

ASIAN
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passport

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A JOURNEY AROUND ASIA

SPECIAL EDITION

A JOURNEY AROUND ASIA

ISLAND TOURISM



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“Travel makes one modest. You see what a tiny place you occupy in the world”

— Gustave Flaubert

♦ ♦ ♦
They say that travel is the way towards broadening our minds and that through this very experience of travel, we are exposing ourselves to other influences, cultures and experiences, allowing us to have a better understanding of the world we live in. Growing up, I was lucky enough to have had the opportunity to explore and travel to different parts of the world, opening my eyes to a world outside of where I was born. For my parents, to be able to give their kids that opportunity to see the world from a different perspective was all they ever wanted – and for that I am very grateful. They taught me that spending on experiences is going to be a lot more fruitful than spending on materialistic things, and though money can buy you the finest things in life, in the long run, that fancy new bag you bought probably isn't going to make you smile as often as remembering your first backpacking trip.

Through travel, we are able to seek out new places, meet new people, discover new cultures and create wonderful memories, and though we might not be able to explore the world like we used to right now, we're hoping that with this special issue of *ASIAN Geographic Passport Island Tourism Edition*, we can ease your travel itch, and allow you to experience Asia right from your very own couch.

Journeying across the continent, we explore some of the best islands around Asia, uncovering the most interesting activities on offer, and delving into local history and culture. Even though we know these might not quite be the travel plans that you were expecting, we still hope that the issue will entice you all the same. So, why not grab that good ol' cup of Joe, sit back and join us on this adventure.

Elizabeth LIM

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Island Nations of Asia

An island country is a nation that is made up of one or more islands, or land that is surrounded completely by water. Around one-fifth of Asia is made up of island nations, and while island countries are typically small with low populations, some, like Indonesia and Japan, are notable exceptions.



Southeast Asia

Brunei



Size: 5,765 square kilometres
Population: 433,285

The Nation of Brunei, Abode of Peace – as it's officially named – is a rich unitary Islamic absolute monarchy on the north coast of Borneo in Maritime Southeast Asia. It has 161 kilometres of coastline next to the South China Sea, and it shares a 381-kilometre border with Malaysia. It also has 500 square kilometres of territorial waters. Most of Brunei is within the Borneo lowland rainforests ecoregion.

Indonesia



Size: 1.9 million square kilometres
Population: 270.6 million

Situated in Southeast Asia, Indonesia lies strategically between the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean. The island country stretches for 1,760 kilometres from north to south and 5,120 kilometres from east to west. The number of islands making up the archipelago has been estimated to be over 18,000. There are five major islands, namely Sulawesi, Borneo, Java, New Guinea, and Sumatra, and two primary archipelagos, the Maluku Islands and Nusa Tenggara, as well as 60 smaller archipelagos. Some of the islands are shared with other countries, including Borneo (Brunei and Malaysia), Timor (East Timor), and New Guinea (Papua New Guinea). Java is the most densely populated island in the archipelago, and in the world.

Philippines



Size: 300,000 square kilometres
Population: 108.1 million

The Philippines, an archipelago east of Vietnam, between the Philippine Sea and the South China Sea, boasts the highest portions of a partly submerged mountain chain. It is made up of more than 7,000 islands; the three main island groups are Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. It is the fifth largest island country in the world, and its 36,289 kilometres of coastline makes it the country with the fifth-longest coastline in the world. At 10,540 metres deep, Galathea Depth in the Philippine Trench, located in the Philippine Sea, is the deepest point in the country and the third deepest in the world.

Singapore



Size: 718 square kilometres
Population: 5.9 million

Singapore consists of 63 islands, including the main island, Pulau Ujong, or Singapore Island, which is the world's 20th most populous island and the 31st most densely populated island. There are two man-made connections to Johor, Malaysia: the Woodlands 1st Link in the north and the Tuas 2nd Link in the west. Jurong Island, Pulau Tekong, Pulau Ubin and Sentosa are the largest of Singapore's smaller islands. Since 1822, Singapore has continued to increase the area of the island through land reclamation, from 580 square kilometres in the 1960s to 718 square kilometres today.

East Asia

Japan



Size: 377,915 square kilometres
Population: 126.9 million

Japan is located in the Pacific Ocean off the eastern coast of mainland Asia. The islands of Japan are located between the Sea of Okhotsk and the East China Sea to the north and south, respectively. The country includes about 6,852 islands, with



its four main islands, or the “Home Islands”, being Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu. Large parts of Japan are heavily forested and mountainous, while its densely populated settlements are mainly located in the coastal regions.

Taiwan



Size: 36,197 square kilometres
Population: 23.8 million

An island state in East Asia, known historically as Formosa, Taiwan makes up 99 percent of the area controlled by the Republic of China, and lies just 180 kilometres across the Taiwan Strait from the southeastern coast of mainland China. The East China Sea lies to its



north, the Philippine Sea to its east, the Luzon Strait directly to its south and the South China Sea to its southwest. Smaller islands include a number in the Taiwan Strait such as the Penghu archipelago, the Kinmen and Matsu Islands, and some of the South China Sea islands.

South Asia

Timor-Leste



Size: 15,007 square kilometres
Population: 1.3 million

East Timor, or Timor-Leste, is a sovereign nation occupying the eastern half of the island of Timor in Maritime Southeast Asia. To the north of the island are the Ombai Strait, Wetar Strait, and the greater Banda Sea. The Timor Sea separates the island from Australia to the south. Much of the country is mountainous.

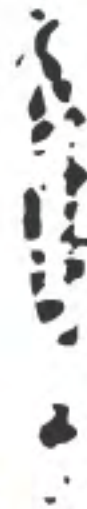


Maldives



Size: 298 square kilometres
Population: 530,953

The smallest country in Asia, the Maldives is an archipelago of far-flung, low-lying islands and atolls located in the Indian Ocean. This tropical archipelago comprises 1,190 coral islands, grouped into 26 atolls straddling the equator, about 900 kilometres southwest of Sri Lanka. Climate change is severely threatening the existence of the Maldives as well as diminishing existing human capabilities on these islands. According to the World Bank, with future sea levels projected to increase in the range of 10 to 100 centimetres by the year 2100, the entire country could eventually be submerged.



Sri Lanka



Size: 65,610 square kilometres
Population: 21.4 million

Sri Lanka, formerly called Ceylon, is an island nation in the Indian Ocean, southeast of the Indian subcontinent, in a strategic location near major Indian Ocean sea lanes. It is the 25th largest island in the world by area. There was once a land connection to the Indian mainland, which is now mostly submerged.



West Asia

Bahrain



Size: 780 square kilometres
Population: 1.6 million

Bahrain is a generally flat and dry archipelago in the Persian Gulf. Often described as an archipelago of 33 islands, extensive land reclamation projects have changed this, and the number of islands and island groups has increased to 84, with 161 kilometres of coastline. Bahrain's largest islands are Bahrain Island, the Hawar Islands, Muharraq Island, Umm an Nasan, and Sitra Island. Bahrain is connected to Saudi Arabia by the 25-kilometre-long King Fahd Causeway.





Southeast Asia

◆ ◆ ◆ Divided into 11 different countries that reach from eastern India to China, Southeast Asia is one of the most culturally diverse regions in Asia. Whether you are looking for that off-the-beaten-path adventure or a luxurious getaway from city life, we bring you across Southeast Asia to visit some of the region's most popular tourist destinations, and tell you why you need to be making those travel plans right away.

Text Elizabeth Lim



Sunrise at the beautiful Padar Island, Komodo National Park, In donesia

INDONESIA

- Komodo National Park • Lombok Island
- Flores Island

MALAYSIA

- Perhentian Islands • Bohey Dulang Island

PHILIPPINES

- Cebu Island • Boracay Island

THAILAND

- Similan Islands • Koh Yao Islands

MYANMAR

- Mergui Archipelago
- The Salone (Moken) people

VIETNAM

- Ba Lua Archipelago • Ha Long Bay • Phu Quoc Islands

CAMBODIA

- Koh Kong Island • Koh Rong Island

SINGAPORE

- Sentosa Island • Pulau Ubin





{ SOUTHEAST ASIA }

Indonesia

EXPEDITION INFORMATION

WHEN TO GO

April to December

GETTING AROUND

The most efficient and cost-effective way of getting around the different cities is by bus. There are also tourist shuttle bus options for those venturing further afield. If you are travelling between regions, the quickest and cheapest way of travel is by air via domestic flights

GETTING THERE

Travellers can fly into Indonesia via the two main international gateways, Jakarta's Sukarno-Hatta Airport or Bali's Ngurah Rai Airport, which also offer domestic flights. Around the archipelago, there are also international airports at Medan, Makassar, Manado, Padang, Surabaya and Yogyakarta

Made up of a whopping 17,800 islands, Indonesia is one of the most visited and most exciting countries to explore in Southeast Asia. Home to over 261 million people, Indonesia is the world's largest island country and with inexpensive local food, reasonably priced accommodations, and spectacular, diverse geography, it's no wonder this is such a popular destination amongst travellers.

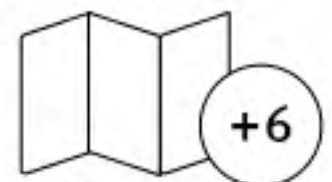
Indonesia was once known as the Dutch East Indies (or Netherlands East Indies), a name used as early as 1884 by a German geographer who thought the name "Indonesia" was derived from the Greek *indos*, meaning "India" and *nesos* meaning "island". Furthermore, the world's Indonesian archipelago represents one of the most unusual areas, encompassing a major juncture of Earth's tectonic plates that spans over two faunal realms, serving as the nexus of the people and cultures of Oceania and mainland Asia.

A large country with such diverse cultures, there is always something new and exciting to discover

However, forming a significant part of the "Ring of Fire" has meant the country is highly susceptible to environmental disasters as a result of seismic and volcanic activity.

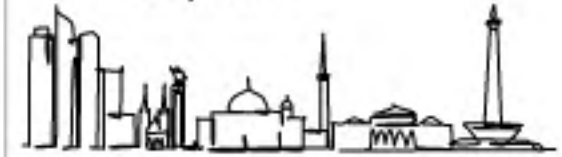
A large country with such diverse cultures, there is always something new and exciting to discover. From the hubbub of the sprawling city areas, to the cool white beaches and active volcanoes – every island is a unique blend of adventure and cultural discovery. With thousands of islands to explore, experiencing it all in one trip might be quite a stretch but here are some great places to start!

Time zone



UTC+06:00

Capital



Jakarta

Language



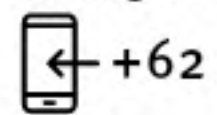
Indonesian

Currency

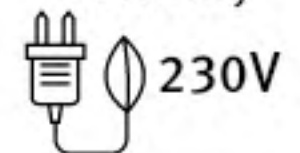


Indonesian rupiah (IDR)

Calling code



Electricity



Plug type C, F (European-style)

KOMODO NATIONAL PARK

Known for its famed dinosaur-esque creatures, Komodo National Park is a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site that sits between the islands of Sumbawa and Flores in the East Nusa Tenggara province and encompasses a total of 29 volcanic islands. Three of the major and most popular islands within the Komodo National Park region are Rinca Island, Padar Island and Komodo Island.

These volcanic islands are the last known refuge of *Varanus komodoensis*, huge lizards that once roamed across Indonesia and Australia, and it is thought the park is home to around 5,700 of the fearsome-looking reptiles. Furthermore, Komodo dragons exist nowhere else in the world in such great numbers, and they have been a great interest of study to scientists. It is believed that the rugged hillsides of dry

savannah and thorny green vegetation on the island, against the white beaches and blue waters, are the reason the dragons have been able to thrive here.

Komodo National Park is located just a few hours away from the town of Labuan Bajo in East Nusa Tenggara and encompasses numerous islets covering over 600 square kilometres. Though many travellers arrive on the island to catch a glimpse of the famous lizards, the island also offers impeccable views, gin-clear water, and impressive stretches of sand, including the famous Pink Beach. Additionally, the seas around the national park also offer some brilliant dive sites, which have enthralled snorkellers and divers with vibrant coral reefs and exotic marine life – making the island a true paradise with activities for just about anyone.

WHEN TO GO

April and early
December
(dry season)

GETTING THERE

The quickest and easiest way of getting to Komodo National Park is to first travel from Bali to Labuan Bajo on Flores Island. From there, travel by boat to the island, a journey of around two hours

BELOW

Tourist bungalows on Kanawa Island, Komodo National Park





VISIT THE KOMODO DRAGONS

Of course, no trip to Komodo National Park is complete without a meeting with the famed lizards. Found mainly on Rinca and Komodo Islands, the Komodo dragon is the biggest extant species of lizard, with the largest around three metres in length and weighing around 70 kilograms. It is related to the now-extinct Megalania, which inhabited Australia 50,000 years ago and may have been twice the size of the largest Komodo dragons. For anyone looking to snap a photo with the Komodo dragons, it is important to note that they are aggressive creatures and should be approached with caution. Despite evidence to suggest the animals have a mildly venomous bite, shock and blood loss are the more significant effects of being bitten.

BELOW

A Komodo dragon stands on its hind legs

PADAR ISLAND

Located within the national park, Padar Island is a small but surreal island. Mostly savannah-covered, Padar Island used to be home to Komodo dragons but is now a famous hiking spot thanks to its numerous green-capped mountains. A hike to the summit of this island will give you the best views of the entire national park. What is also fascinating is that the island is surrounded by three different bays each of which has its own different colour of sand. Standing on the summit you are able to see one that is pearly white, another charcoal black and the last one, a baby pink. Though the hike up Padar Island is not long nor is it steep, it can be rocky, so it is important to take care when making your way to the summit.



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THE FAMOUS PINK BEACH OF KOMODO ISLAND

Known otherwise as Pantai Mera, Pink Beach is one of the most iconic destinations for anyone visiting Komodo National Park. One of only a handful of pink beaches on the planet, this exceptional beach gets its striking baby pink colour from the crushed shells of tiny sea creatures.

} Why is the sand pink?

The beach gets its striking pink colour from tiny animals called Foraminifera which produce a red pigment on the coral reefs. When the tiny fragments of the coral combine with the white sands, this produces the soft pink colour that is visible along the shoreline

TOP

Aerial view of dramatic scenery on Pulau Padar Island, Komodo National Park

ABOVE

A pink beach on Padar Island, Komodo Islands



LOMBOK ISLAND

Considered the more relaxed alternative to buzzing Bali, Lombok is an island located in West Nusa Tenggara province, forming part of the Lesser Sunda Islands. Lombok is much less commercialised and is a great place to partake in activities you would find in Bali... just without the crowds.

Offering its own unique version of Indonesian culture, this slower paced island is the perfect balance of Nature and culture, often paying tribute to the traditional Sasak animists that once dominated the island before the arrival of Islam in the 18th century. Compared to the crowded streets and traffic jams of nearby Bali, Lombok is tranquil and serene and though smaller in size next to other popular islands in the country, Lombok's natural beauty and relaxing ambiance attract tourists from across the globe. The island is

also a favourite destination amongst honeymooners and those looking for a more intimate and laid-back holiday.

TIU KELEP WATERFALL

Lombok is known for its pretty, Instagram-worthy waterfalls, and one of the island's most famous ones is the Tiu Kelep Waterfall. This gushing natural wonder can be found in the north of the island, and is surrounded by a luscious emerald green forest. Located in Senaru Village, the waterfall requires a trek of around 45 minutes through the forest past trickling streams. Upon arrival, you will be treated to an incredible waterfall that plunges over 45 metres – the perfect place to cool off after a hot and humid hike.

WHEN TO GO

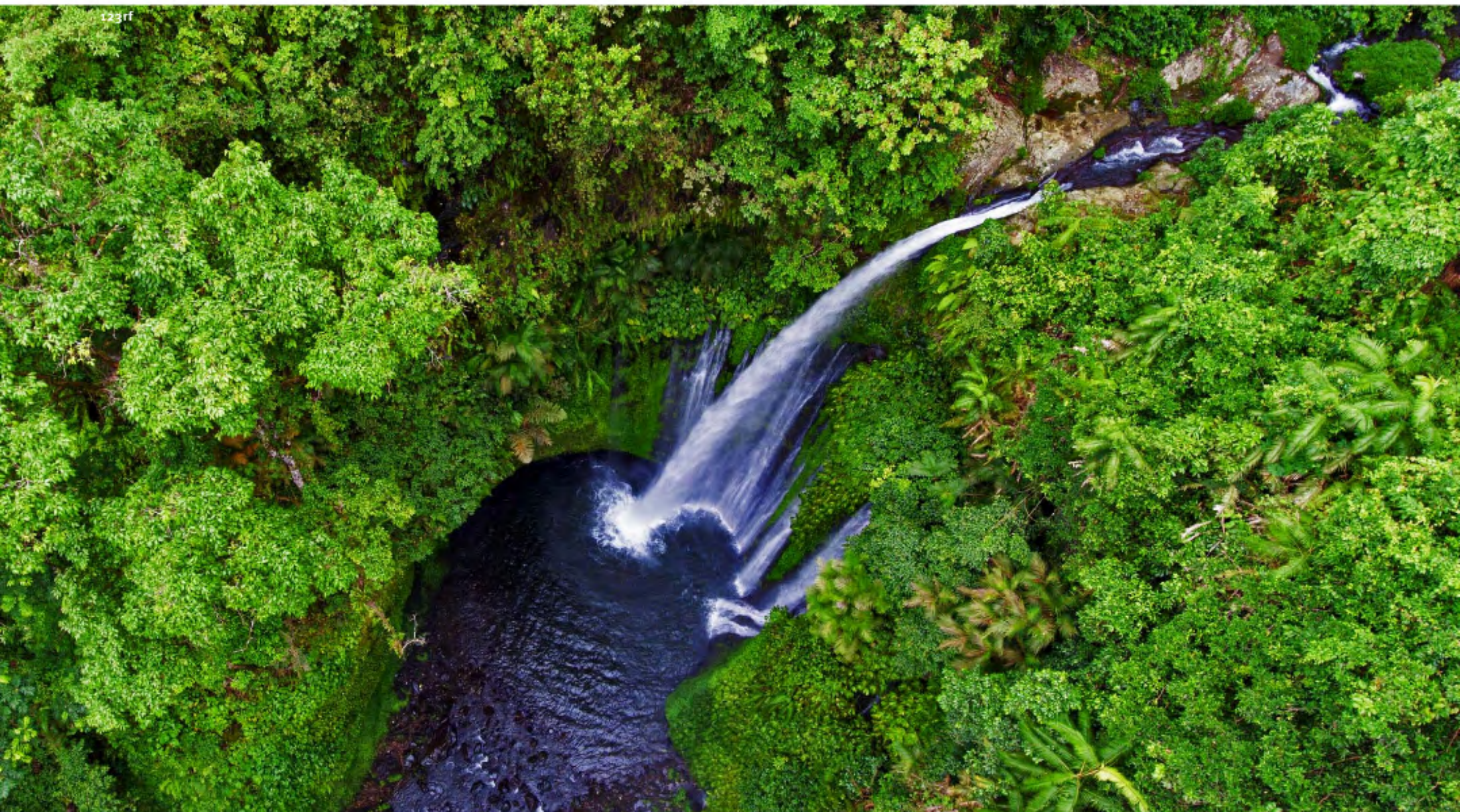
July to August

GETTING THERE

One of the most convenient ways of travelling to Lombok is by air, flying from major cities such as Bali, to Lombok International Airport. You can also take a public ferry from Padangbai in Bali to Lembar Port in Lombok. The journey will take around four to five hours

BELOW

Tiu Kelep Waterfall near Mount Rinjani





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CLIMB MOUNT RINJANI AND MAKE A PIT STOP AT AIR KALAK HOT SPRINGS

The most famous attraction in Lombok, Mount Rinjani is the sole reason that many visitors come to the island. Not only is this the main mountain of the island, but it is also a still-active volcano and the second-largest volcano in Indonesia. Trekking up the mountain will take you to the crater right at the summit, where you can find stunning views of the island. And though many say that hiking to the summit is one of the best experiences you can have in Indonesia, it is a long and strenuous one, so it is important that anyone attempting the hike is in a reasonably good shape.

