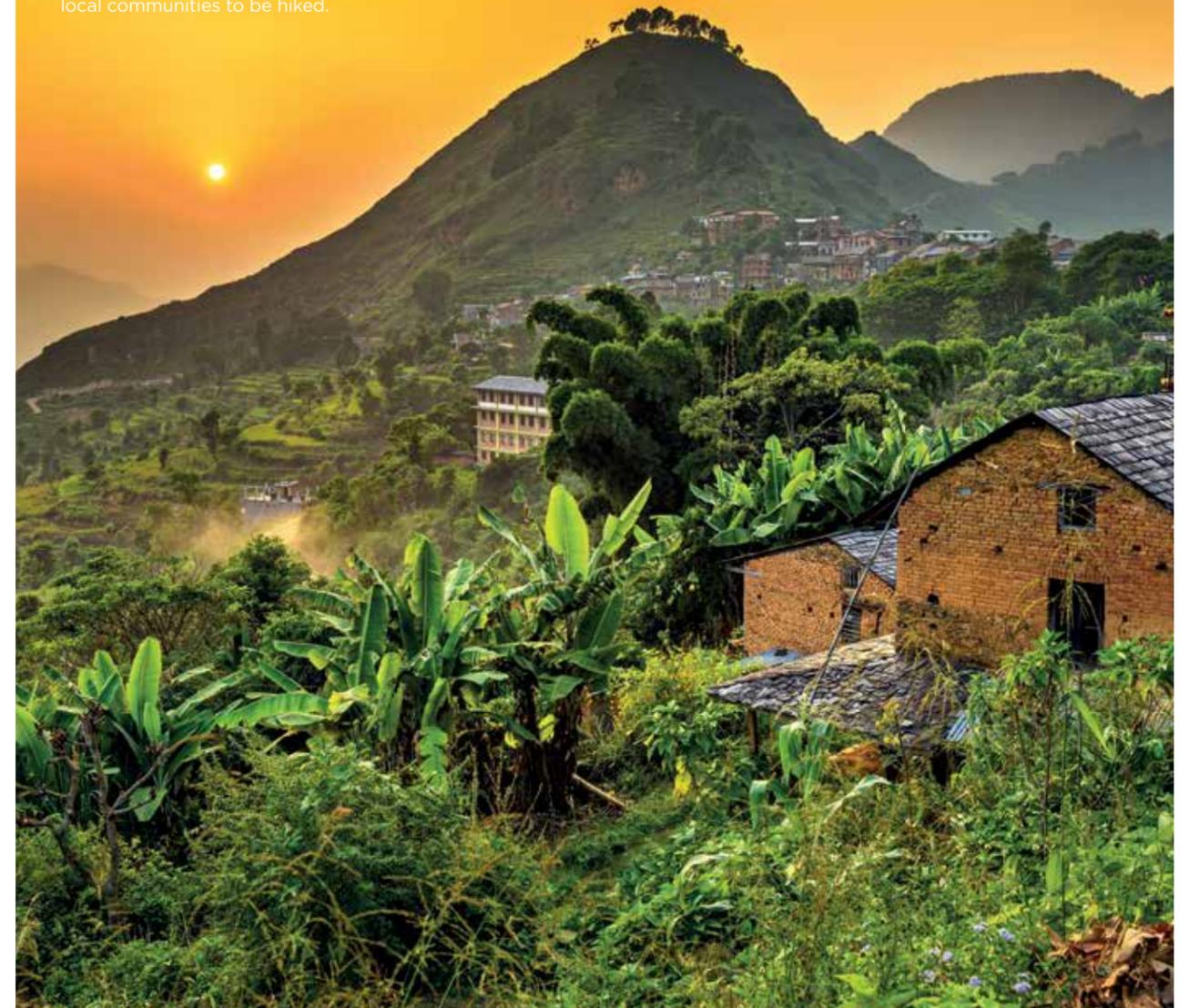
BANDIPUR

Set high on a ridge between Kathmandu and Pokhara, the village of Bandipur is the perfect showcase for Newari culture. Although beautifully preserved it is still a living community, retaining its many charms and atmosphere. The fact that the streets are free from motor vehicles make it even more appealing!



▼ Bandipur

Bandipur village has been sympathetically developed, with some of the beautiful 18th century buildings now housing lovely cafes and boutique hotels, making it a delightful place to linger. It's high position also means that the views over the surrounding landscapes and to the Annapurna range beyond are magnificent. The area is particularly good for adventure sports, so if paragliding, caving, rock climbing and rafting float your boat, this is a good place to come. For those who prefer their activities a little calmer, there are some beautiful trails out into the surrounding countryside and local communities to be hiked.





Take one day to see the best bits.

Day 1: Newari houses, town centre, local markets, enjoy the views.

DHULIKHEL

An atmospheric Newari town, Dhulikhel was once an important trade centre, sitting on the route between Kathmandu and the Tibet border. Today, it is best known for its incredible views of the high Himalaya, as well as its lovely old town centre with its temple-lined village square.