ABOVE
Sunrise from
Mount Rinjani

HISTORY OF LOMBOK



17th century, Indonesia, [wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Batavia_17th_century.jpg)

The origins of Lombok date back as far as the **14th century** but little is known about the island until the **17th century**. The local Sasak people, originally animist farmers, converted to Islam around the end of the **16th century**



Sasak dancers, [wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Sasak_dancers.jpg)

The Sasak made their way to Lombok long before most of Indonesia's other ethnic groups settled amongst the **13,000** odd islands of the archipelago, and they are believed to have migrated from either Burma (now Myanmar) or northwest India



Nestled close to the stunning Lake Segara Anak, Air Kalak Hot Springs is a must-visit pit stop after your hike up Mount Rinjani. Taking a dip in the lake will not only soak away any of the aches and pains; it is also believed that the waters of the hot springs have medicinal properties due to the high volcanic mineral content.

VISIT TETEBATU VILLAGE

Similar in some ways to Ubud in Bali, Tetebatu Village is perfect for travellers to meet and learn about the culture of the indigenous people of Lombok, called the Sasak. Home to vast rice fields, hidden waterfalls and caves, the village is a far cry from the crowded cafés and fancy villas found on other islands, and a visit to the village takes you back to a simpler and more slow-paced way of life. Here, you can find traditional handicrafts – sometimes even having the opportunity to try your hand at their traditional techniques such as bamboo braiding – and observe and appreciate the way of life of these fascinating indigenous people.

TOP LEFT

The hot springs are a must after hiking the volcano

TOP RIGHT

Volcanic activity has only rarely curtailed the steady parade of tourists making their way to the summit

RIGHT

A drone's eye view of Tetebatu's sprawling rice fields





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HISTORY OF LOMBOK



The Sasak chiefs of Lombok who allied with the Dutch to resist Balinese occupation, [wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org)

In the early years, Lombok was made up of dozens of tiny clans who were each ruled by their own Sasak "prince". There was constant competition and feuding between the various clans and states, which the neighbouring Balinese princes used to their advantage when they eventually conquered the island. The Balinese took control of western Lombok in the early **17th century** whilst the Makassarese, from Sulawesi, invaded eastern Lombok



Dutch intervention in Lombok and Karangasem against the Balinese in 1894, [wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org)

The Balinese ruled Lombok from the middle of the **1700s** until the **1890s**, when the **Dutch** intervened, taking control of the island. After a series of bloody fights, the Balinese were driven out and Lombok became part of the group of islands now known as the Lesser Sunda Islands

Under the **Dutch**, hefty taxes were imposed which pushed many Lombok peasants into poverty, making way for Chinese businessmen to exploit the economic vacuum. Things continued on in a repressive manner until Indonesia eventually declared its independence in **1945**, with Sukarno as the first president of the country. He tried to regroup Lombok into a larger cluster of islands known as Nusa Tenggara, but the island proved hard to govern



Major General Suharto (at right, foreground) attends a funeral for generals assassinated in 1965, [wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org)

After the ousting of Sukarno in **1965**, Lombok entered a dark period of oppression amongst many other islands of Indonesia. It was only after the new president Suharto implemented his harsh "New Order" plan that the island attained growth and stability. By **1973**, a prolonged famine reached its peak, resulting in the locals moving from the island as part of a transmigration programme

The country began to prosper in the **1980s** when tourism began to take off after outside investors and speculators came in to develop the island. Despite the financial crisis of 2007 and the political turmoil that followed, Lombok still attracted a steady stream of travellers, and the island soon emerged as a relaxed, more authentic alternative to its more-developed neighbour



FLORES ISLAND

WHEN TO GO

April and early December (dry season)

GETTING THERE

The best way to get to Flores is by air, flying from Bali into Labuan Bajo in the far west or Maumere in the far east

Named after the Portuguese word for “flowers”, Flores is a stunning small island in East Nusa Tenggara that is known for its natural charms such as mountains, beaches and tri-coloured Kelimutu Lake.

An underrated island in comparison to other popular destinations like Bali and Sumatra, Flores is a great place to start for anyone looking for an island to explore in Indonesia that is considered off-the-beaten track. One of the most beautiful islands hidden from touristy eyes, Flores is home to Portuguese Indonesians, an ethnic group that comprises of descendants of the colonial Portuguese settlers who landed in the wider region during the 16th century. As a result of this, over 90 percent of the population on the island are Roman Catholics – a stark contrast to Indonesia’s predominantly Sunni Islam populace.

With much of the island having gone largely unnoticed, the coastline and lush forests have remained largely untouched, making Flores an essential port of call along the Southeast Asia backpacking trail. It’s a similar story for the pristine waters surrounding the island, and dive liveboards bring adventurous divers here to experience some of the country’s most unspoiled reefs.

TRI-COLOUR LAKES OF MOUNT KELIMUTU

Kelimutu National Park is one of the smallest amongst six national parks that stretch between Bali and the Nusa Tenggara islands. However, it is not the size of its centrepiece mountain that draws people to the area, but rather the spectacular crater lakes known for having constantly changing colours.



The spectacular crater lakes are known for having constantly changing colours

The three lakes are:

1. Lake Tiwu ata Mbupu (Lake of Old People), which is usually blue
2. Lake Tiwu Nuwa Muri Koo Fai (Lake of Young Men and Maidens), which is known to be typically green in colour
3. Lake Tiwu Ata Polo (Bewitched or Enchanted Lake), which is usually red in colour

The names of these lakes come from local folklore, which has it that the lakes are a resting place for departed souls. Mae, the god of the afterlife, is believed to send those who died to different lakes depending on their merits in their life.

Interestingly, the colours of the lakes change over time. At times the lakes have been white, turquoise and red, and in November 2009, they were black, turquoise and a Coca-Cola brown, while in July 2010, the lakes changed to various shades of green. The general explanation for the phenomena is that volcanic gas may be triggering chemical reactions as a result of particular minerals in the water. But other scientists have suggested that the lakes periodically change colour due to oxidation-reduction chemical dynamics. But the exact science is besides the point: These striking lakes are a must-visit!

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP

Mount Inerie, a stratovolcano in south-central Flores

OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM

One of the stunning crater lakes at Mount Kelimutu in central Flores





VISIT THE TRADITIONAL NGADA VILLAGES

- To experience a taste of traditional Floresian culture, travellers can head to Bajawa to visit the traditional Ngada villages of Desa Guru Sina, Desa Langa, Desa Bela and Desa Lina Tiwa, which are nestled between two volcanoes in the remote inlands.
- These communities are characterised by a distinctive form of architecture that has survived despite the globalising forces of the modern age. Each village is organised by clans (or families) and the number of houses (known as *sa'o*) and shrines for male and female ancestors in a given village are determined by the number of clans in that village. The buildings in the village reflect traditional beliefs and you can often find the skulls of sacrificed animals adorning the village as a reminder of their religious practices.

They even use megalithic formations to contact deceased family members. These small villages are completely isolated and only connected to the town of Bajawa via a narrow, winding road. While the Ngada communities have demonstrated a strong desire to protect and preserve their architectural heritage, they have found that by allowing tourists to visit their village, they are able to earn a new form of living, through charging an entrance fee and selling their *ikat* (traditional handicrafts). While the village has maintained its traditional way of life, they have been impacted in various ways by the increase in tourist foot traffic. However, the villages still make for a fascinating visit, and you'll rarely be able to experience such rich indigenous culture elsewhere in the country.

ABOVE

One of the main sources of income in the traditional village of Bena is from handmade clothing, scarves and decorative cloths



Their Home

The houses are made of wood with a high thatched roof and the doorway is often ornamented with buffalo horns and jawbones (the number on a house indicates the family's status). In addition, each family has two houses – the females have the *bhaga* symbol, which is a miniature house, perched on the roof whilst the males have the *ngadhu* symbol, which looks like a parasol with an impressive carved wooden pole.

TOP LEFT
A local woman from Wagomenge village

TOP RIGHT
Women dressed in traditional garb

ABOVE
Traditional wooden houses with thatched roofs



{ SOUTHEAST ASIA }

Malaysia

A member of the Commonwealth, Malaysia is a political marriage of territories that were once under British Rule. Established in 1964, Malaysia only became what it is today, when the federation of the eleven peninsula states – joined by Singapore and the two Bornean territories of Sarawak and Sabah – came together after the British handed over power. Shortly after, in August 1965, Singapore split from the federation and became its own independent republic.

Located just north of the equator, Malaysia is split into two sections, separated by 650 kilometres of water – the western half shares the peninsula with Thailand and Singapore whilst the eastern half covers roughly a quarter of the island of Borneo, the other portion being part of Indonesia.

Home to over 31 million people of various races and religions, Malaysia is a melting pot of cultures, with its urban and rural divisions reinforced by the ethnic diversity that is so prominent in the country's history.

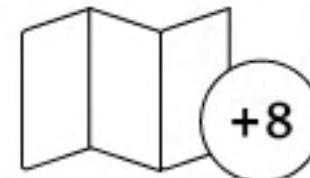
EXPEDITION INFORMATION

WHEN TO GO
November to March

GETTING AROUND
Public transport in Malaysia is relatively accessible and inexpensive. You can travel around by bus, train and taxi. Budget flights are also a great option for those looking to hop between regions within the country

GETTING THERE
The main gateway to Malaysia is Kuala Lumpur, which has two airports – KLIA and KLIA2 – with many international as well as domestic flights passing through. If you are looking to visit from neighbouring Singapore, you can travel by train or by bus, where fares are cheaper, but the journey is much longer

Time zone



UTC+08:00

Capital



Kuala Lumpur

Language



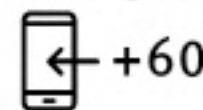
Malay, but English widely spoken

Currency



Malaysian ringgit (RM)

Calling code

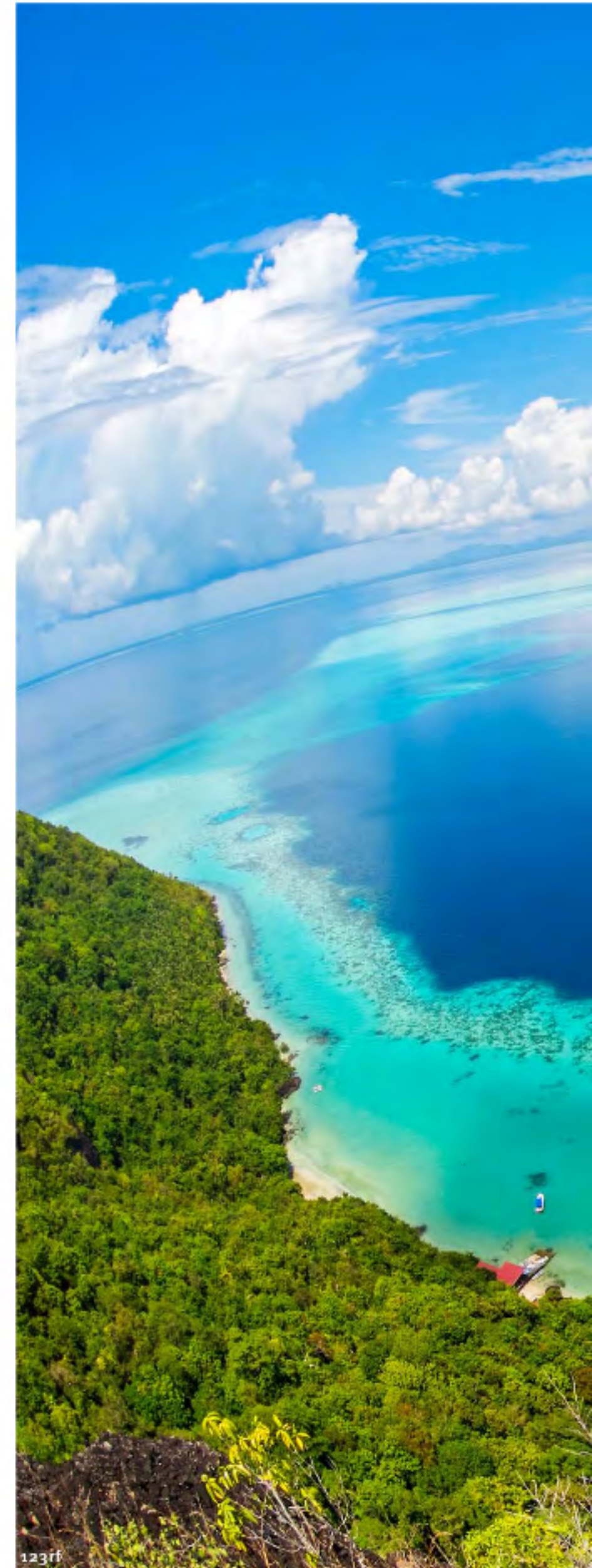


Electricity



Plug type

G (UK-style)



Malaysia is a melting pot of cultures, with its urban and rural divisions reinforced by the ethnic diversity that is so prominent in the country's history



Dominantly, the cultural force of the country is Islam, but there is also a sizeable Christian and Hindu minority, together adding a beauty to the country with its mix of mosques, temples and churches.

From modern urban architecture to traditional rural *kampungs* (villages),

spectacular mountains and unspoiled rainforests to beautiful beaches and pristine waters, inexpensive and delicious food to fascinating cultural sights, Malaysia has so much to offer travellers, whether you're a Nature nut, adventure addict or a culture vulture.

ABOVE

A stunning panoramic view of Bohey Dulang Island in Semporna, Sabah



PERHENTIAN ISLANDS

The ultimate beach destination in Malaysia, the Perhentians have it all, from backpacking options to luxury resorts, relaxed dining to buzzing nightlife, and the best part is that it is not nearly as frequented by tourists as compared to places such as Langkawi or Tioman Island.

The Perhentians – also known as Pulau Perhentian – means “stopover” in Malay. This small archipelago is situated just 21 kilometres from the coast of Terengganu, in the South China Sea, and is comprised of two main islands, Pulau Perhentian Besar and Pulau Perhentian Kecil, which mean “Big Perhentian” and “Small Perhentian”, respectively. Many believe that the name came from when the islands were once used as a stop-off by pirates, whilst others believe it’s because they were used as a stopover for trade ships between Malaysia and Bangkok.

When planning your trip, take note that Perhentian Besar is the more expensive island, where the class of accommodation and services is higher, whilst over at Perhentian Kecil, it is a lot cheaper and much more rustic, catering more towards backpackers and local families. With crystal-clear turquoise waters, coral reefs and deserted white-sand beaches, the Perhentian Islands are relatively undeveloped, and the laid-back ambience combined with stunning scenery, only adds to the peacefulness that so many look for in a beach paradise.

Many believe that the name came from when the islands were once used as a stop-off by pirates

WHEN TO GO

March to November (dry season)

GETTING THERE

Travel to Kuala Lumpur and then fly or take an overnight bus to Kuala Terengganu or Kota Bharu. From there, you will have to take a taxi to Kuala Besut Jetty and then take a speedboat before arriving at Perhentian Kecil. The journey by boat takes around 30 to 45 minutes

TOP

Snorkellers enjoy the Perhentians’ gin-clear waters

RIGHT

Windmill Stairs with the Blue Lagoon below



TAKE PART IN SNORKELLING OR SCUBA DIVING

The Perhentian Islands are all about lazy days at the beach, diving, snorkelling, hiking or just finding an escape – with the occasional night out at the bar. Situated right on the fringe of the Pulau Redang Marine Park, the islands’ waters are home to stunning corals as well as a thriving underwater ecosystem that is densely populated by reef fish, sharks, turtles and more.





Shark Point: As the name suggests, this dive site is the best spot to come up close and personal with various shark species but in particular blacktip reef sharks. With a maximum depth of around 12 metres, this is a great site for both beginners and advanced divers.

Sugar Wreck: A sunken freighter located off the west of Pulau Perhentian Kecil, Sugar Wreck rests at a depth of around 18 metres below the surface. The vessel was previously used for transporting sugar and sunk in 2000 during the monsoon period. The wreck is now home to a teeming array of marine life, including big schools of snappers, jacks and trevallies circling the hulk. For more experienced divers, it's also possible to penetrate the wreck to view the engine room, wheelhouse and cabins.

Tanjung Besi: Found on the northern tip of Pulau Perhentian Besar, Tanjung Besi features some impressive rock formations and a few small caves and swim-throughs. Found at a depth of between 10 to 25 metres, the site is home to large groupers and barracudas as well as other animals such as turtles, giant moray eels, triggerfish and surgeonfish.

GO TREKKING ON THE ISLAND

If diving is not quite for you, you can put your hiking shoes to good use with the various jungle trails that criss-cross the islands. If you follow the Nature trails that can be found throughout the southern half of Pulau Perhentian Kecil, you'd have ended up journeying from one end of the island to the other in one day. One of the most popular hiking routes on the island is the Windmill Hiking Route.



BOHEY DULANG ISLAND



A little paradise off the coast of Borneo, Bohey Dulang Island is the second-largest island in Tun Sakaran Marine Park, also known as Semporna Islands Park. Known for its incredible lagoon, this mountainous island is a remnant of an ancient volcano and an incredibly popular destination for trekkers and birdwatchers.

Bohey Dulang, along with neighbouring island Bodgaya, were once part of an extinct volcanic crater, but over time, the crater was flooded with seawater, which later created a spectacular lagoon that is over 25 metres deep. Its southern side is open to tourists and just below the water's surface, you can find an extensive stretch of coral reef nestled on what used to be the southern crater rim. The island used to be nicknamed "Pearl Island" as it was once used as a pearl cultivation centre – the first ever in Malaysia – though the farm was later closed in 1993.

Many who travel to the island are attracted by the scenery, but it is not the

only thing that makes Bohey Dulang so interesting: While largely uninhabited, the island is home to a small community of Bajau Laut, or sea gypsies. The Bajau Laut are the true masters of the sea, having roamed the waters of the Coral Triangle between Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia for many generations. Today, you can find a sizeable population living in their wooden houseboats or stilt huts built atop the coral reefs out at sea.

Truly a paradise escape, Bohey Dulang may be small in size, but its impeccable lagoons, beaches and hiking trails make this island a must-visit for a day trip getaway.

While largely uninhabited, Bohey Dulang is home to a small community of Bajau Laut, or sea gypsies

WHEN TO GO

February to April
(dry months)

GETTING THERE

To get to Bohey Dulang Island, travellers will have to take a domestic flight to Tawau Airport, before travelling an hour by car to Semporna. From there, it's a 30-minute boat ride to the island





123rf



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TOP LEFT

A long wooden pier on Bohey Dulang Island

LEFT

Beautiful Tun Sakaran Marine Park viewed from Bohey Dulang Island

TOP RIGHT

Traditional sea gypsy stilt huts

BOHEY DULANG HIKING TRAIL

The view from Bohey Dulang's highest point, at around 350 metres, is what draws most people to the island. After the 600-metre-long hiking trail, you will be greeted by the most unreal panorama of the lagoon's crystal-clear waters and the coral reefs that lie beneath. The hike to the summit should take around 45 minutes to an hour but the stunning vista is definitely worth the effort. It is a relatively easy hike though it is important to still be in good shape and have the proper footwear. Additionally, our advice is to schedule your climb in the morning so as to avoid the daytime tourist crowd!



VISIT THE GIANT CLAMS AND MARINE INVERTEBRATE HATCHERY

The island is also home to the Giant Clams and Marine Invertebrate Hatchery, which has recently become an extremely popular pit stop for many on a visit to the area. This research and conservation facility, housed in a wooden stilt complex that overlooks the sea, is where rare giant clams are bred. Launched in 2006, the hatchery is a collaboration between Malaysia's Sabah Parks and the UK's Marine Conservation Society. Visitors have the opportunity to check out the exhibition hall as well as the nurseries where juveniles from seven of the world's nine clam species are kept.