▼ Views

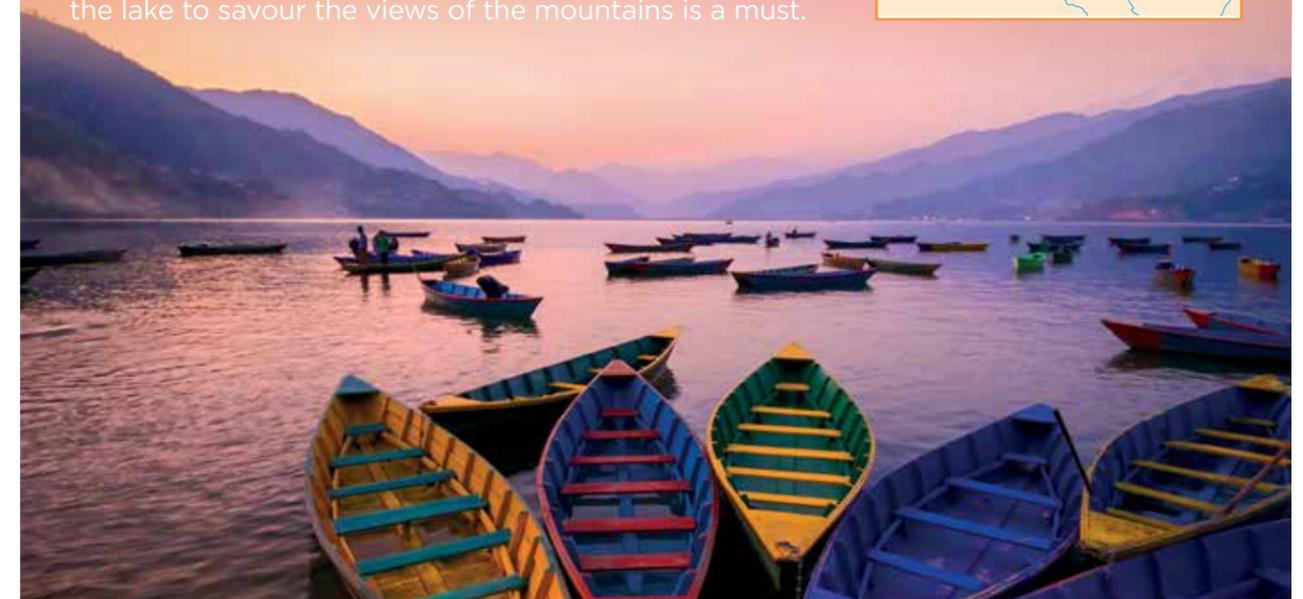
Dhulikhel looks out towards a huge swath of the Himalayas, from Mt Annapurna in the west to Mt Lhotse in the east, no peak less than a sky-scraping 6,000 metres. Many of the lodges and resorts sit on a ridge above the town and provide exceptional views over to the mountains – we recommend you stay in one of these and spend a day exploring the town.



Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Old bazaar, Bindyabasini Temple, Gupteshwor Cave, Devi's Fall, International Mountain Museum. Day 2: World Peace Pagoda, Phewa Lake, Gurkha Museum.

POKHARA

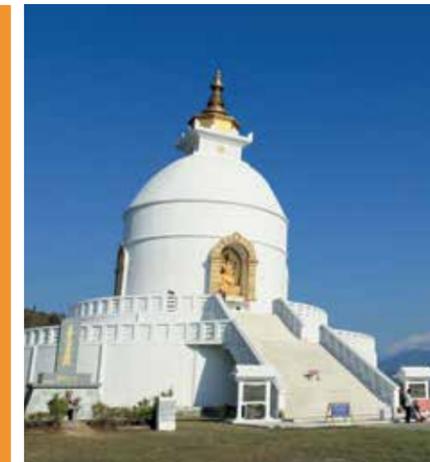
Sit on the lush shores of Lake Phewa in the shadow of the Annapurna and Manaslu mountain ranges, Pokhara offers both incredible scenery and a laidback vibe. Occupying a valley, the city has become the hub of Nepal's adventure scene though finding a spot beside the lake to savour the views of the mountains is a must.



▲ Phewa Lake

Nepal's second largest lake, legend tells that Phewa was formed when a goddess disguised as a beggar was scorned by the people of the valley, causing her to fill it with water. Whilst on the Pokhara side, the lake shores are lined with hotels, bars and restaurants – the rest of the area is densely forested and excellent for bird watching. Visit the Tal Barahi Temple at the lake's centre; on a clear day the reflections of the Annapurna range on the lake's waters are unsurpassed.

Walk or cycle around the lake or sail across it to thoroughly explore the area.



◀ Viewpoints

Pokhara has an unsurpassed location and while the views from the town are breathtaking, head up to the World Peace Pagoda for even better ones. The World Peace Pagoda sits on a ridge above Phewa Lake. Constructed by Buddhist monks from Japan, there are trails to lead you up to the pagoda and cafés up there to refresh you.

We can take you to the village of Sarangkot to enjoy the sweeping panoramas of the Annapurna Range.

Museums

There is no better place to learn about Nepal's peaks than in the shadow of two magnificent ranges, and the International Mountain Museum is devoted to all things mountain. Displays on old mountain climbing gear is side-by-side with information on the Himalayas, including its geology, flora and fauna, history and people. Pokhara is the location of the last of Nepal's Gurkha training centres – the Gurkha Museum celebrates the achievement of this elite unit and covers its history from its formation in the 19th century.

BHUTAN

Tales of Bhutan, the Land of the Thunder Dragon, are interwoven with magic and mystery. Deeply Buddhist and cautious of the outside world, Bhutan's biggest draw, apart from its spectacular mountain setting of course, is its cultural authenticity. Meet the proud and friendly Bhutanese people and explore the remote monasteries and spiritual temples of the last Himalayan kingdom.