BELOW
Bajau Laut kids enjoy the crystal-clear water

RIGHT
A giant clam





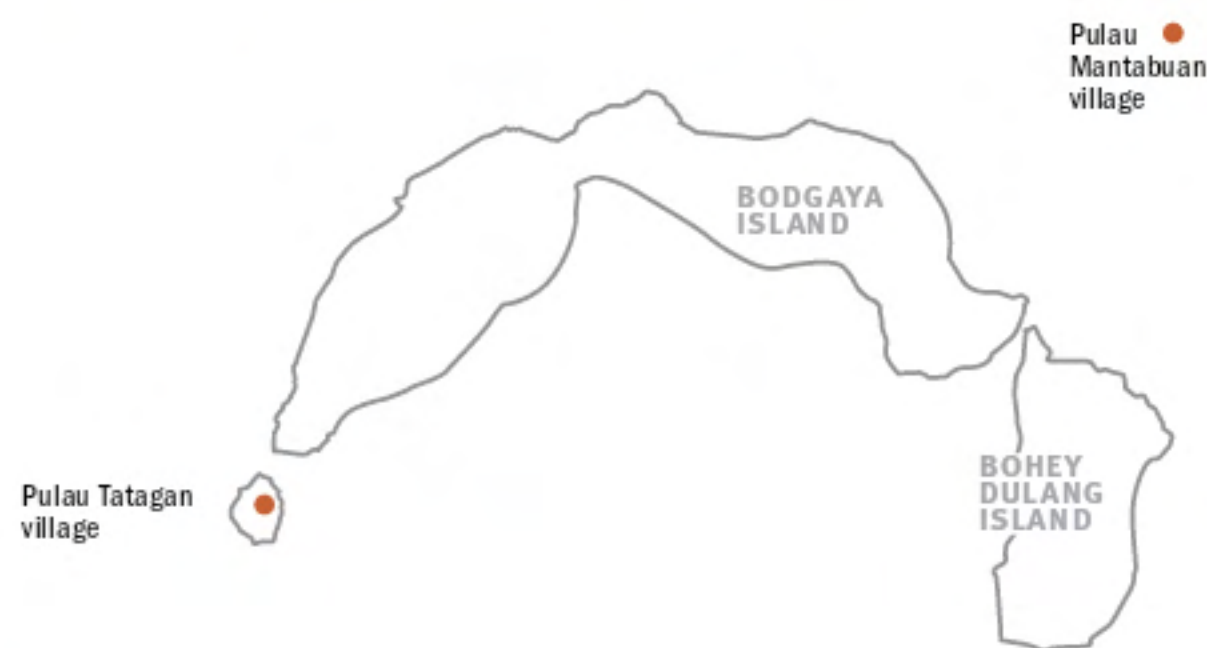
VISIT THE BAJAU LAUT

The island of Bohey Dulang is best known for its population of Bajau Laut. Known for their seafaring ways, the community lives in stilted houses around the marine park and many visitors travel to the island to see these nomads living their day-to-day lives out at sea.

Meet the Freediving Sea Gypsies

Masters of the art of freediving, the Bajau Laut are known to be able to dive to depths of well over 20 metres whilst holding their breath for several minutes. As well as spearing their catches, they are also proficient at fishing using nets and lines.

In Malaysia, they can mainly be found in Mabul, Bohey Dulang, Sibuan, Maiga, Mantabuan, Selakan and Omodal. It is believed that many spend so much time out on the water that if they ever set foot on land, many report feeling “land-sick”!



Pulau Selakan village

Pulau Tatagan village

Pulau Mantabuan village

ABOVE

A Bajau Laut girl wearing white powder as a sunscreen

TOP LEFT

The Bajau Laut construct simple huts on stilts and use traditional boats called *lepa lepa*

TOP RIGHT

The older generation of Bajau Laut have witnessed gradual change over the years



One of Cebu's
beautiful waterfalls

123rf

{ SOUTHEAST ASIA }

Philippines



EXPEDITION INFORMATION

WHEN TO GO

November to June

GETTING AROUND

The most convenient way of getting around most towns is either by tricycle or jeepney – the ubiquitous, colourfully decorated buses that are the most popular means of public transportation in the Philippines. Depending on where you are going, cheap flights are also an option for travel between cities. Travellers can also consider hiring private cars or motorcycles to get around

GETTING THERE

The main gateway into the Philippines is either via the capital city of Manila, arriving at Ninoy Aquino International Airport; or via Cebu, arriving at Mactan-Cebu International Airport. These two transport hubs serve international flights from all over the region and the world. An extensive network of domestic flights brings travellers to every corner of this vast archipelago

Located in the western Pacific Ocean, this island country is an archipelago consisting of some 7,000 islands and islets lying just 800 kilometres off the coast of Vietnam. With dazzling beaches, year-round sun and hundreds of incredible islands to visit, it's no surprise that the Philippines is the ultimate beach destination in all of Southeast Asia, attracting a steady stream of foreign travellers from around the world, with its beautiful white-sand beaches and turquoise blue waters.

While the country has become a prime spot to travel to, especially amongst scuba divers and beachgoers,

there is still so much of the country that is left to explore. More than just its beaches, the Philippines is home to countless picturesque landscapes including luscious paddy fields, forests, waterfalls, mountains and even active volcanoes.

No matter what you're in the mood for, the Philippines has a little bit of everything for everyone, but with so many islands to explore, the challenge is knowing where to begin when you have a limited number of days to spare. But fret not! Read on for the perfect introduction to the island experience in this beautiful part of Southeast Asia.

DID YOU KNOW

The Philippines gets its name from Philip II, who was the King of Spain during the Spanish colonisation of the islands in the 16th century. As the country was under Spanish rule for over 300 years and under US tutelage for another five decades, the Philippines has many cultural affinities with the West. This is why the Philippines (behind India) is the second most-populous Asian country that has English an official language and is one of the only two predominantly Roman Catholic countries in Asia



A depiction of the baptism of Philip II in Valladolid, Spain, wikipedia.org

Time zone



UTC+08:00

Capital



Manila

Language



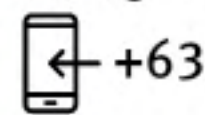
Filipino, English

Currency

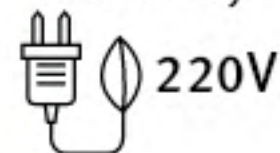


Philippine peso (PHP)

Calling code

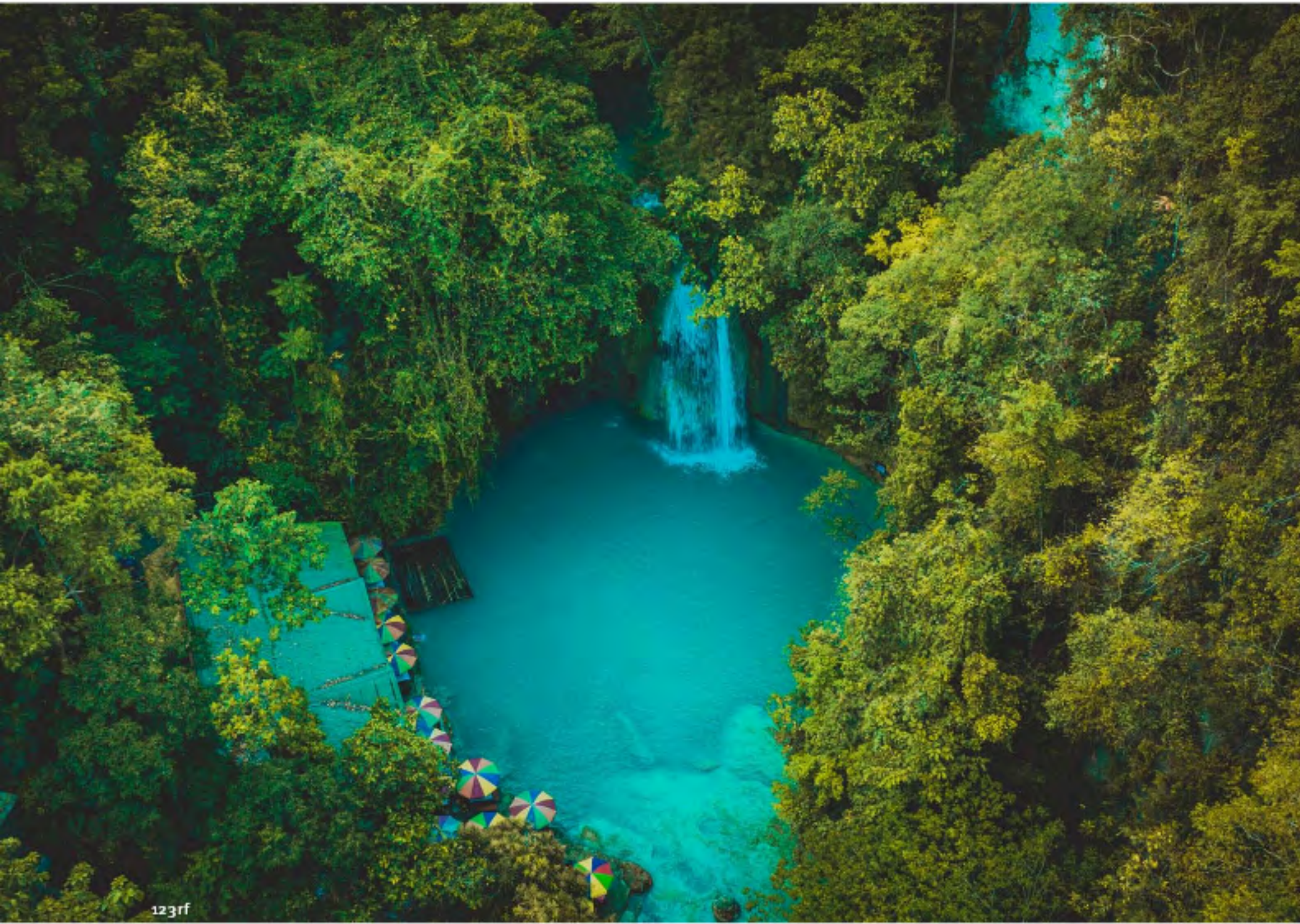


Electricity



Plug type

A, B (US-style), C (European-style)



123rf

WHEN TO GO
March to April

GETTING THERE
Cebu is an international destination with flights from Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Japan, Taiwan and South Korea. Arrival is at Mactan International Airport almost daily. Alternatively, Cebu is just an hour away by plane from Manila

ABOVE
Kawasan Falls, one of Cebu's many amazing waterfalls

CEBU ISLAND

Cebu Island is long and narrow, stretching 196 kilometres from north to south and 32 kilometres across at its widest point. Sitting in the heart of the Philippines' Visayas region, the island province consists of the main island of Cebu and more than 150 other islands and islets. The island's capital is Cebu City, which is a major transport hub and one of the oldest Spanish settlements in the Philippines.

Cebu Island has incredible limestone plateaus and scenic coastal plains, as well as rolling hills and rugged mountain ranges. With beaches, coral atolls, islands, and rich fishing grounds surrounding the island, Cebu combines island life, historical sites and a bustling city seamlessly, making it the island to be at on your next vacation.

Cebu Island has incredible limestone plateaus and scenic coastal plains, as well as rolling hills and rugged mountain ranges

EXPLORE WATERFALLS AND BASK IN THE MAINIT HOT SPRINGS

The hot springs in Malabuyoc are endowed with beautiful natural wonders and resources. The concealed yet well-known Mainit (translating to "hot") Spring is hidden mainly due to its accessibility and distance, and while it may take some effort to get there, the journey is well worth it. The springs are filled from the interior of two mountains, and there are also more than five waterfalls of various heights located close by.





MALAPASCUA ISLAND

Monad Shoal ●

A standout diving destination in Cebu, and arguably one of the best in the world, this island is just a boat ride away from Maya Port on Cebu. This scenic island off the northern tip of Cebu Island is a favourite spot for divers who want to see thresher sharks in crystal-clear waters. In 2016, thresher sharks were included in CITES (Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species), and the Philippine government has implemented laws to protect them. Dives at this island are usually easy to do and the outcome for many is extremely rewarding. Beyond exploring the deep with thresher sharks, there are also reefs, wrecks, sandy muck dives and wall dives to enjoy.

Monad Shoal: This is the prime spot for coming up close and personal with the graceful thresher shark. Since the early 1990s, Monad Shoal has garnered a reputation for being one of the premier places for scuba diving in the Philippines and has drawn thousands of divers from all over the world to explore its waters. Essentially a seamount or rock stump with a flat top that is roughly 20 metres down from the surface, Monad Shoal is a magnet for thresher sharks as the seamount acts as a cleaning station for the removal of the parasites from their skin, mouth and gills. The best time to see the threshers is right before sunrise, so if you're considering diving here to encounter these beautiful and elusive animals, be prepared to wake up early.

BELOW
Malapascua is one of the Philippines most well-known dive destinations

123rf





BORACAY ISLAND

We all know the Philippines is one of the best beach destinations in Asia, but no conversation about this country as a destination is complete without mentioning Boracay.

This small island located in the Western Visayas, south of Manila, is the country's most well-known beach destination, often being featured in various publications on the best islands around Asia and the world. Most notably, in 2012, Boracay was awarded the "Best Island in the World" by international travel magazine *Travel + Leisure*; in 2014, it was top of the "Best Islands in the World" list published by *Condé Nasta Traveler*; and in 2016, it was at the top of the same magazine's list of "Top 10 Destinations to Watch".

Boracay's sheer natural beauty is the reason travellers have been flocking to the island for years and the attention has transformed this once quiet and isolated island into a highly developed tourist destination. Resorts of all shapes and sizes have been popping up all along the coast and restaurants and shops now fill the streets and alleys of the island.

Initially, the sudden influx of tourists greatly affected the island and its environment resulting in the closure of the island in 2018 to undertake major infrastructure upgrades, especially of the island's struggling sewerage system after a video of sewage flowing directly into the ocean went viral.

Since then, the island has put in place strict measures to ensure that the natural environment is protected. Islanders are no longer allowed to party on the beach, single-use plastics will be banned from the island, and there has been a cap on the number of people who can visit the island. Though that may seem off-putting to some, it has only added to the allure



of the island, as now people who travel to Boracay are able to experience the island at its best and at the same time participate in the effort to ensure a more sustainable future for the island and its vital tourism industry.

ENGAGE IN WATER SPORTS

If you think that all there is to do here is just sit back, relax and soak up the sun, think again. You're just inches away from the ocean, which means you're inches away from endless water-based activities! In fact, Boracay Island is home to a whole host of recreational water activities, including some that you can only find here.



WHEN TO GO

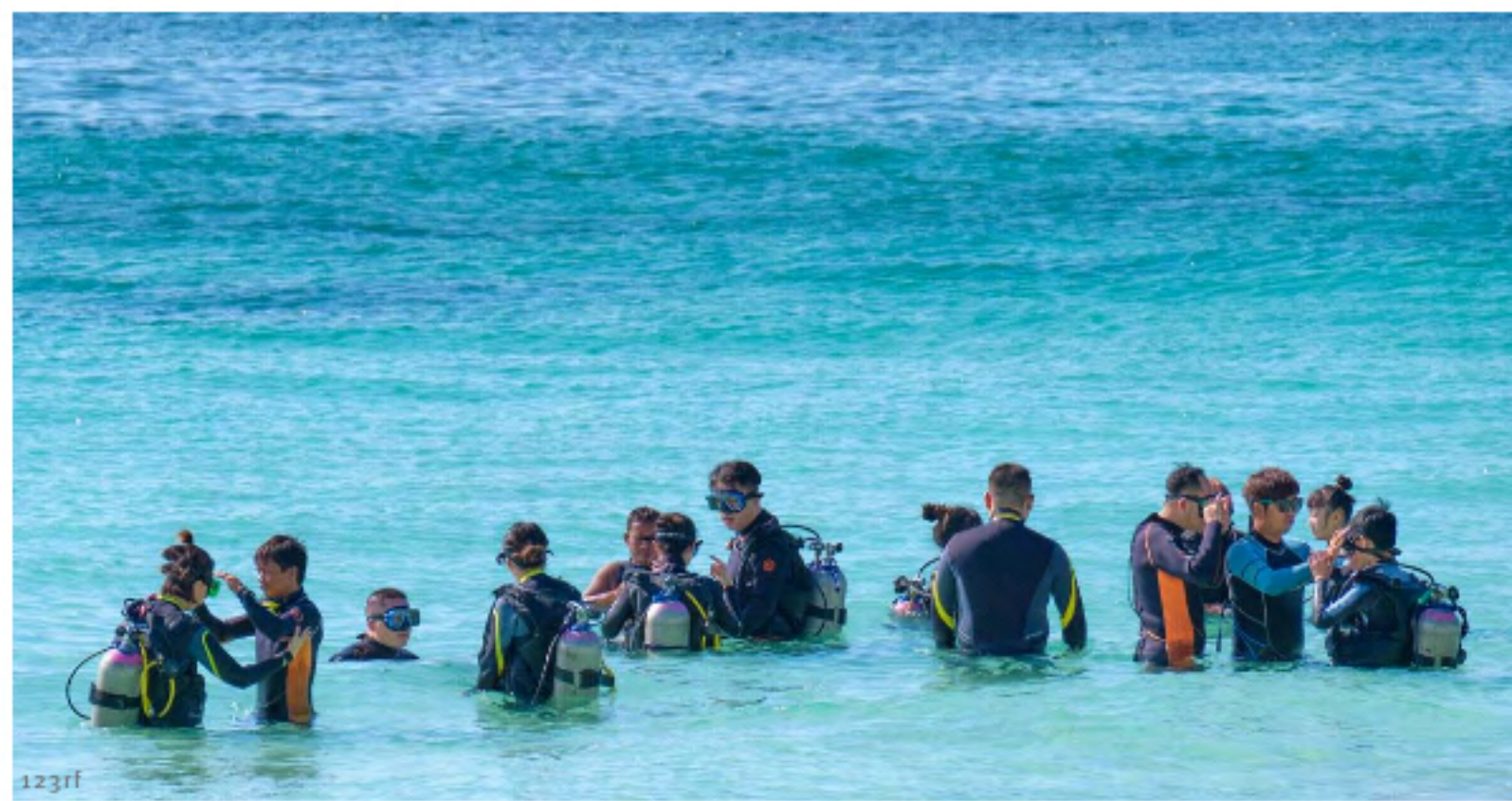
November to April

GETTING THERE

Domestic flights to Boracay arrive via either Caticlan Airport (Godofredo P. Ramos Airport) or Kalibo International Airport, the latter also serving a few foreign airlines, including Air Seoul and China Eastern Airlines. If you are arriving at Caticlan, you can take either a private hire car, tricycle or boat to Boracay, a journey of only 10 to 15 minutes. From Kalibo, you will have to travel around two hours either by van, bus, or taxi to Caticlan Jetty Port

TOP

Boracay's emerald water and swaying palms are world famous



Parasailing: The ultimate must-do on Boracay Island, parasailing gives you the opportunity to fly through the air and have a bird's eye view of the entire island. Attached to a parachute that is then attached to the back of a speedboat, this is not so much sailing as flying, and if you do it as the sun begins to set, it really will take your breath away – figuratively and literally!

Flyfish: If you really want an adrenaline rush, hop aboard Flyfish, an inflatable raft, similar to a banana boat, that is pulled along by speedboat. Have some serious fun with your friends as you get tossed around by the splashing waves, at times launching into the air! Be warned: You might get a bit wet!

In fact, Boracay Island is home to a whole host of recreational water activities, including some that you can only find here

Diving Lessons (Novice Friendly):

If you've always wanted to try scuba diving, Boracay is a fantastic place to get certified. Home to some stunning dive sites teeming with marine life, the island is a paradise for dive junkies of all levels, but particularly if you're just beginning your dive journey. Choose from an endless number of dive centres offering high-quality training, and rest assured that you'll be well looked after, guided the whole way by professional instructors.