QUICK INFO



APPROX
FLYING TIME
10 HOURS
INDIRECT



GMT
+6



VISA
REQUIRED
YES



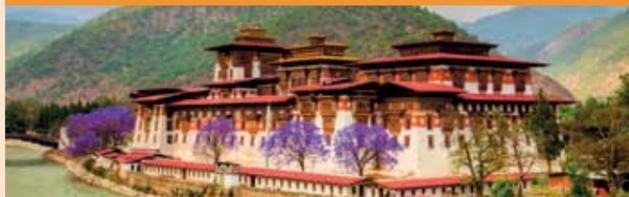
CURRENCY
**NGULTRUM/
INDIAN
RUPEE**

OUR BEST BITS

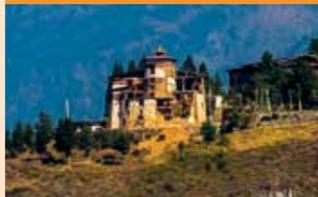
1 Taksang Monastery



2 Punakha Dzong



3 National Museum of Bhutan



4 National Institute for Zorig Chusum



5 Chokhor Valley



See all our
Bhutan best
bits on one
inspiring
itinerary
on **page 194**

GETTING AROUND



Bhutan has one main road, the National Highway, that covers most of the country. Travelling on a tourist visa means that the cost of all transport is included in the price of your trip.



For comfort and convenience we will supply a private car and driver for sightseeing and transfers.

WHEN TO TRAVEL



Bhutan's climate is generally temperate and has four seasons. The monsoon is between June and August, bringing rain and warm temperatures; autumn from September to November is clear and crisp; winter, December to February, can be sunny though quite cold; spring, March to May, is considered the most beautiful time of year, when the valleys are in bloom and the mountain views exquisite.

| JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|-----|-----|------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|-----|
| ★★ | ★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★ | ★ | ★ | ★★ | ★★★★ | ★★★★ | ★★ |

★ Travel is possible
★★ Good time to travel
★★★ Ideal travel conditions

ACCOMMODATION

Due to the strict controls and restrictions imposed by the Bhutanese government, there are limited hotel options - you'll find luxury five-star properties with excellent facilities or simple, comfortable hotels with very little inbetween. All hotels, though, pride themselves on their ambience and hospitality. Home and farm-stays are both popular choices, and the perfect way to get a taste of the real Bhutanese way of life.

Keep an eye out for our handy Top 5 hotel lists on some Bhutan destination pages.



Take one day to see the best bits. Day 1: National Library, Institute of Zorig Chusum, Handicrafts Emporium, Folk Heritage Museum, Textile Museum, Trashi Chhoe Dzong.

THIMPHU

Bhutan's capital since 1961, Thimphu is the gateway to one of the world's most mysterious countries and an introduction to its rich and perfectly preserved heritage. In recent years the city has seen the introduction of cafes, bars and nightclubs, but you'll still see plenty of monks and locals in traditional dress as you wander the streets.



▲ Tashi Chhoe Dzong

Located to the north of the city, Tashi Chhoe Dzong sits on the banks of the Wang Chhu, its golden roofs glinting regally. Although damaged and rebuilt and renovated many times, the design of the dzong is traditional and was constructed without nails. Used to house both monks and civil officials, there are 30 temples, chapels and shrines here - the current king even had his coronation here in 2008. Sit on a ridge above Thimphu's centre Changangkha Lhakhang is another popular temple to visit - join the pilgrims to enjoy the vibrant atmosphere.

★ TOP 5 HOTELS★

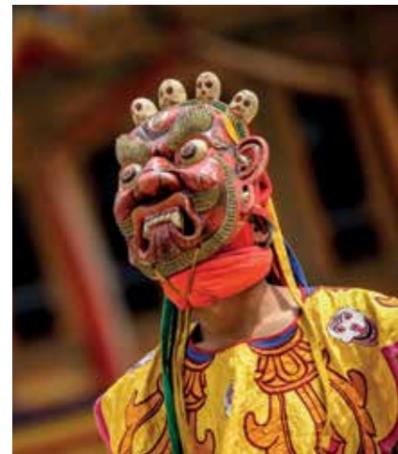
1. **Taj Tashi Thimphu** ★★★★★
2. **Le Meridien Thimphu** ★★★★★
3. **Kisa Hotel** ★★★★
4. **Hotel Bhutan** ★★★
5. **Hotel Migmar** ★★★



National Institute for Zorig Chusum ►

Set up by Bhutan's government as a means of preserving culture and traditions, the National Institute for Zorig Chusum, or 'the painting school', instructs its pupils, for four to six years, in Bhutan's 13 traditional arts. For more insight into Bhutan's rich heritage try the National Textile Museum and National Library.

We can add a visit the National Institute to watch classes and enjoy Bhutanese craft demonstrations.



Take two days to see the best bits. Day 1: Sangchhen Dorji Lhuendrup Lhakhan, Khamsum Yuelley Namgyal Chorten. **Day 2:** Chimi Lhakhang, Punakha Dzong.

PUNAKHA

Set in a lush and fertile valley on the confluence of the Mo (Mother) and Pho (Father) rivers, Punakha was the capital of Bhutan for 300 years. The area surrounding the city produces bountiful supplies of rice, oranges and bananas; the whole valley lent a serene atmosphere by its abundance and rich heritage.



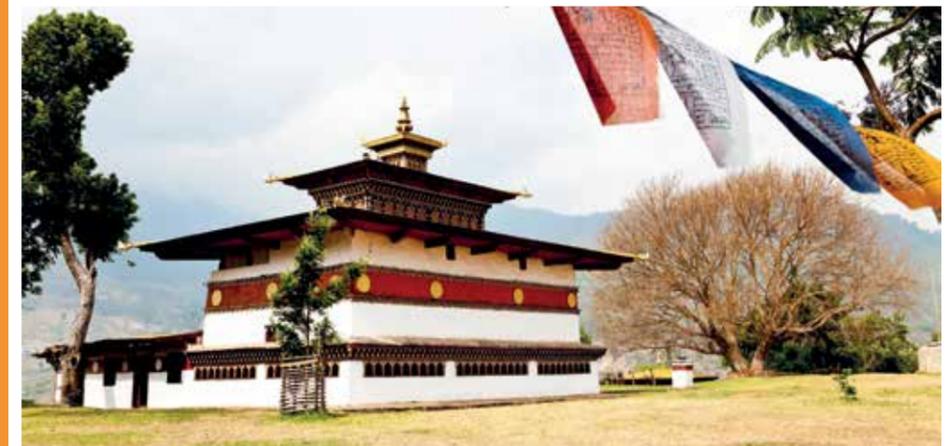
▲ Punakha Dzong

Consider Bhutan's most beautiful dzong, this magnificent structure is set right on the confluence of the Mo and Pho rivers. Built in 1638, Punakha is the second oldest and second largest dzong in the country. Still the winter residence of the dratshang, the dzong houses a number of sacred relics, whilst its location on the river and in the sunny climes of the Punakha valley only makes the white-washed walls and brightly coloured roof all the more impressive.

We can organise a guide to lead you through the 14 shrines and chapels spread amongst the courtyards and towers.

▼ Chimi Lhakhang

Nestled amongst paddy fields and small villages just outside of Punakha, Chimi Lhakhang is a yellow-roofed Buddhist temple that is also considered a temple of fertility. Built in the late 15th/early 16th century to honour Lama Drukpa Kunley who was said to have subdued a demon with a magical thunderbolt of wisdom, the temple is visited by childless couples looking for a wang (blessing). A ramble through the fields surrounding the temple is a lovely way to get a glimpse of rural village life.

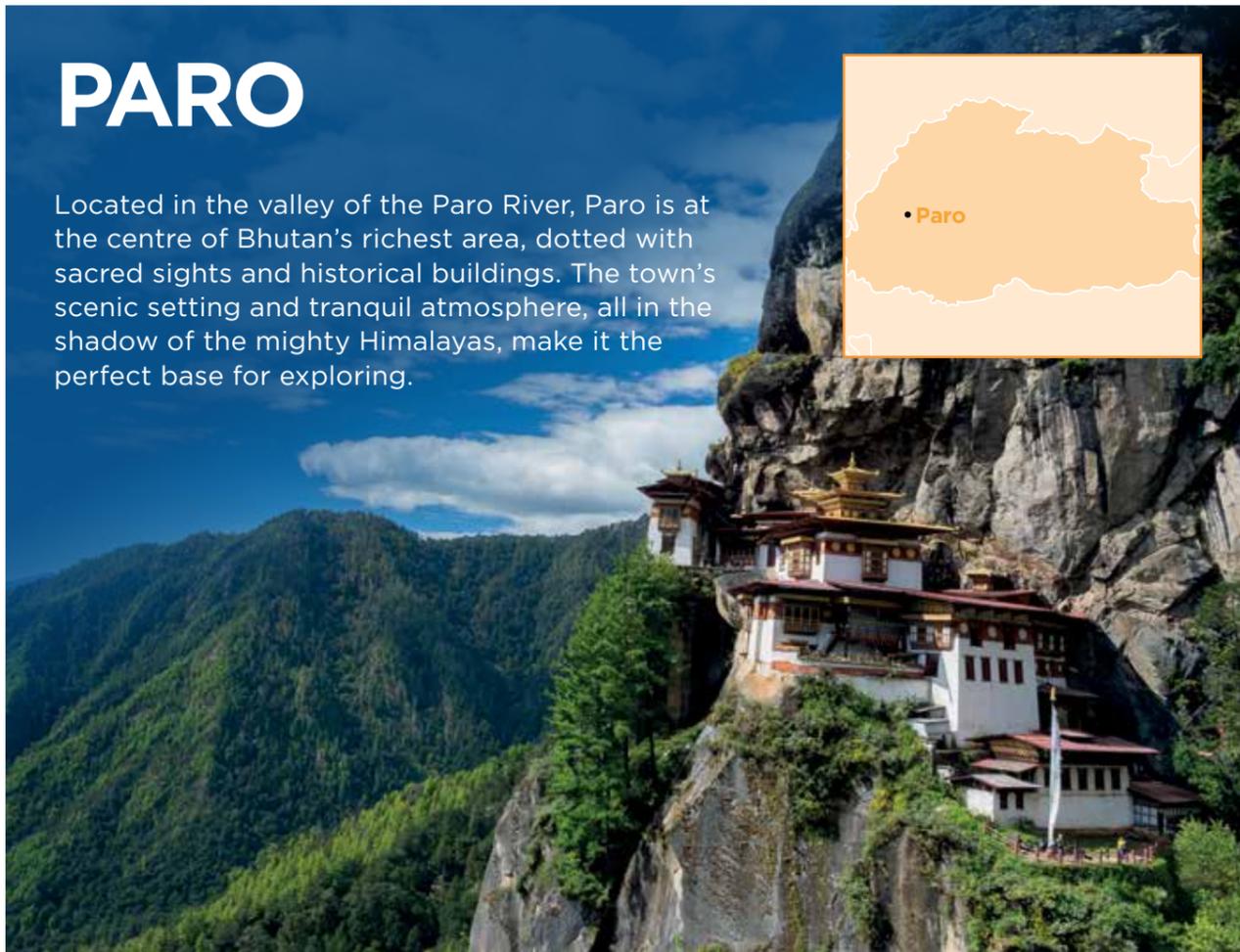




Take three days to see the best bits. **Day 1:** Ta Dzong, Ringpung Dzong, Paro Dzong, National Museum of Bhutan. **Day 2:** Taktsang Monastery, Kyichu Lhakhang. **Day 3:** Haa Valley.