TOP

Parasailing is a great way to enjoy Boracay's coastline from the air

ABOVE

Boracay is an idyllic place to earn your diving certification



BORACAY ROCK (WILLY'S ROCK)

We're sure that at some point prior to your trip, you will see this spot pop up on your Facebook and Instagram feed. This small castle-like volcanic rock formation is arguably one of Boracay's most iconic and photographed landmarks. The small rocky outcrop becomes a tidal island at low tide, and at the top of the stairs that have been carved into the volcanic rock, there is a statue of the Virgin Mary. Many people call it Willy's Rock because of its close proximity to Willy's Beach Club

Hotel, whilst others call it The Grotto, in honour of the Virgin Mary statue, or just simply Boracay Rock, but we call it what it is – a natural beauty! A popular spot with locals and travellers alike, Boracay Rock can also be visited during high tide, though you would need to be prepared to wade through waist high water, so we definitely recommend visiting at low tide instead. Either way, this is an essential photo op waiting for anyone visiting Boracay!

BELOW

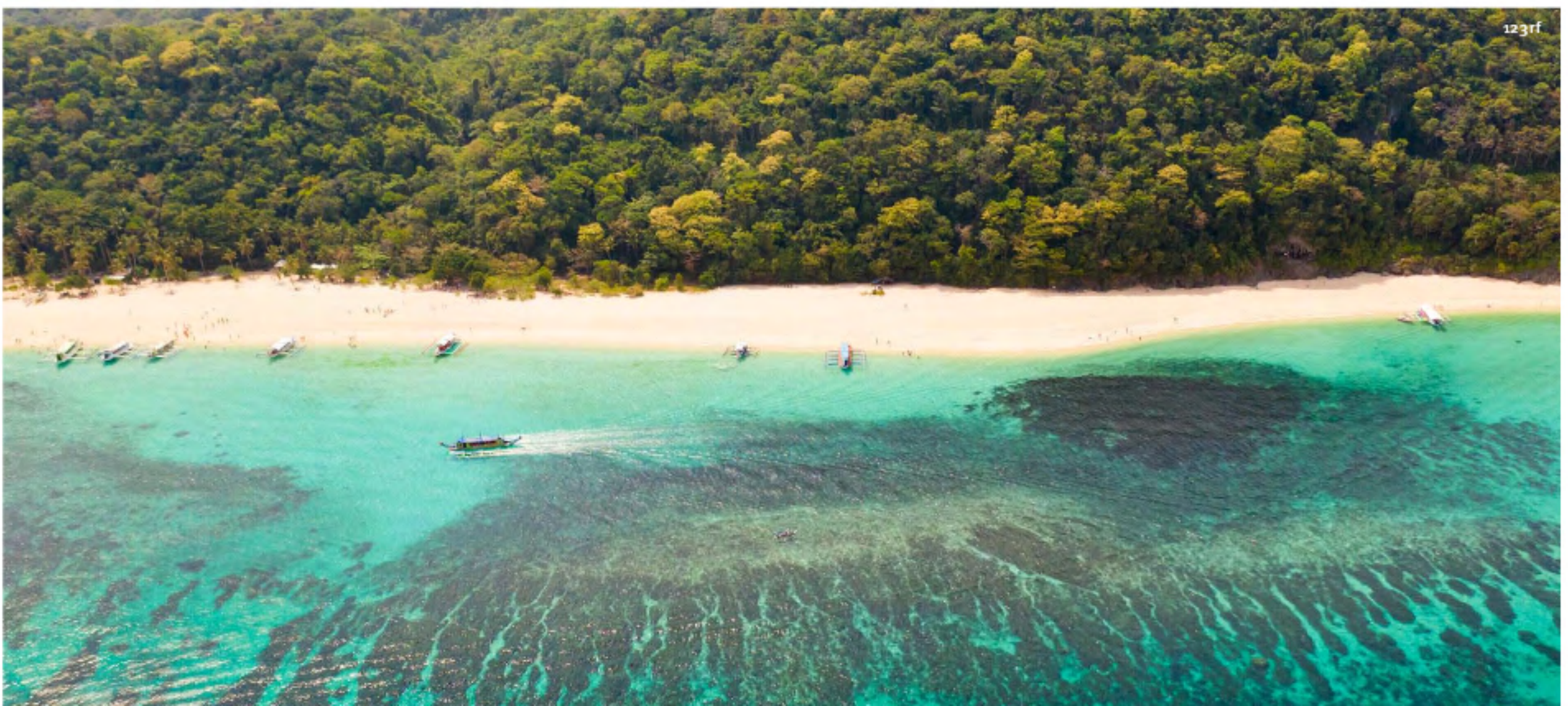
The much-photographed Willy's Rock, otherwise known as Boracay Rock

BOTTOM

Boracay's stunning Puka Shell Beach



123rf



123rf



MOTAG LIVING MUSEUM

So, you've done all the water activities and sunbathing that you can handle and want something a bit more interesting. Well, why not head on over to Aklan and visit the Motag Living Museum for a cultural immersion experience unlike any other? The "museum" allows you to immerse yourself entirely in the culture of the locals, by mingling with them and even visiting their homes. You can also see their traditional crafts, local farming methods, native delights and much more. Be blown away by the rich heritage of the area and try your hand at making local handicrafts and be awed by their creativity and craftsmanship. A wonderful change of pace, your visit to

the Motag Living Museum will allow you to appreciate the culture of the locals in a whole new way.

To Be Like the Ati

Celebrated every January, and culminating on the third Sunday, the Ati-Atihan Festival is one of the biggest events on the Philippine cultural calendar. Today, like so many Philippine celebrations, it honours the Santo Niño (a statue of the child Jesus), but the festival – whose name means "to be like the Ati" – is rooted in indigenous legend. While there are variations, the story goes that chieftains and their families fleeing the Malay island of Borneo from a tyrannical sultan arrived on the shores of Panay and were greeted by the Ati locals. They went on to purchase the lowlands, while the indigenous Ati began dwelling in the highlands. To celebrate the relationship, festivities took place, with the Malay migrants painting their faces to honour their dark-skinned hosts. Despite the religious elements in today's festival, you will notice the street dancers' blackened faces and colourful costumes paying tribute to the Ati.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

At the Motag Living Museum, a woman weaves palm leaves into mats used for roofs; the museum displays hand-made kitchen utensils; the Ati-Atihan Festival in full swing; the Ati are an ethnic group concentrated in Boracay, Panay and Negros



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FEATURE | ISLAND TOURISM | SOUTHEAST ASIA

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EXPEDITION INFORMATION

WHEN TO GO

November to April

GETTING AROUND

One of the most convenient ways of travelling inside this large country is via domestic flights. In general, renting a car is not recommended, as it is expensive and the roads are not for the faint-hearted. Renting a motorbike is much more economical, and many travellers choose this option despite the roads. You can also get around via train, bus or ferry

GETTING THERE

Thailand is easily accessible from most countries around the world. The most common airports that travellers fly into are Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport and Don Mueang International Airport. Alternatively, many travellers fly directly into Phuket, a major tourist hotspot, via Phuket International Airport

{ SOUTHEAST ASIA }

Thailand

Dubbed the “Land of Smiles”, Thailand is one of Asia’s, and the world’s, biggest tourist destinations, and is brimming with history and tradition. Unlike many other countries in Southeast Asia, Thailand was never under European colonial influence and instead, up till 1932, was ruled under an absolute monarchy. After the Siamese revolution, the country became a constitutional monarchy, and by 1939, it had changed its name from Siam to Thailand.

Located in the centre of mainland Southeast Asia, Thailand encompasses diverse ecosystems, from the hilly forested areas of the northern region, to the rugged coasts of the narrow southern peninsula.

LEFT

Koh Nok, in the Koh Yao Islands, halfway between Phuket and Krabi



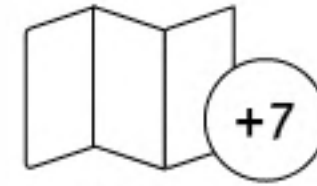
BELOW

A beach on the Similan Islands, in Phang Nga Province

Originally an agricultural country, Thailand began its steady transformation in the second half of the 20th century after locals began travelling from their villages and moving up to the capital Bangkok and other cities for greater work opportunities. Since then, Bangkok has become one of the busiest cities in Southeast Asia, with a constant stream of local and international travellers arriving on the country's shores.

Yet amongst all the condos and office buildings, many Thai communities have kept their traditional way of life, with many still living in traditional farming villages. Without having to venture far, travellers are able to encounter traditional fishing communities, rice paddies, and of course, stunning Buddhist temples located just off the beaten path. From delectable food and bustling night markets to hidden cities and impressive dive sites, there is so much to discover in Thailand, and through your travels in this diverse and colourful country, you'll quickly see just why Thailand has stayed at the top of so many travellers' bucket lists.

Time zone



UTC+07:00

Capital



Bangkok

Language



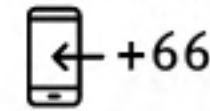
Thai

Currency

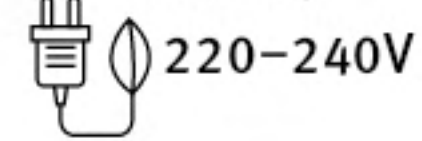


Thai baht (THB)

Calling code



Electricity



Plug type

A, B (US-style), C (European-style)

123rf





THE SIMILAN ISLANDS

Located just off the west coast of Southern Thailand, and around 120 kilometres northwest of Phuket, the Similan Islands is located in the glistening waters of the Andaman Sea, and comprise nine different islands. One of the best-known island groups in the Andaman Sea, this archipelago's turquoise water, fine white sand and rich marine wildlife fulfils every beach paradise checklist. In fact, the archipelago is also one of Thailand's most interesting diving areas and has been a favourite destination amongst divers and snorkellers for years – including being a popular location amongst yachties and boat tours.

The name of the archipelago is derived from the Malay word *sembilan*, meaning “nine”, corresponding to the original number of islands in the Mu Ko Similan National Park. But there are, in fact, 11 islands, after two remote islands (Ko Bon and Ko Tachai) were included in the group.

WHEN TO GO

December to early January

GETTING THERE

The commonest way of getting to the Similan Islands is via Phuket, Khao Lak and Ranong. You can book a day cruise to the archipelago or hop on a liveaboard. Koh Bon and Koh Tachai are far from the main group: Koh Bon is an hour's boat ride from Koh Similan, and it takes another hour from Koh Bon to get to Koh Tachai

1. Koh Huyong (Koh Hu Yong)
2. Koh Payang (Koh Pa Yang)
3. Koh Payan (Koh Pa Yan)
4. Koh Miang (Koh Meang)
5. Koh Ha
6. Koh Payu (Koh Pa Yu)
7. Koh Hin Pousar
8. Koh Similan
9. Koh Bangu (Koh Bayu)
10. Koh Bon (Koh Talu)
11. Koh Tachai



Note: Koh Bon and Koh Tachai not shown

ABOVE

The Similans are a top diving and snorkelling destination



Unlike neighbouring islands such as Phuket and Koh Phi Phi, the Similans aren't as dramatically scenic. However, what attracts travellers from far and wide are the low-lying formations covered with thick forest. The most striking features of these islands are the huge boulders that litter the western and southern shores on many of the islands, and against the thick forests and white-coral sand beaches, this is as picturesque as it gets in Thailand.

With the conditions around the islands being ideal for coral growth, another big

drawcard is the archipelago's incredible reefs. The Similans are home to all sorts of marine creatures that have helped to establish the reefs and sandy beaches in the area. Huge numbers of visitors to the island come to explore the various species of hard and soft corals by means of either snorkelling or scuba diving. And for those more seasoned divers, the archipelago also offers incredible underwater topography. You'll be able to discover a huge variety of environments to explore – from dramatic walls to big rocks, caves and swim-throughs.

BELOW

The crystal-clear waters around the Similans are famous

BOTTOM

Tourists wait to board speedboats at Koh Miang





123rf



123rf



KOH YAO ISLANDS

Consisting of twin islands Koh Yao Yai (Big Long Island), and Koh Yao Noi (Small Long Island), the Koh Yao Islands are a major change of pace in comparison to tourist hotspots such as Phuket and Koh Phi Phi. Instead of luxurious beach clubs scattered along white sand beaches, travellers are introduced to small, sleepy fishing villages. And though it may seem unexciting compared to what you can find on the other islands, the laidback and serene atmosphere is what gives the Koh Yao Islands their unique charm.

Located in the middle of Phang Nga Bay, the Koh Yao Islands might be Thailand's best-kept secret, perfect for anyone looking for that off-the-beaten-track experience without having to stray too far away from the mainland. Just a short boat ride from Phuket, the Koh Yao archipelago is home to unspoilt beaches and lush jungles – many of which have been overlooked by tourists. In addition, the islands are surrounded by the warm and inviting waters of the Andaman Sea, making this an excellent spot for those looking to partake in diving.

With only a handful of luxury resorts and tourist facilities on offer, the locals living on the island seem to have made

it a point to protect the serenity and tranquility of the islands, ensuring that the archipelago doesn't turn into yet another party destination – you'll have a hard time finding any alcohol or bars here. Moreover, because of the locals' fierceness in protecting the environment of the islands, travellers spending a night here can be assured they will be treated to the ultimate quiet refuge away from the hustle and bustle of highly developed destinations such as Phuket and Koh Phi Phi.

PADDLE OUT TO KOH NOK

Just one kilometre away from Koh Yao Noi, the tiny island of Koh Nok is one of the highlights for travellers visiting the Koh Yao Islands. Hire a kayak and get ready for a workout! After around an hour of serious paddling, you'll arrive at your very own private island. Just make sure you bring snacks and plenty of water, as you won't find any refreshments for sale on this tiny, uninhabited slice of paradise. If kayaking out into the middle of the ocean sounds too challenging, there are options to hire a longtail or join a tour group that will take you instead.

WHEN TO GO

Between January and April

GETTING THERE

To travel to the islands, you can take a longtail boat or ferry from Bang Rong Pier, located on the northeastern coast of Phuket. Ferries depart daily from the pier and the journey is around an hour

TOP RIGHT

The beautiful Laem Had Beach at Koh Yao Yai

TOP LEFT

The tiny spit of sand at Koh Nok



BELOW

Fishing boats in the harbour at Koh Yao Noi

BOTTOM

Koh Yao Noi relies on fishing as a major source of income

VISIT THE FISHERMEN'S VILLAGE

To get a feel for how the local fishers live, head to the Fishermen's Village, a collection of small wooden houses built directly on the sea. Walking along the dock of the village, you can spot the many wooden longtail boats, which have colourful tissue or flower necklaces

tied to them as a symbol of good luck. In addition, just standing on the dock gives you a wonderful view of all the wooden houses on stilts and allows you to soak in the peace and quiet of the place. If you're lucky, you'll even be able to catch the fishermen at work, out at sea.





Moken Village

Mu Koh Surin National Park

If you have the opportunity to go further north, you'll encounter another jewel of the Andaman Sea: the Surin Islands. This archipelago of five major islands is another fantastic place for hiking, fishing, snorkelling and diving. This is also the home of Moken sea gypsies, who once plied the waters of the archipelago but are now permanently located on the big southern island, Koh Surin Tai

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

The Moken sea gypsy village at the Koh Surin Islands; a traditional Moken fishing boat at Koh Lao; an old Moken woman looks out from her bamboo hut



The beautiful tree-topped granite island of South Twin in the Mergui Archipelago

{ SOUTHEAST ASIA }

Myanmar



EXPEDITION INFORMATION

WHEN TO GO

March to May (summer season) or for those looking for cooler weather, October to March (winter season)

GETTING AROUND

The most convenient way of travelling around Myanmar is either by train, bus, motorcycle taxi or via private vehicle rental. Note that public buses are usually only more common in the larger cities. It is also possible to fly domestically between the country's larger towns and cities. In smaller towns you can even travel around by means of horse-pulled carts

GETTING THERE

If you are travelling in from outside the region, the most convenient way is to fly into Yangon International Airport, which caters to many international airlines. There are other international airports at Naypyidaw and Mandalay

A British colony for six decades before World War II, Myanmar gained its independence shortly after but endured 50 years of military rule from the early 1960s. After the 2015 elections, the party of human rights icon Aung San Suu Kyi won a landslide victory and assumed power, allowing the country to finally open its borders more fully to adventurous travellers. However, Myanmar has grappled with ongoing ethnic and political strife, and in early 2021, the Burmese military again seized power, proclaiming a year-long state of emergency. For now, much uncertainty clouds the nation, but many travellers that have had a tantalising taste of Myanmar will be hopeful that democracy

will be restored and it will once again be possible to visit this fascinating country.

Indeed, there is so much to explore in Myanmar and from incredible architectural masterpieces and unexplored jungles to the mesmerising cities, this country shows visitors why it has become a must-see destination in Southeast Asia and promises to amaze travellers around the world with adventure and rewarding cultural experiences.

Myanmar's long isolation has also largely spared its waters from the effects of unchecked tourism, and the Mergui Archipelago, off the south coast, in the Andaman Sea, is home to some of the most incredible dive sites anywhere in the world.

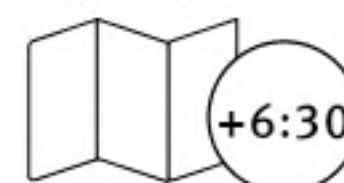
DID YOU KNOW

The Mergui (Myeik) Archipelago was likely first settled by Malay sailors who arrived from the south. However, it remained largely uninhabited until the 20th century. Malays and Chinese traders used the inner waters to escape the southwest monsoon, while larger ships avoided the complicated maritime geography. Pirates and slavers also used it as a refuge, because it was almost impossible to control.

For this reason, the Moken people found refuge here, at least until the modern world intervened. The islands began to be accurately charted only after British occupation in 1824



Time zone



UTC+06:30

Capital



Naypyitaw

Language



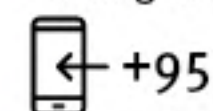
Burmese, English

Currency

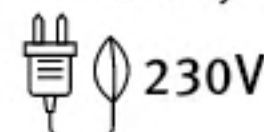


Myanmar kyat (K). Myanmar used to be a "cash-only" economy but has recently set up ATMs, mainly in Yangon and Mandalay, where you are able to use overseas debit and credit cards, but always be sure to bring extra cash just in case

Calling code



Electricity



Plug type

C, D, G (UK-style), C (German-style)



WHEN TO GO

December to February

GETTING THERE

In general, but especially due to the current political crisis, the Mergui is best accessed via liveaboard from Thailand. Boats typically depart from Khao Lak, Ranong or Phuket

BELOW

The Mergui Archipelago's Kyun Phi Lar, or Greater Swinton Island

MERGUI ARCHIPELAGO

Covering a vast area – around 36,000 square kilometres – the Mergui Archipelago (also known as the Myeik Archipelago) is located in far southern Myanmar and is a part of the Tanintharyi Region. Home to more than 800 islands of varying size, the islands of the archipelago lie in the Andaman Sea just off the western shore of the Malay Peninsula.

Most of the islands in the archipelago are uninhabited and are mostly covered with jungle, though some are fringed with white-sand beaches. With hundreds of islands yet to be explored, it is often said that in the Mergui Archipelago, the entire region is always in the process of being “discovered”.

Geologically, the islands are characterised mainly by limestone and granite, and are generally covered with thick vegetation. The shorelines of many of the islands are punctuated by beaches, rocky headlands and in certain areas, mangrove swamps, whilst offshore, you can find endless stretches of coral reefs.

For half a century following Myanmar's independence in 1948, the islands of the Mergui Archipelago – known as the “Forbidden Islands” – were mostly out of bounds, even to locals, but in the late 1990s, access was finally granted by the military, allowing divers from nearby Thailand to travel to the area on liveaboard charters. When Myanmar





finally moved towards democracy and started opening up to foreign visitors again, a handful of islands in the archipelago were earmarked for development.

Whilst the area is much more accessible than it once was, much of the archipelago is still closed off to tourism as Myanmar continues to protect the region, to avoid damaging the surrounding environment. Furthermore, the spots that have been transformed to cater to tourists are still comparatively underdeveloped – with there being no mobile phone coverage throughout the offshore islands, and resort satellite Internet being sketchy and slow.

In fact, if there is a word to describe the resorts scattered amongst a handful of islands in the archipelago, it would be “unpretentious”. Staying here, you are introduced to the world of “barefoot luxury”, where there is no need to dress to impress. Forget shopping malls, convenience stores, banks and ATM machines, neither are there many restaurants, nightclubs or pubs. This is purely a location where travellers come to relax and escape – and though that may put some people off, the



Mergui Archipelago is still one of the most visited regions in the country. Beyond the barefoot luxury resorts, the few inhabited islands are home to tiny villages that have hardly any infrastructure where you’ll find mixed populations of Burmese and Moken, the semi-nomadic sea gypsies, known for their freediving and spearfishing talents.

TOP
A Buddhist pagoda overlooking a sandy beach, Great Swinton Island

BELOW
The islands are characterised by limestone and granite



Pyiet Oo Aung

THE SALONE (MOKEN) PEOPLE

CULTURES AND TRADITIONS

Population



Estimated 3,000

Language



Moken
(a distinct language),
Burmese

Religion



Mainly animism

Called “Salone” by the Burmese and “Chao Ley” by the Thais – literally, “sea people” – the Moken live a traditional lifestyle in the southern part of the Mergui Archipelago, just off the coast of Myanmar. The Moken are considered semi-nomadic “sea gypsies”, and having lived in the area since at least the 18th century, they are thought to have traversed the entire Andaman Sea. Numbering perhaps 3,000 individuals, they are also amongst the smallest minorities in Myanmar.

To this day, mystery surrounds the origin of the Moken people. They are commonly considered to be of Austronesian ethnicity, whilst others claim that they may have migrated from

The Moken are considered semi-nomadic “sea gypsies”, and having lived in the area since at least the 18th century, they are thought to have traversed the entire Andaman Sea

southern China some 4,000 years ago. Although their history has never been determined, one thing that has stayed constant is their way of life.

It is thought that the Moken once inhabited the Malay Peninsula, until the Malay incursion forced them to scatter throughout the Mergui Archipelago. Today, they can mainly be found on the coastal islands around Kawthaung, Myanmar’s southernmost town.

RIGHT

A traditional Moken houseboat, called a *kabang*

OPPOSITE PAGE

Like the Bajau Laut, the Moken are skilled freedivers and spearfishers



FACTS ABOUT THE MOKEN

- The Moken are experts in swimming and diving, and have the extraordinary ability to see clearly underwater, as well stay underwater for long periods. They are used to diving every day and Moken children treat the sea like their playground.
- During the summer season, the Moken live in traditional houseboats known as *kabang*, moving from bay to

bay depending on the wind and weather. In the rainy season, they come back on land and live in temporary huts. It might be said that the Moken live simple lives off the riches of the sea, but this notion belies the hardships they face due to reduced fish catches and the effects of pollution and climate change. It is becoming increasingly difficult for many to survive.

BELOW

A Moken man hunts for fish using a traditional bamboo spear





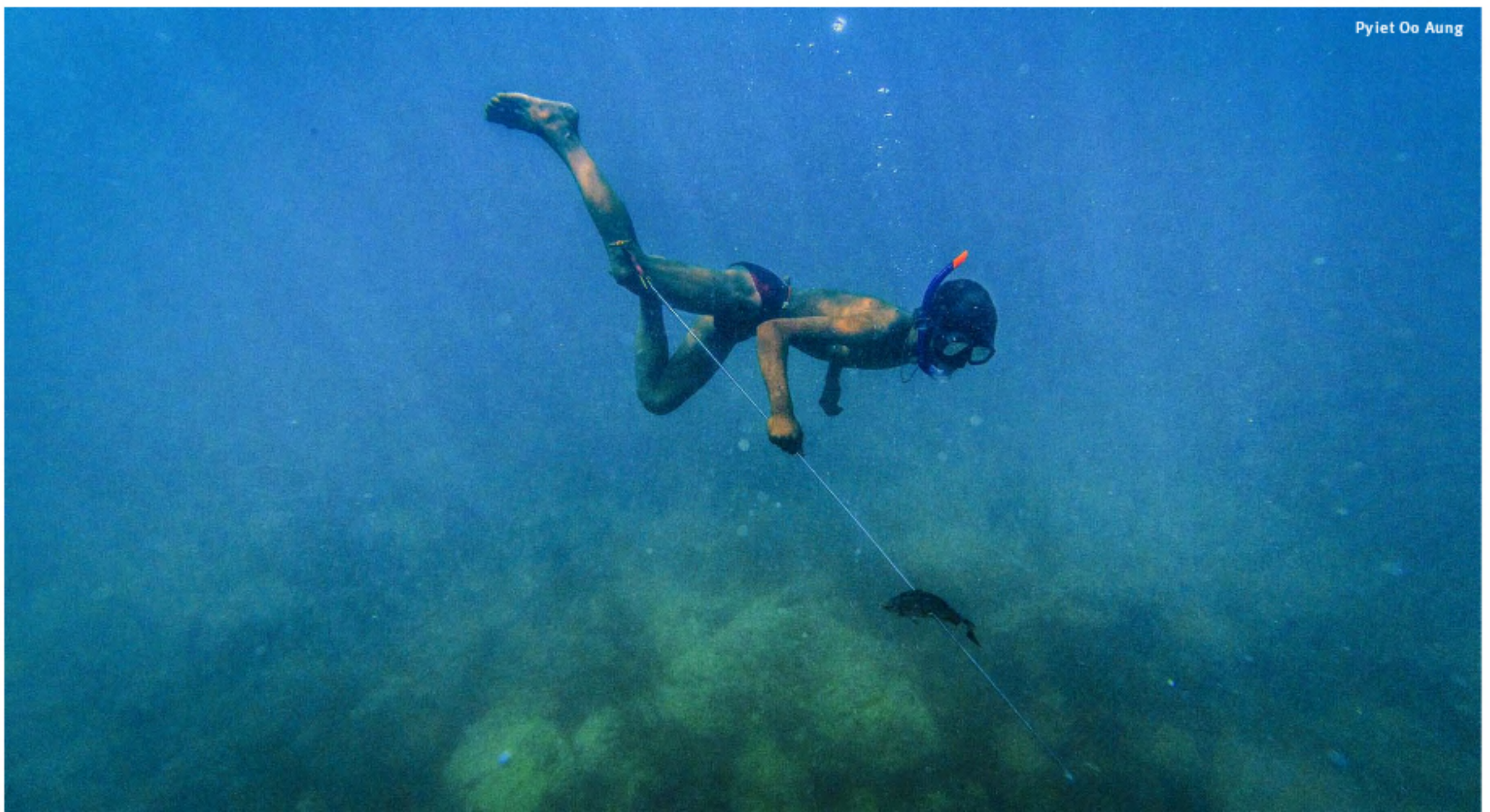
BELOW

A simple sea gypsy canoe made from a single piece of wood on a beach at Dome Island

- In addition to fishing, the Moken gather and sell natural marine products such as seashells, oysters, seaweed, and pearls. Their incomes also come from collecting edible bird's nests, honey and medicinal plants that they grow on the islands.
- The Moken are an extremely reclusive tribe and they do not mix easily with other people. They do not participate in the economic, social or even cultural development of the country they live in. Moreover, their communities have many cultural values that are different from those belonging to modern society.



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Pyiet Oo Aung



123rf



123rf



Pyiet Oo Aung

Salone Festival

Visitors can witness what life is like for the Moken during the annual Salone Festival at Majungalet Village on Bocho Island, near Lampi Island. Usually held in February, the festival is a celebration of the sea gypsies and their way of life, and features rowing and diving competitions, folk singing and dancing, and a traditional Moken feast

OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM

A young Moken man spears a fish

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

An elderly Moken lady at Lampi Island; a boy from a Moken village; a woman rows a traditional dugout canoe



{ SOUTHEAST ASIA }

Vietnam

Occupying the eastern portion of mainland Southeast Asia, Vietnam is a long and narrow nation that is shaped like the letter “S”. The country neighbours China to the north and Laos and Cambodia to the west, with the South China Sea lying to its east and south. Vietnam is a combination of lush mountains, golden sand beaches and bustling cities – attracting close to 20 million international visitors every year.

Roughly divided into the north, south and central regions, the landscape of Vietnam varies depending on which region you are in. To the north, the landscape is mainly mountainous filled with expansive rice paddies and

the Red River Delta, whilst in the south of the country, you can find the Annamite Mountains (Giai Truong Son), the coastal lowlands and the Mekong River Delta. Central Vietnam on the other hand boasts enormous cave systems protected by national parks. The coast then snakes along the East Sea before curving to the Gulf of Thailand to the west – creating the country’s famous “S” shape.

Despite the struggles over the years, such as the oppression meted out by the French during the country’s colonial years; the devastating Vietnam War; and dramatic political changes, Vietnam has embraced its history and rich cultural heritage.



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The coast then snakes along the East Sea before curving to the Gulf of Thailand to the west – creating the country’s famous “S” shape

Buddhist temples standing tall next to modern city skyscrapers, colourful annual festivals, and a capital city designed like a French-style metropolis, Vietnam has become a mix of old and new and its struggles and accomplishments – coupled with French influence – are evident in almost every aspect of the country. Journey with us through this exotic and compelling country as we highlight the top three must-visit destinations on your next trip to Vietnam.

LEFT
A “floating village” at Rock Island, Ha Long Bay

ABOVE
Colourful boats at Phu Quoc Island

EXPEDITION INFORMATION

WHEN TO GO

Vietnam is a year-round destination, but visiting between March to April is typically the best time, as the temperatures are moderate and rainfall is light

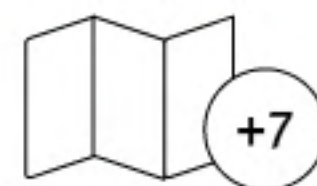
GETTING AROUND

Getting around Vietnam is relatively convenient with Cyclos, or bicycle rickshaws, available in many places. However, drivers have a tendency to ask for outrageous sums so be sure to negotiate fiercely and settle on a price before climbing aboard! In larger cities, you can also get around by train, bus and boat

GETTING THERE

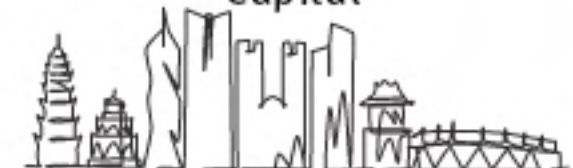
Vietnam has over 20 airports, but the busiest and most common ones are Vietnam’s three main international airports at Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi and Da Nang. A few international flights may also land in Danang and the seaside resort town of Nha Trang

Time zone



UTC+07:00

Capital



Hanoi

Language



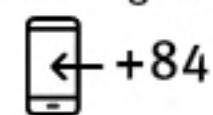
Vietnamese

Currency

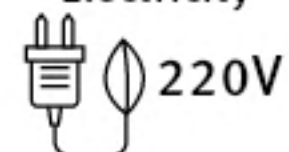


Vietnamese dong (VND)

Calling code



Electricity



Plug type

A (US-style), C (European-style) and D (UK-style)



BA LUA ARCHIPELAGO

WHEN TO GO

End-April or
end-October

GETTING THERE

From within Vietnam, travellers will have to buy bus tickets to go to Ha Tien or Rach Gia through either a travel agent. From there, you will have to take a boat to the archipelago from Hang Pagoda on Phu Tu Island in Binh An Commune, Kien Luong District

Located in Kien Giang province in southern Vietnam, Ba Lua Archipelago is home to more than 45 islands and islets nestled in the Gulf of Thailand. Dubbed the “Little Ha Long Bay” of the south, the archipelago’s islands are named after the shapes they resemble and following local folklore: Hon Heo (Pig Islet), Hon De (Goat Islet), Mangrove Islet, Re Lon (Groom) Islet and Re Nho (Groomsman) Islet, amongst many others.

Known for its picturesque scenery of limestone islets of various shapes and sizes, Ba Lua has remained largely intact

to this day, and attracts international travellers from far and wide to explore the area. Out of the 45 islets, 10 of them are home to local fishing villages and Hon Gieng, Hon Duoc and Hon Duong are the closest to each other. Furthermore, the sea around the archipelago has been known to be extremely shallow at times, which makes walking between the islands possible!

Ba Lua archipelago is currently an extremely popular tourist destination amongst the younger generation, keen on an adventure to explore the unspoiled and undiscovered regions of Vietnam.

OPPOSITE PAGE

Tourists can rent small traditional boats to travel between the islands of Ba Lua

RIGHT

Simple huts on the shore at the Ba Lua Islands



123rf

DID YOU KNOW



During the French colonial period, a common local story surrounding the islands was that Ba Lua was actually the name of a beautiful Sino-Vietnamese woman who once lived in Ha Tien. The story goes that she met a powerful Western man and they were married. After taking ownership of the islands, he demonstrated his love for his wife by naming the archipelago after her.



Dubbed the “Little Ha Long Bay” of the south, the archipelago’s islands are named after the shapes they resemble and following local folklore



TIEN CAVE

Among the many canyons and caves of Ba Lua, Tien Cave is considered one of the most beautiful caves anywhere in the world. A breathtaking natural wonder, the cave is carved out of a mountain facing the southwest and northeast regions of the archipelago and is over 150 metres long. Visitors can enter via the southwestern gate and walk all the way through to the other side where you will reach a dreamlike beach.

BA HON DAM BOAT TOUR

One of the best ways to catch a glimpse of all the islands is via a one-and-a-half-hour boat ride to Ba Hon Dam. Many of the variously shaped islets have yet to even be named so you can have some fun coming up with creative names for the islands as you cruise by. Keep an eye out for the occasional dolphin or dugong, which may take an interest in their visitors – if you’re lucky.



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HA LONG BAY

WHEN TO GO

March to May or September to November

GETTING THERE

Located around 170 kilometres away from the capital of Hanoi, Ha Long Bay is easily accessible by bus, taxi, motorbikes, ferry, hydrofoil and private tour companies

ABOVE

Tourist junk boats cruise the limestone formations in the early morning

OPPOSITE PAGE

A traditional Vietnamese boat at the beach, Phu Quoc Island

Named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1994, Ha Long Bay has the world’s most spellbinding sea views and is undoubtedly the most popular destination in Vietnam. Located in northeastern Vietnam’s Gulf of Tonkin, in the province of Quang Ninh, Ha Long Bay covers over 1,500 square kilometres and is best known for its emerald green waters and thousands of limestone islands topped by rainforest. Largely uninhabited and undisturbed, the islands are covered with lush vegetation and there are numerous hiking trails to enjoy in addition to the stunning views of the isolated bays. In Vietnamese, *Ha Long* translates to “descending dragon” and according to ancient mythology, the Vietnamese people are believed to have descended from dragons themselves. The legend goes that in an attempt to protect

the country from hostiles, a dragon was sent from heaven to protect the people and sprayed fire and emeralds or jade. Soon, these jewels turned to what is now the towering limestone formations.

Beyond just the exhilarating scenery, Ha Long Bay has a whole host of attractions to visit and activities to take part in. Adventure junkies can rent a kayak or a small boat to explore Ha Long Bay’s amazing karst caves, or really challenge themselves with some of the world’s best rock climbing experiences. For divers and snorkellers, Ha Long Bay has some excellent dive sites with healthy coral and countless species of fish, molluscs and crustaceans. And with a huge selection of fresh seafood to choose from, you won’t have any difficulty finding a delicious barbeque to end your night.

PHU QUOC ISLAND

An unassuming island that sits just off the southwest tip of Vietnam in the Gulf of Thailand, Phu Quoc (pronounced “foo kwok”) is undoubtedly one of Asia’s best-kept secrets.

The largest island in Vietnam, spanning some 574 square kilometres, Phu Quoc boasts idyllic beaches, evergreen forests and a serene atmosphere, making it the ideal holiday destination for travellers looking for somewhere to just sit back, relax and let loose.

The island is home to a substantial population (around 180,000), with fishing and agriculture being the primary industries, but tourism forming an increasingly significant part of the local economy.

The northern part of Phu Quoc is relatively untouched, as the area has been designated as a UNESCO-listed national park but along the southern coastline, visitors will find plenty to keep them entertained. From resorts to bars and quaint cafés, Phu Quoc has everything



you’d expect from a beach destination but besides the beachside activities, the island also offers traditional villages, expansive Nature parks and Buddhist pagodas and temples to explore.

A fine blend of traditional and modern, Phu Quoc has much to offer regardless of your budget and preferences, but with so much to do and so much to explore, you’ll need to check out our recommendations for your upcoming trip to the island.

WHEN TO GO
November to March

GETTING THERE
The easiest way to get to Phu Quoc is by air. From Ho Chi Minh City, it takes less than an hour

ABOVE
Sunset at Phu Quoc Island



Here you can go camping, hiking and birdwatching. The forest reserve is also a great location for avid photographers

PHU QUOC NATIONAL PARK

Comprising more than half of Phu Quoc Island's northern region, Phu Quoc National Park is by far the most popular attraction on the island. Declared a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 2010, this massive natural attraction spans more than 30 hectares of unique flora and fauna, and dense mountain ranges. The majority of the park is strictly protected by the Vietnamese government for research purposes but fret not, because travellers are still able to explore the Khu Rung Nguyen Sinh Forest Reserve via Ganh Dau Village to see the incredible greenery of the national park. Here you can go camping, hiking and birdwatching. The forest reserve is also a great location for avid photographers.

VISIT BAI SAO BEACH (SOUTH BEACH)

Located on the southern tip of the island, Bai Sao Beach is nestled on the coast of An Thoi town and is the ultimate destination for many visitors to Phu Quoc. The beach has often been dubbed "Paradise on Earth" by Vietnamese locals – and for good reason. With waters as blue as the sky, white sand beaches and tranquil waters, Bai Sao is probably the most beautiful beach in all of Vietnam.



TOP

African lions at Vinpearl Safari Park

MIDDLE

Phu Quoc is also a birdwatcher's paradise

RIGHT

Bai Sao Beach: Vietnam's best?



Ham Ninh Fishing Village

One of the oldest villages on Phu Quoc Island, this little fishing village is the ideal location for anyone looking to get a glimpse into the daily life of the local fishermen. Many of the locals that reside here are involved in either fishing or diving for pearls and sea cucumbers to make their living. Travellers to the village can enjoy relaxing sunset views of the colourful fishing boats, the Ham Ninh Mountains and pretty coastline. Additionally, a village visit isn't complete without a pit stop at one of the local restaurants to try out various seafood delicacies.

BELOW (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT)

Women make traditional crafts at Ham Ninh; an elderly fisherman flashes a smile; a woman surrounded by traditional fishing net; a young village girl plays with cast nets





123rf

{ SOUTHEAST ASIA }

Cambodia

A popular destination amongst backpackers, Cambodia offers visitors an intoxicating blend of natural beauty and rich culture.

Covering an area of more than 180,000 square kilometres, the country has its cultural roots dating all the way back to the ancient state of Funan that existed from the first to the sixth century CE. Later in 802 CE, Funan gave way to the Angkor Empire with the rise of King Jayavarman II, and for the next 600 years, the country would see the powerful Khmer kings dominate much of present-day Southeast Asia, spanning from the borders of Myanmar all the

way east to the South China Sea and north to Laos. The official language of Cambodia, Khmer, evolved during this period, and contains elements of Sanskrit, the classical language of Hinduism and Buddhism.

Cambodia later became a French colony and during the 20th century, experienced the turmoil of war, the Japanese occupation, post-war independence and political instability. But it was the victory of the communist fighters in the Cambodian Civil War, from 1968 to 1975, that spelled

ABOVE

A white sand beach on the island of Koh Rong

RIGHT

Koh Rong is the second-largest island in Cambodia, after Koh Kong





disaster for the country. In just four years in power, the brutal Khmer Rouge regime killed as many as 1.5 to 2 million people, around a quarter of the population. In the 1990s, Cambodia began the process of recovery and the country regained political autonomy, re-established a constitutional government and instituted free elections.

To say that much of the nation has been marked by its history would be an understatement, but travelling through Cambodia today allows visitors to see just how far the country has come from the days of ancient kingdoms, political turmoil and tragic conflict, and no trip would be complete without an exploration into the country's tumultuous past. But modern Cambodia is much more than its turbulent history. From fabulous beaches and fascinating local markets to eye-popping religious sites, the country offers travellers the opportunity to experience a corner of Southeast Asia like no other.