PARO

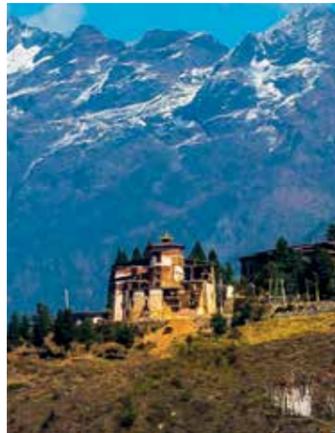
Located in the valley of the Paro River, Paro is at the centre of Bhutan's richest area, dotted with sacred sights and historical buildings. The town's scenic setting and tranquil atmosphere, all in the shadow of the mighty Himalayas, make it the perfect base for exploring.



▲ Taktsang Monastery

Also known as 'Tiger's Nest', Taktsang is Bhutan's most impressive monastery. Hanging precariously off a rock face 900 metres above the floor of the Paro valley, the temple was built in 1692 around eight caves. Whilst it may look impossible to reach from the valley floor there are in fact three paths that will take you up to Taktsang.

The walk up to the monastery passes through coniferous forest via a viewpoint that gives spectacular views of the Tiger's Nest.



◀ National Museum of Bhutan

Partially housed in the old round watch tower of the dzong below, the National Museum sits on a hilltop above the town. The extensive collection includes thangkas, and festival masks, a natural history gallery and a heritage gallery that features religious statues and stone carvings.



◀ Paro Dzong

The premiere example of Bhutanese architecture in the country, the Paro Dzong watches over the town from its hillside perch. Used many times to defend Bhutan from Tibetan invaders, this dzong is perhaps the best known and most impressive of them all.

There are 14 shrines and chapels spread amongst the courtyards and towers to explore.



Two nights is a good amount of time to spend exploring Bumthang's four valleys, but just tell us the amount of time you'd like to spend here and we'll sort it!

BUMTHANG

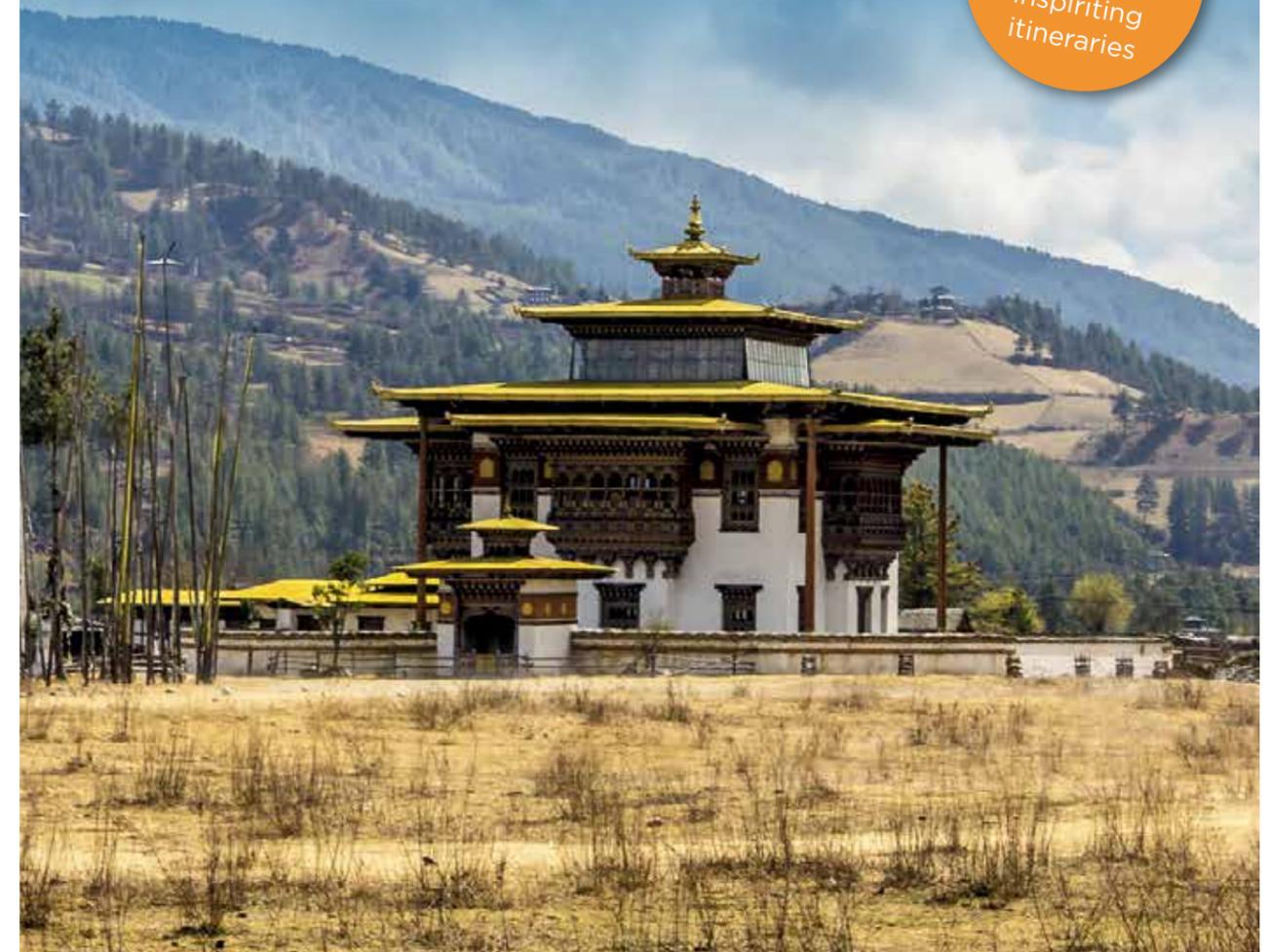


The Bumthang region was until as recently as the 1970s only accessible by mule and on foot. Home to some of Bhutan's oldest Buddhist temples, you'll also find quaint farming villages where practices haven't changed for centuries.