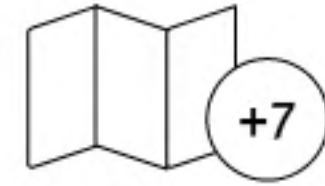
EXPEDITION INFORMATION

WHEN TO GO
November to April

GETTING AROUND
City and town transport systems generally involve the use of either a *moto* (motorcycle taxi) or a tuk-tuk and are your best way to travel around Cambodia. If you are looking to travel out of the city, consider hiring a car and driver or flying domestically within regions

GETTING THERE
Cambodia is accessible by air but there are no direct flights from Europe, North America, Australasia or South Africa; you will need to get a connecting flight from somewhere within Southeast or East Asia. Alternatively, if you are coming from neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Vietnam or Laos, you can cross through its land borders by train, bus or rental/private hire cars

Time zone



UTC+07:00

Capital



Phnom Penh

Language



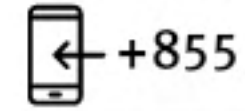
Khmer (official), English (widely spoken and understood in urban areas)

Currency



Riel (KHR) and US dollar (USD)

Calling code



Electricity



Plug type

A (US-style), C (European-style) and G (UK-style)



Modern Cambodia is much more than its turbulent history



123rf

KOH KONG

A city near the Thai border in the shadow of the Cardamom Mountains, Koh Kong is the perfect place for jungle trekking as well as taking some time out to relax on white sand beaches. The capital of Koh Kong Province, the city is a great base for off-the-beaten-track adventures in one of the country's most beautiful provinces, which includes Botum Sakor National Park, Cambodia's largest. Recognised as one of Asia's emerging eco-tourism destinations, this picturesque province is home to a treasure trove of natural beauty and adventure.

The ultimate Nature paradise, Koh Kong is one of the biggest provinces in the whole country, with a long undeveloped coastline and a mountainous, forested and largely inaccessible interior. The island also encompasses a large part of the Cardamom Mountains, which are home to the biggest rainforest in Southeast Asia and where you'll find dozens of rare and endangered animal species, including Asian elephants, bears, tigers and Siamese crocodiles.

For an even more remote getaway, you can take a boat out to the namesake island of Koh Kong, which is around 10 kilometres south of Koh Kong town. Due to its remoteness, much of the island has remained untouched. You can expect to encounter a wide variety of animal and bird species, as well as healthy coral reefs and seagrass meadows harbouring marine life such as turtles, dugongs, dolphins and even whale sharks.

The island offers its visitors an opportunity to kayak amongst pristine mangrove forests, swim in rejuvenating waterfalls and visit some of Cambodia's most remote fishing communities. Given how accessible Koh Kong is from Phnom Penh, it's no wonder that the island has been receiving an influx of tourists over the years. Furthermore, Koh Kong is conveniently located near the Thai border, the border of Thailand providing travellers with the opportunity to make this their last pit stop on their journey through Cambodia before hopping on a bus and heading across the border into Thailand.



WHEN TO GO

December to February

GETTING THERE

Around a five-hour drive from Phnom Penh, Koh Kong is accessible by bus or by hiring a private car. You can also join a guided boat tour of Koh Kong island

ABOVE

The mangrove forests of Koh Kong

TREK THROUGH THE FAMOUS CARDAMOM MOUNTAINS

Probably the best jungle trekking area in Cambodia, the Cardamom Mountains are home to one of the last unfragmented rainforests in Southeast Asia, and one of the world's true biodiversity hotspots.

The area is afforded a very high level of protection by the Cambodian government, which has resulted in relatively low levels of illegal logging, poaching, and other destructive activities, compared to the Thai portion of the range. The mountains are a release site for animals rescued from Cambodia's rampant trade in illegal wildlife, and tourists can visit the Wildlife Release Station and participate in wildlife rehabilitation work.

The mountains are believed to shelter one of the largest populations of Asian elephants in Indochina, clouded leopards, Malaysian sun bears, pileated gibbons, critically endangered Siamese crocodiles, and more than 450 bird species, including many endemics. The region is an incredible place for a hike and if you're feeling adventurous, you can embark on an overnight camping excursion through the mountains to soak in the most impressive natural beauty Cambodia has to offer.

TA TAI WATERFALL

A semi-natural site, the Ta Tai waterfall is located in Ta Tai village, Smach Meanchey district, about 20 kilometres east of Koh Kong provincial town. The area around the waterfall is home to over 84 families that earn their living from fishing and hunting. The Ta Tai waterfall comprises two stages – the first stage is around 5 to 6 metres high, whilst the second stage is 12 to 15 metres high. Visitors are able to swim in the natural pools at the bottom of the waterfall. The water is extremely clear as it originates from the Cardamom Mountains. The waterfall can be reached by boat or by road.



12 3rf



123rf

THE LEGEND OF THE WATERFALL

According to legend, there was once a man named Ta Tai who, with his son, used to go to the waterfall to fish. One day, there was a storm and the resulting floods carried away Ta Tai's son, but after several days, the boy was found at the same spot where he disappeared. The boy said he had been taken by someone who wanted to kill him, but a hermit called Ta Eysei saved him and took him back. Ever since, the waterfall has been called Ta Tai Waterfall or Ta Eysei Waterfall.



TOP
The Ta Tai river with a backdrop of the Cardamom Mountains

ABOVE
The beautiful Ta Tai Waterfall at Koh Kong



KOH RONG

BELOW

Saracen Bay, Koh Rong Samloem, about four kilometres south of Koh Rong island

BOTTOM

The lighthouse on Twilight Beach, Koh Rong Samloem

Cambodia's second-largest island is the picture-perfect example of deserted white sand beaches, lapping turquoise waters and gently swaying palm trees. Though this is no five-star luxury, Koh Rong is the perfect escape from the charming chaos of Phnom Penh.

Situated 25 kilometres west of Sihanoukville, in the Gulf of Thailand, Koh Rong has an area of approximately

78 square kilometres while well over two-thirds of its entire 61 kilometres of coastline is just white sand beaches. The word *Rong* is believed to refer to an old term for "cave" or "tunnel", but ask any local on the island, and they might tell you that *Rong* actually refers to a person.

Koh Rong is home to four separate village communities: Koh Tuich, Doeum D'keuw, Prek Svay and Sok San.



WHEN TO GO

December to February

GETTING THERE

Without a bridge or airport on the island, the only way of travelling to Koh Rong is by boat. The most convenient way of getting there from overseas is by first travelling to the nearest airport – Sihanoukville International Airport – in Preah Sihanouk. From there, you will have to get to the ferry terminal, either at Serendipity Pier or Sihanoukville Port, where you will be able to purchase a boat ticket to take you to the island

Most of the local residents that live on the island make ends meet by means of fishing and small-scale crop cultivation, though with the growing tourism sector, many have quickly found jobs in the local establishments scattered on the island.

Koh Rong, along with its sister island to the south, Koh Rong Sanloem, have been steadily gaining popularity amongst international travellers, and many foreign-run guest houses and bungalow resorts have been popping up. However, much of the islands still remain untouched and the villagers are still able to live as they have for decades.

Travellers that arrive on the shores of Koh Rong and Koh Rong Sanloem come here for the most incredible beach experience possible in Cambodia and though there may be limited activities on the island to engage in, staying here is

very budget-friendly and visitors can find almost anything they need on the island.

KOH RONG SANLOEM LIGHTHOUSE

Right at the southern end of Koh Rong Sanloem is a long-abandoned lighthouse, a relic from a time when Cambodia was a French protectorate. The lighthouse makes for a bracing hike, about 60 to 90 minutes each way on rough, hilly paths flanked by dense jungle with plenty of stones and possibly a few snakes thrown in for good measure! However, you'll be rewarded with fine views from the top, making all the effort worth it. Set off as early as you can, so you can be back before it gets too hot, bring lots of water, and have a dollar ready to pay the lighthouse keeper for the climb up to the top.

BELOW
Fishers ply the waters near Koh Rong Sanloem



123rf

GLOWING PLANKTON

Koh Rong and Koh Rong Samloen may be well known for their awesome white sand beaches and azure waters, but when the sun goes down, a unique natural spectacle occurs that is unlike anything you've ever experienced. As darkness falls, huge numbers of miniscule bioluminescent plankton rise to the warm surface and glow like tiny stars as you move through them.

While the amazing phenomenon is common along the coastlines of both islands, the glittering plankton show up best in spots where there is little

light pollution and when there is no moon. Special boat tours to witness the sparkling organisms leave from Koh Touch and Saracen Bay (the main tourist areas of Koh Rong and Koh Rong Samloen, respectively), and there are also certain places where you can simply walk to the beach at night. Wade into the water till you are around a metre deep and the plankton will begin to light up as you disturb the water. It's also possible to do an evening snorkel and enjoy the stunning underwater light show right in front of your eyes!



TOP
The bioluminescent waves at Koh Rong

RIGHT
Bioluminescence acts as a defense mechanism in plankton



Villages

Koh Tuich Village (southeast) Prek Svay (northeast), Daem Thkov (east) and Sok San Village (west)

The villages of Koh Rong are mainly small fishing villages, where houses are raised on stilts above the sea. While many of the local residents live from fishing and small-scale crop cultivation, an increasing number have begun finding jobs in the island's fast-growing tourism sector. This is particularly true for Koh Tuich Village as the southeastern tip of the island is the point of arrival for many tourists – this has resulted in the area now being home to more tourist businesses than residential homes.

The villages of Koh Rong are mainly small fishing villages, where houses are raised on stilts above the sea

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

A villager and his water buffalo at sunrise; two local boys pose for the camera; a view of picturesque Sok San Village; a group of children smile and laugh in the doorway of their village home

EXPEDITION INFORMATION

WHEN TO GO

Year round

GETTING AROUND

The MRT (Mass Rapid Transport) train is a spotlessly clean, safe and efficient way of getting around the city, with many of the main tourist attractions within walking distance from a station. Most one-way trips cost between S\$1 and S\$2, and if you are looking for unlimited travel on the MRT and buses, you can pick up a Singapore Tourist Pass (S\$10, S\$16 and S\$20 for 1, 2 or 3 days, respectively)

GETTING THERE

Singapore's Changi International Airport is one of the busiest and best connected in the world, handling over 100 airlines flying to and from some 400 cities, so travelling by air is not an issue no matter where you come from. Additionally, you can travel into the country via a cruise, docking at Marina Bay Cruise Centre, which accommodates some of the largest cruise liners around today



Sentosa Island's Siloso Beach

123rf

{ SOUTHEAST ASIA }

Singapore



Famously known as the “Little Red Dot”, Singapore is located at the tip of the Malaysian Peninsula and is Southeast Asia’s most modern city. Located just 137 kilometres from the equator, the country is home to over five million people who live on just 710 square kilometres of land.

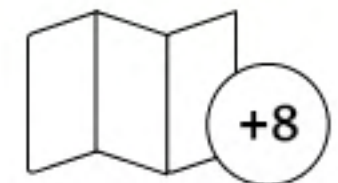
Once a British colony, Singapore first joined the Federation of Malaysia in 1963, before later becoming an independent state on August 9, 1965. What not everyone appreciates about this tiny island nation is that it is actually home to over 64 offshore islands. Only three of them are inhabited – Singapore Island, Sentosa and Pulau Ubin – with another

four – Pulau Tekong, Pulau Sudong, Pulau Pawai and Pulau Senang – belonging to the Singapore Armed Forces.

A bustling metropolis, the city is made up of a harmonious blend of religions, cultures, arts and architecture, and though physically small, it has established itself as one of the world’s leading tourist destinations, and an economic giant.

With every corner you turn, you are sure to find something new and exciting about this country and from luxury shopping to cultural landmarks and eateries, Singapore has something to offer every traveller.

Time zone



UTC+08:00

Capital



Singapore

Language



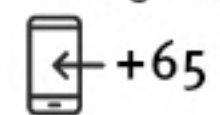
English, Mandarin Chinese, Malay and Tamil

Currency

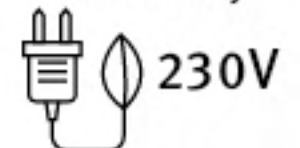


Singapore dollar (SGD)

Calling code



Electricity



Plug type

C (European-style)
G & M (UK-style)



SENTOSA ISLAND

Dubbed “Asia’s Favourite Playground”, Sentosa Island can be found just 15 minutes away from the main city centre, off the southern coast of Singapore. Steeped in history, the five-square-kilometre island is the ideal destination to relax and have some fun, whether you’re frolicking on the sand or trying your hand at ziplining down from the hill to the beach. Sentosa offers activities for just about anyone, making it the perfect spot for both rest and recreation.

Before being transformed into a tourist haven, Sentosa was historically known as Pulau Blakang Mati, meaning “Island Behind Death” and was inhabited by the Bugis (people of southern Celebes, Indonesia), Malays and Chinese during the early years of British colonial rule.

After Singapore fell to the Japanese in 1942 during WWII, the island was turned into a prisoner-of-war camp

but in the years that followed, it was decided that the island would be best suited for recreation and tourism. Hence, a contest to rename the island was launched in November 1969 and the name *Sentosa* – which in Malay, similar to the Sanskrit version *Santosh*, translated to “peace and tranquillity” was chosen, and put into effect in September 1970.

Undergoing a 10-year overhaul in 2002 to include improved attractions, new hotels and better transport options, Sentosa has since become a booming tourist destination, attracting over 20 million visitors per year.

HERE’S WHAT TO SEE AND DO ON SENTOSA



Palawan Beach

THE BEACHES

Sentosa has a 3.2-kilometre sandy stretch divided into Palawan Beach, Siloso Beach, and Tanjong Beach. If you’re looking for a day just to soak in the sun and relax, this is the perfect place for you, and if you’re after something fancier, make a stop at one of the many beach clubs found on the island for good food and even better drinks



Resorts World Sentosa

RESORTS WORLD SENTOSA (RWS)

One of the main attractions on the island, RWS is a family integrated resort with a casino at its core. Home to Universal Studios Singapore, Adventure Cove Waterpark, and S.E.A. Aquarium, among others, RWS offers entertainment to visitors of all ages and eateries for every food lover



WHEN TO GO

Year round

GETTING THERE

Taking the MRT, alight at Harbourfront Station and either take the Sentosa Express located at the third level of VivoCity shopping mall or take a leisurely stroll across the Sentosa Boardwalk onto the island



PULAU UBIN

WHEN TO GO

Start early in the morning when the temperatures are cooler, especially since the bumboat schedules are not fixed

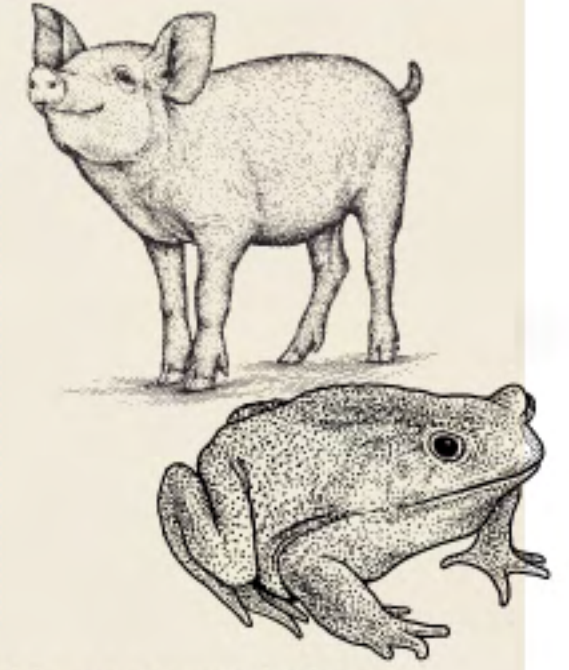
GETTING THERE

Travel to Changi Point Ferry Terminal and take a 15-minute ride in a bumboat to the island. Running daily from 7am to 7pm, boats have a maximum capacity of 12 passengers and there's no timetable; the boat will only leave once it is fully loaded

An island known for its granite quarries, Pulau Ubin is the last inhabited island in Singapore that still maintains its traditional way of life. Home to fewer than 50 people, the island takes you back to the way Singapore was decades ago, to a time when people lived in traditional villages, or *kampongs*.

The island is where you'll see some of Singapore's last remaining wooden *kampong* houses. Located just off the country's northeastern coast, Pulau Ubin is perfect for anyone looking to escape the hustle and bustle of modern Singapore life.

DID YOU KNOW



Legend has it that Pulau Ubin was formed when three animals from Singapore – a pig, a frog and an elephant – challenged each other to race from Singapore to Johor across the Straits and the animals that failed, would be turned to stone. The three animals all faced difficulties along the way and were all unsuccessful in reaching the shores of Johor. The frog was turned into Pulau Sekudu, or Frog Island (an island just off Pulau Ubin), whilst the pig and elephant turned to stone, together forming Pulau Ubin.



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Known previously as Pulau Batu Jubin, meaning "Granite Stone Island" in Malay, this 10-square-kilometre island was once a granite mining hub responsible for providing stone for use in the construction industry on the mainland, especially in the building of the famous Singapore-Johor Causeway. In the 1970s, the granite mines were closed down and as such dwindled, forcing residents to leave the island. These granite quarries are no longer in operation and have been slowly recolonised by vegetation or filled up with water.

The only settlement on the island is Ubin Town, where many businesses are catered specifically to visitors to the island, including bicycle shops, restaurants and provision shops.



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ABOVE LEFT

A wild boar wanders loose around Pulau Ubin's Chet Jawa Wetlands

ABOVE RIGHT

Macaques, like this baby, comfortably outnumber Pulau Ubin's human residents

LEFT

Renting a bicycle is a great way to get around Pulau Ubin



EXPLORE CHEK JAWA WETLANDS

A 100-hectare wetland located on the southeastern tip of Pulau Ubin, Chek Jawa is among the last few places in Singapore with a natural rocky shore. Home to one of the country's richest ecosystems, Chek Jawa is a unique natural area where six major habitats – sandy beach, rocky beach, seagrass lagoon, coral rubble, mangroves and coastal forest – meet and mix. As the area is naturally formed and a fragile habitat, interested visitors to the wetlands are required to either join a tour with NParks, the local national parks authority, or apply for a permit.

UBIN PUAKA HILL

Somewhat of an off-the-beaten-track location on Pulau Ubin, Puaka Hill is the island's highest peak and was only recently opened up to the public and made safer for trekkers. A 74-metre hike, the ascent to the peak only takes 15 minutes and once at the top, rewards you with breathtaking views as far as the border with Malaysia. With its steep and rocky terrain, some will still find the climb challenging, so it's important to have the proper footwear if you're planning to tackle this hike.



10 Singapore Islands to Explore

After you've had your fill of window shopping, bars and delicious local food, Singapore's crowds and traffic noise might have you itching to get away again. But there's no need to go far! Here are 10 islands off the Singapore shore you can spend a day at – without the need for a passport!

Lazarus Island & Pulau Seringat, Pulau Satumu, Pulau Semakau, Coney Island, Pulau Ubin, Kusu Island, Sisters' Islands, St. John's Island, Pulau Hantu and Sentosa Island

Ethnic Groups

Singapore is a multiracial and multicultural country with ethnic Chinese (76%), Malays (15%), and ethnic Indians (7.5%). There is also a substantial Eurasian population ♦ AG

TOP

The Chek Jawa Boardwalk Jetty snakes alongside the mangrove forest wetlands

MIDDLE

The serene view from Puaka Hill

ABOVE

Singapore's different races live harmoniously side by side



South Asia

◆ ◆ ◆ From the 300 islands in the Bay of Bengal that make up India's incredible Andaman Islands to the picture-postcard coral atolls of the Maldives, we invite you to discover gin-clear waters and some of the world's most flawless beaches

Text Elizabeth Lim

INDIA

- Swaraj Dweep, Andaman Islands
- Elephanta Island, Mumbai • Majuli

MALDIVES

- Malé Island • Vaadhoo Island
- Utheemu Island



Barren Island volcano,
Andaman Islands, India



{ SOUTH ASIA }

India

BELOW

Elephant Caves
on Elephanta
Island, Mumbai

RIGHT

A woman from the Mising tribe
transports grasses on her boat from
wetlands near Assam's Majuli Island

Welcome to incredible India – a country occupying the greater part of South Asia and the second most populous country in the world after China. As beautiful as it is bamboozling, India has stunned visitors from around the world for decades, continually bringing new surprises, even to the most seasoned travellers.