▼ Bumthang

The four valleys, Chokhor, Tang, Ura and Chhume, give a taste of a different side of Bhutanese life, whether you decide to just see the sights or to spend a little time delving deeper with easy hiking. The Chokhor Valley is considered to have the most important sights, with a whole series of old lhakhangs (temples). Ura valley, where the earliest inhabitants of Bhutan are thought to have settled, is the highest of the four - visit the village of Ura to sample the medieval atmosphere.

Look online
for more
Bhutan
inspiring
itineraries



ITINERARIES

These itineraries are here to guide and inspire, to give you some idea of how you can combine destinations, sights and experiences to create your perfect trip. Look out for our 'best bits' itineraries which feature our top five sights.

All itineraries include international flights, domestic transportation, accommodation, private touring and sightseeing.

Visit Asia Inspirations online for more examples of inspiring Indian Subcontinent itineraries!



INDIA - 'BEST BITS' ■ 23 DAYS ■ DELHI - TRIVANDRUM

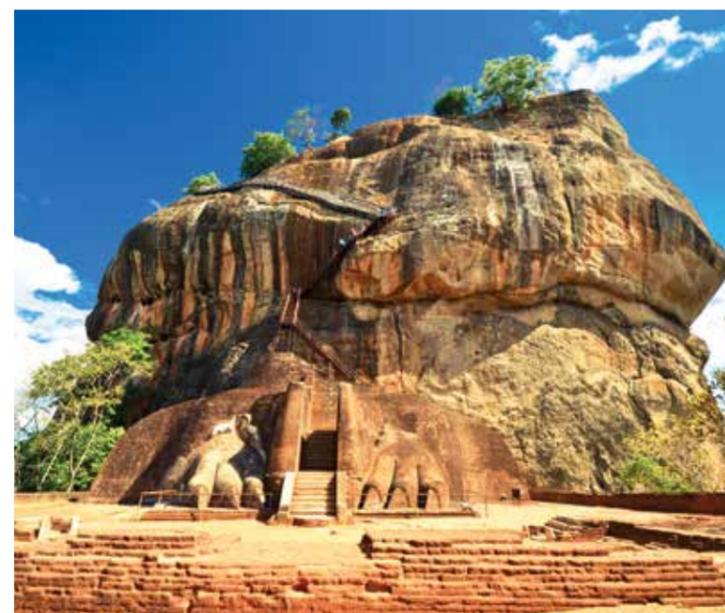
HIGHLIGHTS ■ Taj Mahal ■ Kerala's backwaters ■ Varanasi ■ Ajanta & Ellora caves ■ Udaipur



Day 1: Depart UK and fly overnight to Delhi.
Day 2: Arrive in Delhi.
Day 3: Delhi - spend the day flitting between the sights of New and Old Delhi, including Jama Masjid, the Red Fort and the Rajpath.
Day 4: Travel to Varanasi, a one hour 15 minutes flight or an overnight train.
Day 5: Varanasi - take to the waters of the Ganges, wander the timeworn alleys, and soak in the age-old atmosphere.

Day 6: Travel to Agra, a one hour 30 minutes flight or an overnight train.
Day 7: Agra - head out to see the sights including the Taj Mahal and Agra Fort.
Day 8: Travel to Ranthambore or Bharatpur, depending on the season.
Day 9: Travel to Jaipur, three hours by road. You can head out straight away to start seeing the Pink City's many sights.
Day 10: Jaipur - why not spend the day discovering the Hawa Mahal and the Amber Fort. A traditional dinner and dance performance makes for a great evening.
Day 11: Travel to Jodhpur, five hours 45 minutes by road.
Day 12: Jodhpur - spend the day exploring - we highly recommend taking the time to visit the magnificent Meherangarh Fort.
Day 13: Travel to Udaipur, four hours 30 minutes by road - you could stop off at Ranakpur temple complex en route. Start your time in Udaipur with a cruise on Lake Pichola.

Day 14: Udaipur - wander the lakes, palaces and gardens of this romantic city.
Day 15: Fly to Aurangabad via Mumbai.
Days 16-17: Visit the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ajanta and Ellora caves. Return to Mumbai.
Day 18: Mumbai - take a day to experience India's most dynamic city before flying to Kochi, a one hour 55 minutes flight.
Day 19: Kochi - you can visit the Dutch Palace, Santa Cruz Basilica and Fort Kochi. Seeing a Kathakali dance performance here is a must.
Days 20-21: Embark on a traditional kettuvallam to cruise through Kerala's beautiful backwaters, spending the night on the boat. Disembark and travel to Kovalam.
Day 22: Travel to Trivandrum, 40 minutes by road, and explore Kerala's capital.
Day 23: Fly Trivandrum to the UK.
4★ price from: £6,690
5★ price from: £7,690



SRI LANKA - 'BEST BITS' ■ 15 DAYS ■ COLOMBO - COLOMBO

HIGHLIGHTS ■ Anuradhapura ■ Yala National Park ■ Dambulla ■ Galle ■ Nuwara Eliya



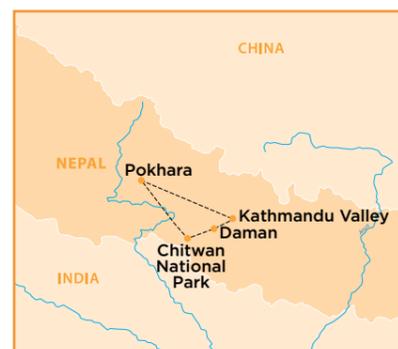
Day 1: Depart UK and fly overnight to Colombo.
Day 2: Arrive Colombo.
Day 3: Travel to Sigiriya, four hours by road. Visit the amazing Lion Rock Fortress.

Days 4-5: Cultural triangle - Polonnaruwa and Anuradhapura deserve a day trip each!
Day 6: Travel to Kandy, about two hours 30 minutes by road, stopping off at Dambulla to see the cave temples en route.
Day 7: Kandy - explore the sights of this laidback town, we recommend seeing the Temple of the Tooth! Kandy is also a fantastic place for a cultural dance performance.
Day 8: Travel to Nuwara Eliya, about two hours 15 minutes by road. You can stop off at a tea plantation and tea factory en route. Explore the colonial city centre.
Day 9: Travel to Yala National Park, about four hours by road. Stop off at

the Udawalawe Elephant Transit Home on the way.
Day 10: Yala National Park - head out on safari and enjoy the beautiful wildlife that calls this park home.
Day 11: Travel to Galle, about three hours 30 minutes by road.
Day 12: Galle - explore this lovely colonial city or, if relaxation is what you're after, enjoy a day on the beach.
Day 13: Travel to Colombo, two hours on a lovely coastal road.
Day 14: Colombo - why not see the colonial Fort District and some of Colombo's colourful neighbourhoods.
Day 15: Fly Colombo to the UK.
4★ price from: £3,390

NEPAL - 'BEST BITS' ■ 11 DAYS ■ KATHMANDU - KATHMANDU

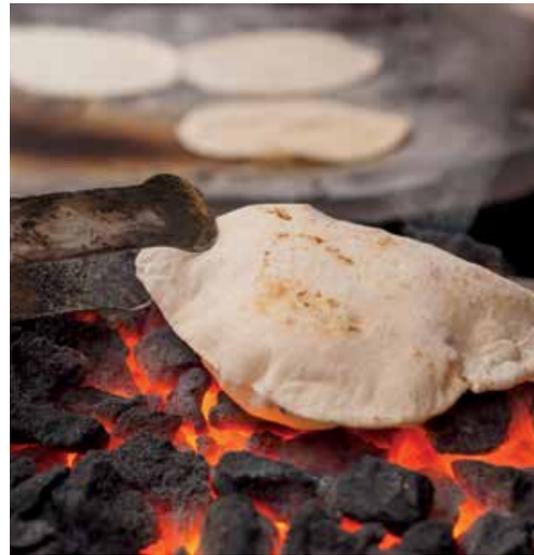
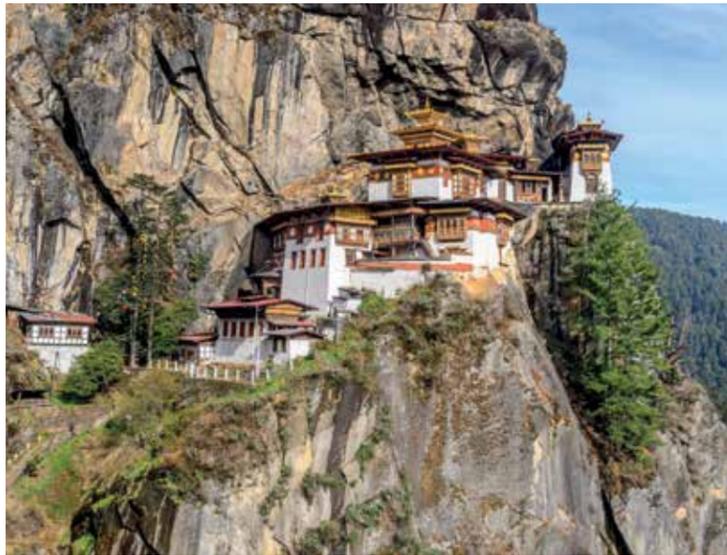
HIGHLIGHTS ■ Durbar Square ■ Pokhara ■ Chitwan National Park ■ Bhaktapur ■ Bodhnath Stupa



Day 1: Depart UK and fly overnight to Kathmandu.

Day 2: Arrive in Kathmandu.
Days 3-4: Kathmandu Valley - explore the rich heritage of this Himalaya-backed valley, with options to visit Patan and Bhaktapur, as well as Kathmandu - the magnificent Durbar Square and Bodhnath Stupa are must-sees!
Days 5-6: Travel to Pokhara, four hours 30 minutes by road and spend two days soaking up the incredible mountain vistas and enjoying this laidback town.
Days 7-8: Travel to Chitwan National Park, around three hours 30 minutes

by road. Spend a couple of days on safari, seeking out the plentiful and rare flora and fauna of the area, including rhinos.
Day 9: Travel to Daman, around three hours by road, and spend some time in a local monastery.
Day 10: Travel to Kathmandu, two hours by road.
Day 11: Fly Kathmandu to the UK.
4★ price from: £2,790
5★ price from: £3,090



BHUTAN - 'BEST BITS' ■ 8 DAYS ■ PARO - PARO

HIGHLIGHTS ■ Taktsang Monastery ■ Punakha Dzong ■ National Museum of Bhutan
■ National Institute for Zorig Chusum ■ Trashi Chhoe Dzong



Day 1: Depart UK and fly overnight to Paro.