An intoxicating mix of chaos and serenity, India is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world and is home to innumerable castes and tribes. The history and culture of India reaches back all the way to the beginning of human civilisation, starting with the highly sophisticated and urbanised culture that evolved along the Indus River from 3300 to 1300 BCE.

Modern India is a melting pot of cultures and traditions, grappling with influences from all the main religions, the legacies of British colonial rule, and rapid development that has greatly expanded the middle class while increasing economic inequality.

From its famous golden beaches of the Indian Ocean all the way to the snow-capped mountains in the Himalayas, India has an incredible portfolio of natural and man-made wonders. Not only is the country home to some of the world's most iconic monuments, but it is also one that offers an exciting assault on your senses. From delicious street food to Bollywood hits blasting from market stalls, stunning temples to kaleidoscopic festivals, India promises a never-ending journey of discovery and adventure.

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An intoxicating mix of chaos and serenity, India is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world and is home to innumerable castes and tribes

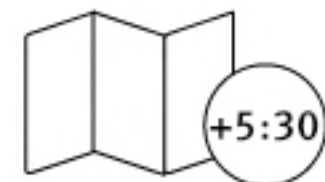
EXPEDITION INFORMATION

WHEN TO GO
November to March

GETTING AROUND
India has an extensive train network that will get you where you want to go quickly, comfortably and affordably. For shorter distances, taxis and tuk-tuks are a good option, but you will need to use your best bargaining skills. For longer-distance cross-country travel, domestic flights are convenient, but if you have the time, taking the train is a much better way to enjoy the journey

GETTING THERE
The main gateway to India is via New Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport, or Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport. Additionally, travellers may fly in via other cities such as Chennai (Chennai International Airport), Hyderabad (Rajiv Gandhi International Airport), and Bangalore (Bangalore International Airport)

Time zone



UTC+05:30

Capital



New Delhi

Language



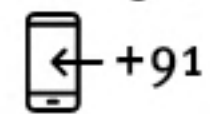
Hindi and English

Currency



Indian rupee (RS)

Calling code



Electricity



Plug type

C, D, M (UK-style)



WHEN TO GO

October to March is the best option to avoid the monsoon rains. The island can get crowded during the Indian school holidays between December and January

GETTING THERE

First head to Port Blair, the capital city of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Located about 70 kilometres north of the city, Swaraj Dweep is most easily accessed via either privately run or government operated ferries. For a seamless booking process, the former is the better option

SWARAJ DWEEP – ANDAMAN ISLANDS, INDIA

One of the largest islands that comprise a chain of islands to the east of Great Andaman, Swaraj Island is situated across the Bay of the Bengal in the Andaman Sea. Originally known as Havelock Island, after British general Sir Henry Havelock, who served in India, the island was later renamed as a tribute to Indian nationalist Subhas Chandra Bose, who hoisted the Indian flag at Port Blair on December 30th, 1943, proclaiming the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as territories liberated from British rule. Focusing on the promotion of eco-tourism, Swaraj Dweep covers an area of over 90 square kilometres and is famed for three beaches: Radhanagar Beach, Elephant Beach and Kalapatthar Beach.

Swaraj Island was once inhabited by tribal natives, but there are now settlers from different parts of the Indian mainland. Even though the Indian

government actively promotes tourism on the island, it remains relatively unaffected by modern technology. The island is famous for its swimming elephants and beautiful reefs.

ELEPHANT BEACH

Surrounded by stunning reefs teeming with marine life, Elephant Beach is ideal for water sports or just for leisure. Offering activities such as diving, snorkelling, swimming, birdwatching, trekking and kayaking, Elephant Beach is one of the most beautiful places to visit in the Andaman Islands. It got its name from days past when elephants were transported to the island to help people reach the beach before the time of boats. Today, you can enjoy a ride around the beach on elephant back.

ABOVE

Perfect white sand at Swaraj Dweep (Havelock Island)



RADHANAGAR BEACH

Recognised among the very best beaches in Asia, Radhanagar Beach is a must-visit spot that welcomes sand junkies into a world of complete serenity and relaxation. Located on the western coast and surrounded by a lush jungle, Radhanagar Beach offers a panoramic view of the ocean complemented by the white of its sand. The beach is also the island's most famous place to watch the sunset over the open horizon.

BARREN ISLAND

A couple of hours by boat from Swaraj Dweep, Barren Island is the only confirmed active volcano in South Asia and the only active volcano along a chain of volcanos from Sumatra to Myanmar. Located where the Indian and Burmese tectonic plates meet, the island is almost two million years old, with the first recorded eruption dating back to 1787. Little vegetation and few animals inhabit the island, but it has



Swaraj Island was once inhabited by tribal natives, but there are now settlers from different parts of the Indian mainland

been discovered that certain species of rodents have adapted to the harsh conditions over the years. Due to the remoteness of the area, much of the island's surrounding waters have remained in pristine condition, making it one of the best spots for scuba diving in the Andamans. Unlike the beaches on Swaraj Dweep, Barren Island's are covered with black sand, which has helped to nurture and maintain the beauty of the island's corals, sponges and sea anemones.

ABOVE
Sunset at
Radhanagar Beach

BELOW
An elephant takes
a stroll along
Elephant Beach





123rf

ELEPHANTA ISLAND, MUMBAI



WHEN TO GO
November to February
(winter season)

GETTING THERE
Travellers will first have to travel to the city of Mumbai. Upon arrival, head to the Gateway of India, where you will be required to purchase either a boat or ferry ticket to Elephanta Island. The journey will take around an hour

ABOVE
The central sculpture, the Trimurti Sadashiva, is more than six metres tall

Situated to the east of Mumbai, Elephanta Island is one of the most popular tourist destinations in India. The island was named in the 16th century by the colonial Portuguese after they discovered a large stone sculpture of an elephant near the entrance to the island.

Covering an area of around 16 square kilometres, the island is home to a collection of rock-cut cave temples, hewn from solid basalt rock. Situated atop two hills, the Elephanta Caves occupy an area of more than 5,000 square metres and were designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1987. The seven caves are the main attraction on Elephanta Island, with many travellers, both foreign and local, flocking to the island to explore the cave complex and its intricately carved sculptures.

The island is home to a collection of rock-cut cave temples, hewn from solid basalt rock

ELEPHANTA CAVES

Various dates between the late fifth to the late eighth century CE, the Elephanta Caves make for a fascinating day trip from Mumbai. Visitors reach the main cave by walking up 120 steep steps from the beach, or by taking a small tourist train up the hill. The most elaborate caves in the complex consist of a central chamber, two lateral chambers, courtyards, and subsidiary shrines, but some of the caves are much less developed. The complex's countless sculptures and panels narrate the mythologies and legends from Shaivism, the tradition that worships the Hindu deity Shiva. The most important is a six-metre-high sculpture depicting a three-headed Shiva, called the Trimurti. Unfortunately, the Portuguese defaced many of the carvings within the caves in the 17th century, with many scholars stating that Christian Portuguese soldiers used the Elephanta Caves and its sculptures as a firing range for target practice. However, many of the carvings are in excellent condition, and visitors to the island are still able to appreciate the beauty and architecture of the place.

MAJULI ISLAND

The cultural capital of Assam, Majuli is the largest river island in the world. Covering an area of over 880 square kilometres, the island is not only home to one of India's largest tribes, but it is one of the most important tourist destinations in the state of Assam.

The island is formed by the Brahmaputra River in the south and the Kerkutia Xuti, an anabranch of the Brahmaputra, joined by the Subansiri River in the north. Historical texts record how a catastrophic flood in 1750 caused the Brahmaputra to discharge southward, resulting in the creation of Majuli Island, which means "land in the middle of parallel rivers".

The island is now mostly occupied by tribal villages, most notably those of the Mising, Deori and Sonowal Kachri tribes – as well as non-tribal communities and so-called scheduled

castes. Isolated for many years, Majuli did not see its first mobile phone until 2009 and even finding plastic packaging is a rare occurrence.

The island once held the Guinness World Record for being the world's longest river island but slowly and steadily, Majuli is being washed away by the fast-moving waters of the Brahmaputra River. Over the last hundred years, the island has shrunk by more than 60 percent, from 1,000 square kilometres to barely 400 square kilometres. Furthermore, research has shown that since 1991, over 35 villages have been washed away.

One of India's greatest islands, this is a must-visit destination for many travellers, and now more than ever because with the speed at which Majuli is being eroded, the island may cease to exist entirely within the next 15 to 20 years.



WHEN TO GO

October to February
(winter season)

GETTING THERE

The nearest major city to Majuli is Jorhat, whose airport is well connected to other major cities in the country. From Jorhat, travellers can take a taxi or tuk-tuk for the half-hour trip to Neemati Ghat, where ferries depart to the island. There are multiple daily services and the journey takes about an hour

BELOW

Majuli Island's verdant fields





EXPLORE THE SATRAS OF THE ISLAND

Majuli is one of the most important cultural locations in Assam and was known as one of the hubs of the neo-Vaishnavite Movement, whose origins can be traced back to the 15th century. It is believed that Majuli is the location that Assamese saint Srimanta Sankaradeva met his foremost disciple and apostolic successor, Madhavdeva, for the first time. Various *satras* – institutional centres associated with the Ekasarana tradition of Vaishnavism – located across the island function not just as monasteries but rather, as centres for traditional performing arts, literature and classical studies.



Shri Shri Dakhinpat Satra: Built in 1584, this *satra* is visited by innumerable devotees from all around the world, and is also a great place to visit for anyone who loves serenity and peacefulness. The gateway of this *satra* is engraved with animals, flowers, and religious motifs.

Kamalabari Satra: This religious site houses significant articles that relate to art, culture, literature and classical studies. The North Satra (which is a portion of the Kamalabari Satra), participates in several cultural events across various Indian cities.



Garmur Satra: This prominent *satra* is among the many holy seats in India, and one of the royal *satras* of Majuli. Established in the year 1656 CE by Jayaharideva, the *satra* houses many ancient artifacts that allow people to gain a deeper insight into the religious beliefs of the people on the island.

TOP
The sanctorium of the Dakhinpat Satra

MIDDLE
The Kamalabari Satra

LEFT
A monk sweeping leaves from the grounds of the Garmur Satra



Visit the Mising Tribe

One of India's largest tribes in terms of population, the Mising are scattered all across the island of Majuli and are thought to have migrated there from the 16th century. They belong to the Tani people, which include various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh as well as Tibet. The Tani share linguistic and cultural similarities, and certain common beliefs, especially the belief in Abo Tani as the father of humankind. Traditional Mising houses are made from wood and bamboo, and have thatched roofs. The Mising are known for their weaving and dyeing skills, and before yarn was available, they produced their own cotton and silk

The Mising are known for their weaving and dyeing skills, and before yarn was available, they produced their own cotton and silk

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

A Mising woman weaves a *gamusa*, a cloth with special significance in Assam; women harvest rice on Majuli Island; a young woman carries her baby boy in a sling; a man gathers grass for his cattle; Mising tribal women carry hay to be used as fodder



EXPEDITION INFORMATION

WHEN TO GO

November to April

GETTING AROUND

The most convenient way of travelling between islands in Maldives is via air though it can become incredibly expensive. The other alternative is to travel by public ferry, which although cheaper, can be unreliable at times. Additionally, if you are island hopping, you might be required to stay overnight on an island as ferries do not run regularly

GETTING THERE

Most travellers arrive in Maldives via Velana International Airport, located in the country's capital, Malé. However, for travellers arriving from either America or Australia, you will be required to take a flight from your country of origin to a neighbouring country in either Europe and the Middle East (for those from America) or Asia (for those from Australia), before transferring to another flight to the Maldives



{ SOUTH ASIA }

Maldives

ABOVE

Malé is one of the world's most densely populated cities

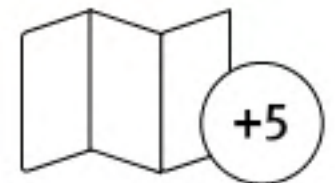
Synonymous with luxury travel, the Maldives is everything you think of when you look for that perfect island getaway. This remote country stretches from north to south 750 kilometres across the Indian Ocean and is home to over 1,200 islands and more than 30 coral atolls that are bursting with world-class diving and snorkelling opportunities.

The beautiful beaches and unique geography of the country have attracted travellers from all across the globe and that has led to a booming tourism industry. By being able to grow rapidly to cater to changing consumer demands, the Maldives has been able to attract millions of tourists to its islands annually. Indeed, with the increasing influx of tourists over the years, the country has

earned a reputation for being the best luxury destination in Asia, if not the world. Many of the resorts in the country are situated on their own private islands, offer butler services and promise the perfect all-inclusive getaway for families and lovebirds alike.

However, beyond all the incredible beaches and turquoise blue waters, the Maldives is struggling to stay afloat, quite literally. The Maldives is a country that is extremely low lying: 80 percent of its territory is less than a metre above sea level and as such, sea level rise associated with climate change is threatening the country's atolls and reefs. With the present rates of global warming, it is thought that in the coming decades many of the islands and atolls will cease to exist.

Time zone



UTC+05:00

Capital



Malé

Language



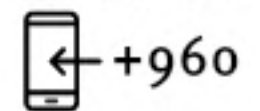
Dhivehi, with English widely spoken

Currency

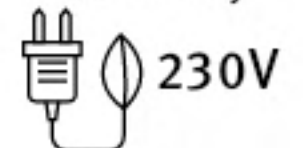


Maldivian rufiyaa (MVR)

Calling code



Electricity



Plug type D, G (UK-style)



MALÉ ISLAND

Situated at the southern edge of North Malé Atoll, Malé Island is the capital and by far the most populous city in the Maldives. Like many of the other islands around Maldives, Malé Island is a popular choice for honeymoon seekers, couples and water sports lovers.

Blessed with a wide variety of activities, ranging from scenic parks to heritage museums and incredible beaches, Malé is known for its laid-back nature and functioning on “island time”, and visitors are greeted with a mix of traditional culture and modernity. Though it can get overwhelming, being one of the most densely populated islands in the world, unlike many of the islands around Maldives, Malé is more than just palm trees and beaches, offering a plethora of tourist attractions and things to do for just about anyone.

Banana Reef

Kuda Haa



WHEN TO GO

November to April

GETTING THERE

As the capital city, Malé is the main transport hub for the country and has its own international airport, Velana International Airport, which is well connected to major cities in Asia and Europe. There are no direct flights to the Maldives from the US or Australia

BELOW

The Maldives' famed water bungalows

Maldives has been able to attract millions of tourists to its islands annually

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the prospect that travel to the Maldives may, one day, no longer be possible has been the catalyst for many to start planning their holidays, pushing people to bump the country up on their “to-travel lists”. Moreover, with over 1,190 volcanic and coral islands sprawled across the Indian Ocean, every island is different, and will offer you an experience different from its neighbour.

Whether you want a piece of the most beautiful ocean in the world, the perfect spot for a destination wedding, or access to some of the planet’s best diving, the Maldives will not disappoint. Start saving!





INCREDIBLE DIVING SPOTS

The Maldives is one of the diving capitals in Asia and for good reason. With dreamy white sand beaches, excellent reefs and an abundance of marine life, diving in this country is considered among the best. In particular, North Malé Atoll is home to some of the best dive sites in the country. The dive sites are characterised by reefs, caves, channels, and drop-offs, and most are appropriate for all levels of diver. There are also a few wreck sites for more-advanced divers to discover.

VISIT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM

Located in Sultan Park, which was once a part of the site of the 17th century Maldavian Royal Palace compound, this three-storey museum was established in the early 1950s with the purpose of preserving the culture and history of the country. This newer version of the National Museum is a conversion of the old palace building; it was built and financed by the Chinese government as a gift to the country. The museum is home to an extensive collection of historical artefacts that date all the way back to the Buddhist era and the rule of Islamic monarchs. The museum complex is surrounded by a beautiful garden park where you can find many locals hanging out and taking a break from the hustle and bustle of city life.

SOME OF THE BEST DIVE SPOTS



123rf

BANANA REEF

One of the first dive sites to be discovered in the Maldives, this site, as its name suggests, is shaped like a banana and is a protected region situated in North Malé Atoll. There are a variety of different underwater landscapes to discover, ranging from pinnacles and dramatic cliffs to overhangs and caves. With depths from 5 to 30 metres, the site is popular amongst divers of all levels



123rf

KUDA HAA

This protected marine area attracts divers from around the world to see its famous pinnacle shaped like a camel's hump. This dive site features steep slopes, a ridge and a wide variety of marine species. Suitable for divers of all levels, the site is best known for its macro life such as nudibranchs, leaf fish, flatworms and small crustaceans. Other larger fish such as jacks, barracudas, groupers, lionfish and more, can also be found here

DID YOU KNOW

In February 2012, the National Museum was broken into by a mob of religious extremists during political protests against then-president Mohamed Nasheed. Some of the museum's most precious items, such as 30 ancient Buddhist coral stone carvings from the country's pre-Islamic period, were destroyed as they were deemed "idols". A bust of Buddha, a six-faced coral statue, and assorted limestone and coral statues were destroyed as well. Security at the museum has been extremely tight since



123rf

The main guns at the National Museum of the Maldives in Malé



Tourists glide over turquoise waters in their pedal boat

123rf



Villas feature steps directly into the sun-dappled water

123rf



VAADHOO ISLAND

One of the islands in Raa Atoll, Vaadhoo is a small island that is home to no more than 500 people and is considered by many to be one of the Maldives' best-kept secrets.

On the outside, Vaadhoo Island is like any other island in the Maldives – white sand beaches, crystal clear waters, palm trees and stunning beach resorts. But the true magic is at night, when the sun sets and Mudhdhoo Beach begins to glow in the dark, giving the appearance of a starlit night sky.

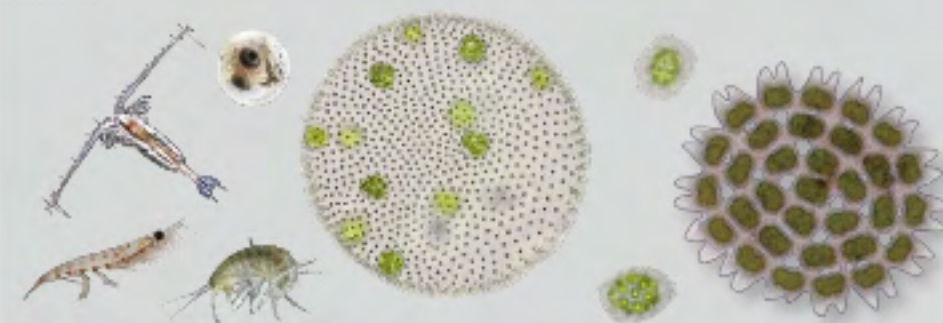
This stunning light show – a natural phenomenon called bioluminescence – is thanks to microorganisms called plankton. These aquatic microbes radiate a vibrant blue light that creates the spectacular scene that can be observed from the beach. When you're in the sea, you can stir up the water and if the plankton are present, they will emit their gorgeous blue light, a spectacle that has been dubbed the "sea of stars".