Day 2: Arrive in Paro and transfer to Thimphu.

Day 3: Thimphu – explore Bhutan's fascinating capital. The National Institute for Zorig Chusum and Trashi Chhoe Dzong are both must visits.

Day 4: Travel to Punakha, about three hours by road. Use the afternoon to start discovering the town.

Day 5: Punakha – you can use today to take a day trip out into Bhutan's countryside, visiting Wangdue

Phodrang and Chimi Lhakhang, the Temple of Fertility.

Day 6: Travel to Paro, around four hours by road. Stop at Simtokha Dzong en route. On arrival you might like to see Ta Dzong and Rinpung Dzong.

Day 7: Paro – head out to fantastic Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest) – the views are breathtaking. Back towards Paro there is Drugyal Dzong and Kyichu Lhakhang to see.

Day 8: Fly Paro to the UK.

4★ price from: £3,290
5★ price from: £3,490

FOODIE - INDIA ■ 12 DAYS ■ DELHI - UDAIPUR

HIGHLIGHTS ■ Indian food ■ Taj Mahal at sunrise ■ Rajasthan's forts



Day 1: Depart UK and fly overnight to Delhi.

Day 2: Arrive in Delhi.

Day 3: Delhi – spend the morning seeing some of Delhi's most impressive sites, Jama Masjid and the Red Fort for

example, before a lunch of local speciality 'wazwan', a multi-course Kashmiri cuisine. In the evening visit a family home for a cooking lesson.

Day 4: Travel to Agra, three hours by road or five to six hours by train. Use the afternoon to visit one of Agra's Mughal wonders then spend the evening sampling local kebab dishes.

Day 5: Agra – the Taj Mahal is one of the most iconic buildings on the planet, we'd recommend viewing it at sunrise. Take lunch in a south Indian speciality restaurant.

Day 6: Travel to Jaipur, four hours by road. En route it is possible to stop at the ghost city of Fatehpur Sikri as well as sampling a traditional Rajasthani lunch in Bharatpur.

Day 7: Jaipur – spend the day visiting Jaipur's magnificent forts and palaces. Have dinner at a roof top restaurant and

watch a demonstration of Rajasthani cooking.

Day 8: Travel to Jodhpur, five hours by road or seven to eight hours by train.

Day 9: Jodhpur – spend the morning sightseeing, the Mehrangarh Fort is a must, to work up an appetite for a lunch of Marwari and Rajasthani food at a family home.

Day 10: Travel to Udaipur, four hours 45 minutes by road, with the opportunity to visit the temples of Ranakpur en route. Lunch today will be served in a palace.

Day 11: Udaipur – enjoy the sights of Udaipur and take a relaxed cruise on Lake Pichola. Watch a demonstration of local cooking.

Day 12: Fly Udaipur to UK.

Price from: £2,890

BESPOKE - INDIA ■ 29 DAYS ■ DELHI - MUMBAI

An adventurous couple asked the tailor-made team to create a tour that encompassed India's richest heritage, scenery and wildlife. Speak to us and we can prepare a similar itinerary for you.



Day 1: Depart UK and fly overnight to Delhi.

Day 2: Arrive in Delhi.

Day 3: Full day sightseeing in Delhi, visiting the Red Fort, Jama Masjid, Chandni Chowk and the Raj Ghat. Continue on to the sights along the Rajpath and Humayun's Tomb, then Qutub Minar and Bahai Temple. Transfer to the railway station to board the Maharaja Express where a feast will be waiting as you make your way to Agra.

Day 4: Arrive in Agra and disembark the train to explore the city. Visit, and enjoy a champagne brunch overlooking the Taj Mahal and Agra

Fort. The journey continues to Ranthambore.

Day 5: Enjoy a game safari in Ranthambore National Park. Continue to Jaipur and, on arrival, visit Jantar Mantar and the City Palace, which includes an exclusive elephant experience. Dine on a royal feast at an exhibition polo match.

Day 6: Take a day at leisure in Jaipur.

Day 7: Transfer to Udaipur.

Day 8: Take a half day sightseeing tour which includes the City Palace, Jagdish Temple and Sahelion-ki-Bari. This evening, cruise Lake Pichola.

Day 9: Spend the morning at leisure before returning to Delhi by plane.

Day 10: Fly from Delhi to Varanasi. An afternoon sightseeing tour includes Asi Ghat, Durga Temple and Kashi Vishwanath.

Day 11: A dawn cruise on the Ganges will be followed by a trip out to Sarnath.

Day 12: Transfer to the train station to board a train to Jabalpur.

Day 13: Transfer to Kanha National Park. Spend the afternoon at leisure.

Days 14-15: Enjoy game drives of the park.

Day 16: Transfer to Pench National Park. Take an evening game drive.

Day 17: Morning game drive with the afternoon at leisure.

Day 18: Morning game drive before transferring to Tadoba National Park.

Days 19-20: Game drives of the park.

Day 21: Transfer to Nagpur Airport and fly to Mumbai.

Day 22: Explore Mumbai, visiting Elephanta Caves, the Gateway to India, Mani Bhavan, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya and Chhatrapati Shivaji terminus.

Day 23: Fly to Cochin. Take a half day sightseeing tour including Mattancherry Palace, Cochin Harbour and St Francis Church.

Day 24: Day at leisure, with an evening Kathakali show.

Day 25: Transfer to Kumarakom and board a private houseboat to explore the backwaters.

Day 26: Disembark the houseboat and transfer to Kovalam and a beach resort.

Days 27-28: Relax on Kovalam's beautiful beaches.

Day 29: Transfer to the airport, flying home to the UK via Mumbai.

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