WHEN TO GO
June to October is the best time to view the "sea of stars"

GETTING THERE
Located around eight kilometres from Malé, Vaadhoo Island is well connected to the rest of the Maldives via speedboat

TOP
Bioluminescent plankton at Vaadhoo Island

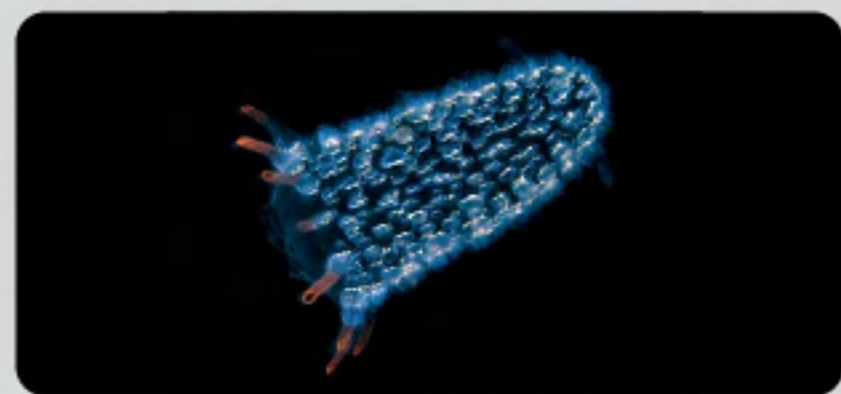
THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE GLOW



Bioluminescence is a natural phenomenon whereby living organisms produce and emit light. It is common among marine vertebrates, invertebrates, and microorganisms



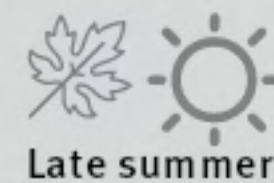
Bioluminescing creatures are often preyed upon by other fishes and the glow is a part of their defence mechanism. It is meant to be a way to scare off predators



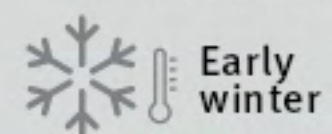
Pyrosoma, a colonial tunicate; each individual in the colony flashes a blue-green light

Light production is typically a result from chemical reactions from inside the organism. The blue light that is emitted is considered "cold" light because it does not generate heat

For bioluminescence to occur in plankton, they have to exist at a constant temperature throughout the day and night. Hence, new moon nights between late summer and early winter are the most ideal times to enjoy this phenomenon



Late summer



Early winter



UTHEEMU ISLAND

The birthplace of the country's hero, Sultan Muhammad Thakurafaanu, Utheemu Island has become a popular location amongst tourists looking to learn a little bit more about the island's cultural history. Also known as Haa Alif Atoll, the island was the childhood home of the sultan, who alongside his two brothers, are known for defeating Portuguese invaders in the 15th century. After driving out the Portuguese, Thakurafaanu was crowned the Sultan of the Maldives, raising the flag of the Utheemu Dynasty, which dominated until 1692 with a lineage of 11 sultans after him.

Located in the northern region of the archipelago, around 300 kilometres north of the capital Malé, Utheemu Island is a change of pace from the busy resorts of many other islands and whilst it still has similar beaches to other islands, there are many other historical spots to visit here. A place steeped in rich history, Utheemu Island is a slice of paradise for both Nature lovers and history buffs.

WHEN TO GO
November to April

GETTING THERE
Visitors have to first travel to Malé International Airport, before boarding a domestic flight to Hanimaadhoo Domestic Airport on the island of Hanimaadhoo in Haa Dhaalu Atoll



BELOW
The harbour at Utheemu Island

BOTTOM
Raiy Nika Beach, Utheemu Island





UTHEEMU GANDUVARU PALACE

The main attraction of the island, the Utheemu Ganduvaru Palace (now preserved as a museum) was the residence of Sultan Muhammad Thakurafaanu and is over 500 years old. Visitors to this national attraction will be escorted around the complex by museum staff members, and have the opportunity to see fascinating wooden interiors, swing beds, old-school lamps that burn using coconut palm oil and elaborate wooden carvings, as well as the large palm-thatched shed that was once used as sleeping rooms for guests. One of the most fascinating highlights of the palace is a simple, unassuming hole in a wooden wall, which projected moving images of the exterior on the drapes of the bed – almost like a pin-hole camera. This little hole was the closest thing that the locals then had to CCTV. The sultan may have been the bravest of Maldivians, but he didn't take any chances in ensuring his home was kept safe!

BELOW

Utheemu Ganduvaru residence at Utheemu Island

BOTTOM

This small palace was the childhood home of Maldivian national hero Muhammad Thakurafaanu, who, alongside his brothers, overthrew Portuguese rule in 1573



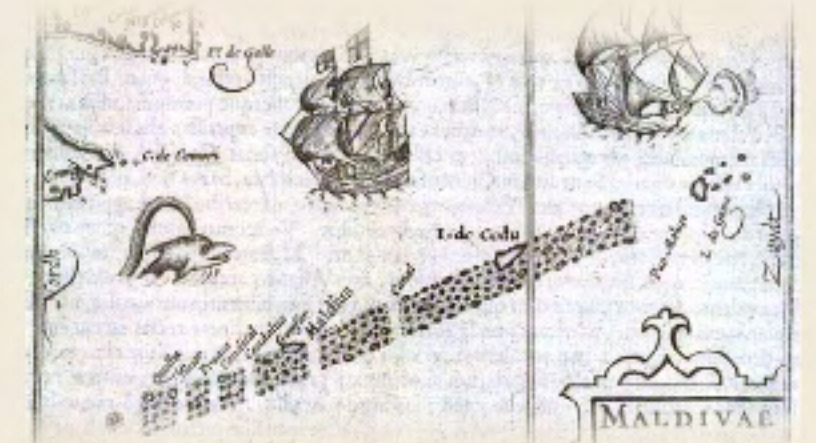
wikipedia.org

123rf

HISTORY OF MALDIVIAN FREEDOM



Portuguese presence in the Maldives was established in 1558, by order of Constantino of Braganza, Viceroy of Portuguese India, wikipedia.org



1598 Bertius map of the Maldives, issued in Middelburg, Netherlands. wikipedia.org

In the late 1500s, the Portuguese attempted to colonise the Maldives and convert the people living there from Islam to Christianity



Niy@ZLhohi

The Portuguese ruled the country for 15 years during which Muhammad Thakurafaanu and his two brothers left the Maldives to build a small navy

In the middle of the night, Thakurafaanu and his brothers began attacking and killing the colonialists an island at a time, until they reached Malé

Many Maldivians were imprisoned in Malé and sentenced to death for refusing to convert to Christianity

Thakurafaanu continued to fight, ultimately overthrowing them and freeing the Maldivian people. Thakurafaanu became the Sultan of the Maldives, ushering in the Utheemu Dynasty, which ruled for the next 125 years



Malé's Islamic Centre is officially named Asjid-Al-Sultan Muhammad Thakurafaanu Al Auzam – the Maldives' most celebrated hero

123rf



Maldives Culture and Lifestyle

Maldivian culture is heavily shaped by Indian, Sri Lankan, Malaysia, Arab, Persian, Indonesian and even African influences.

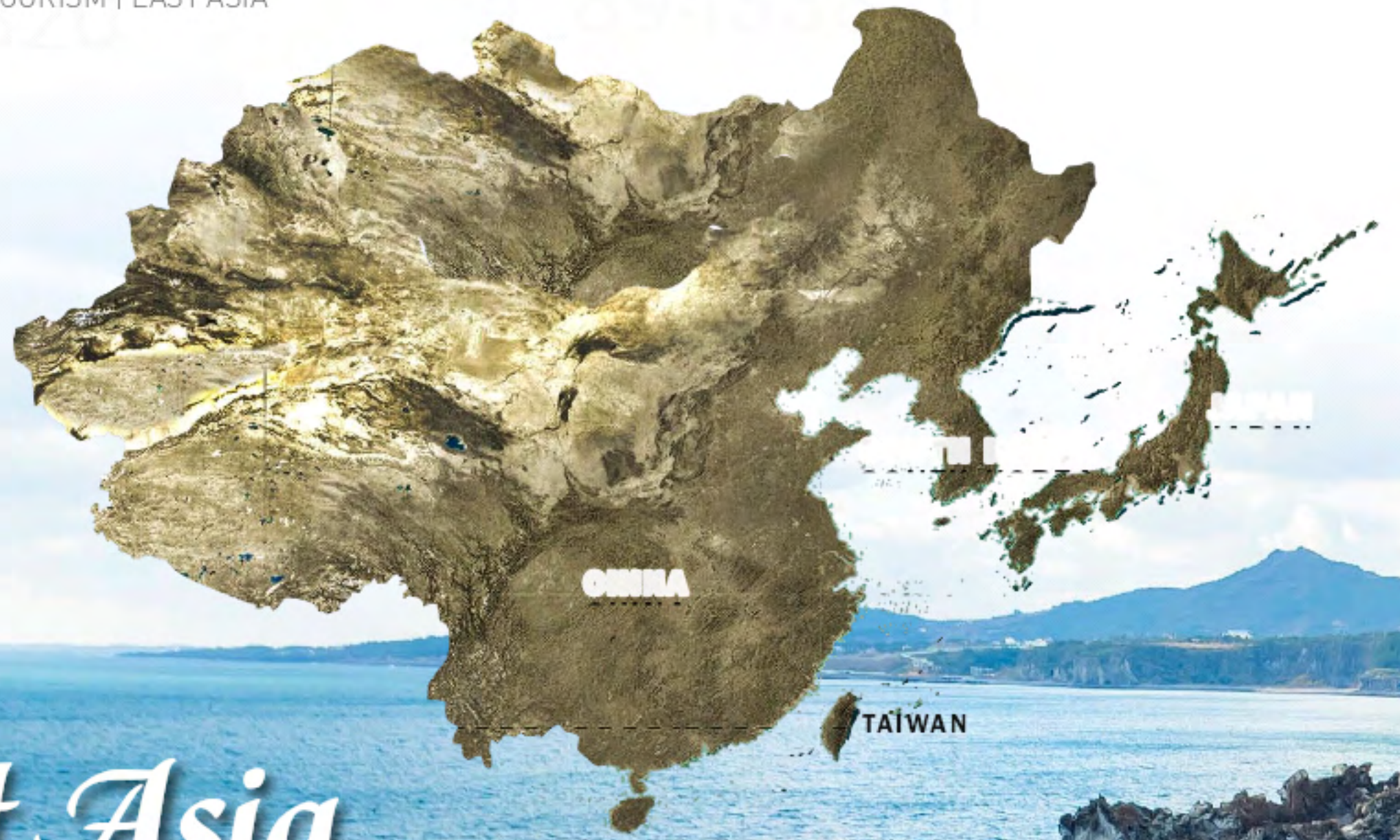
Fishing: Being an island country, the people of the Maldives are extremely dependent on fishing, and skipjack tuna has been heavily exploited. The Maldivian fishing fleet is made up almost entirely of small traditional fishing boats called *dhonis*.

Ramadan: The Maldives is a Sunni Muslim country and the holy month of Ramadan is observed every year. This month of fasting and prayer, celebrated by Muslims the world over, is strictly observed by the locals in this deeply religious country. But when it's time to break fast, it's a wonderful time to enjoy some local delicacies: *kulhi mas* (chili fish), *fathu mashuni* (Asian cabbage and tuna salad), and *faloodha* (a sweet drink made using rose syrup).

Traditional Education System: The traditional education system was mostly about literacy and religious study. The mother usually gave home tuition. A thin wooden box filled with sand was used to draw letters of the alphabet to practise at home, both the local language Dhivehi and Arabic. By the 1980s, traditional schooling was gradually replaced with Western-style schools. ♦ AG

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

A fisherman ferries his catch to a market in Malé; Maldivians break fast during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan; a mother helps her children with their school homework; a young boy makes a shy photo subject



East Asia

◆ ◆ ◆ Whether it's the incredible scenery that inspired epic Japanese movies, China's fascinating pilgrimage sites, or the unique natural wonders of South Korea, East Asia offers an eclectic range of experiences that will enthrall even the most jaded traveller

Text Elizabeth Lim

The spectacular Daepo Jusahgjeolli Cliff off the southern coast of South Korea's Jeju Island

SOUTH KOREA

- Ulleungdo Island • Hongdo Island • Jeju Island

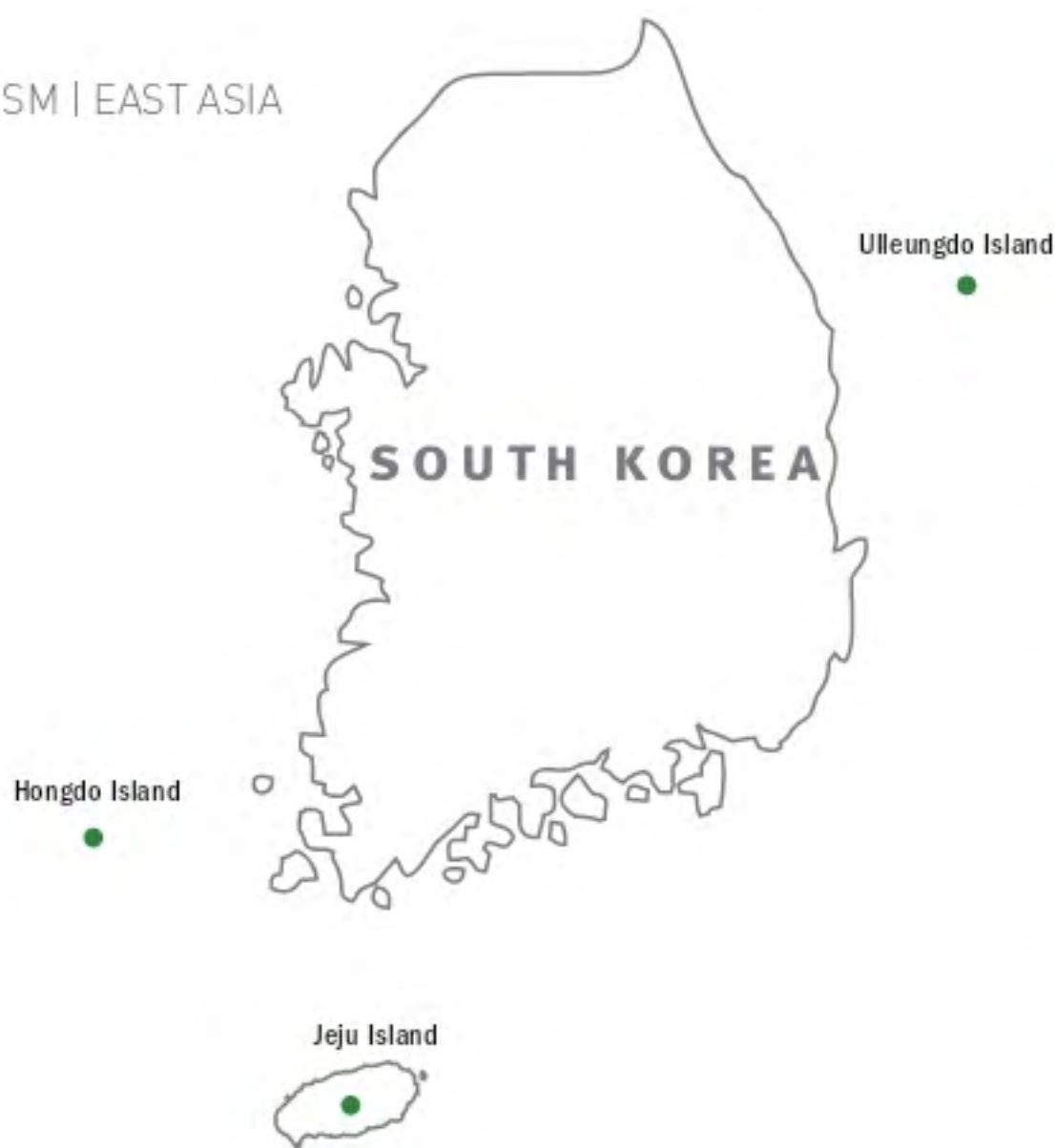
JAPAN

- Yakushima • Okinawa • Tohoku

CHINA

- Weizhou Island • Putuoshan Island
- Xiapu Island





{ EAST ASIA }

South Korea

EXPEDITION INFORMATION

WHEN TO GO

March to May (for cherry blossoms in bloom), September to November (for cooler temperatures)

GETTING AROUND

The most convenient way of travelling around Korea is by train, which connects major towns and cities. Additionally, if you are looking to travel longer distances, domestic flights are an option, as many cities have their own airports

GETTING THERE

Getting to South Korea is relatively easy, as the country is a major travel hub and caters to many domestic and international carriers. Travellers can fly to South Korea either via Seoul Incheon International Airport or via Busan Gimhae International Airport

With a booming economy, ancient culture and growing presence on a global stage, South Korea has slowly become one of the most talked about travel destinations in East Asia. Known as the “Land of the Morning Calm”, South Korea holds over 5,000 years of history, art and culture, and promises travellers an amazing range of experiences, from trekking stunning landscapes to discovering beautiful Buddhist temples.

Annexed by Imperial Japan in 1910, Korea was divided after World War II into northern and southern zones, occupied by the Soviet Union and the United States, respectively. Reunification efforts failed and by 1948, two separate states had been formed: the communist north and the capitalist south. Shortly after, the three-year-long Korean War led to the creation of the four-kilometre-wide Demilitarized Zone that has helped maintain a tense peace between the two Koreas ever since. In the intervening years, South Korea has emerged as one of Asia’s most respected, prosperous, and technologically advanced nations.

Ancient and modern co-exist in perfect harmony in South Korea. Journeying through the country you can find the neon signboards and bustling markets of modern cities such as Seoul and Busan, but travel just a bit further out and you can discover traditional coastal cities such as Icheon and Damyang. Moreover, unbeknown to many, the country has well over 3,000 islands and islets – if you were to travel to one island a day, it would take you a good nine years before you visited every single one!

Much of South Korea is still largely unexplored and untouched by tourists, but through the years the popularity of the country has only attracted an increasing influx of visitors to its shores. Among those thousands of islands are a few exceptional examples: Ulleungdo, Hongdo and Jeju. And while they may be popular getaways for the locals, the majority of foreign visitors will be unfamiliar with them. Read on to discover why these incredible islands should be at the very top of your must-visit list.

Time zone



UTC+09:00

Capital



Seoul

Language



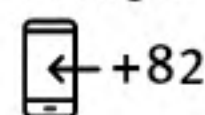
Korean

Currency

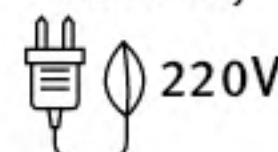


South Korean won (₩)

Calling code



Electricity



Plug type

C (European-style)
F (German-style)

ULLEUNGDO ISLAND

Situated 120 kilometres off the eastern coast of South Korea, Ulleungdo Island is known for its majestic scenery of steep cliffs and rounded peaks along a jiggled coastline. Nicknamed “Mystery Island” by the locals for its mythical energy, Ulleungdo is believed to have been formed following volcanic eruptions over 2.5 million years ago.

It is believed that the island is sacred as it is where the rich energy of the land and clear energy of the sky – making it a marriage of yin and yang. Considered one of South Korea’s best off-the-beaten-track destinations, Ulleungdo has long been a popular destination amongst locals, and over the years, foreign travellers have been catching on.

For most of its history, the island has always been out of reach and uninhabited by people, which has naturally allowed for the island’s flora and fauna to prosper. The Chosun

BELOW

Ulleungdo Island’s verdant landscape in the middle of summer



It is believed that the island is sacred as it is where the rich energy of the land meets the clear energy of the sky – making it a marriage of yin and yang

Dynasty (1392–1897) implemented the “empty-island policy”, ordering islanders to evacuate the island for fear of Japanese invasion. It was only after the Japanese claimed the island for itself in the 1880s that the Korean government finally set into motion plans to reclaim the area back. Arriving in 1883, the first settlers made the island their home. Beginning with just 54 people, there are now just over 10,000 locals living on the island.

WHEN TO GO

April to July, August to November

GETTING THERE

The only way to access the island is via ferry from a few different ports: Gangneung, Pohang, Mukho and Hupo. Timings and frequency of the ferry services do vary from month to month, so it is important to check for exact timings prior to departure





HAENGNAM COASTAL WALKING PATH

Stretching the entire periphery of the island, this walking path offers travellers the best views of Korea's natural beauty. Beginning at Dodong Port, your journey will take you along the water's rocky edge, through caves, under rock formations and trickling water, all the way to Haengnam Village. The trail offers you the opportunity to see the coastal beauty of the island and be right at the edge of the ocean. Around 400 metres from the village is Dodong Lighthouse, where you will be able to get the best view out over Jeodonghang Port. The entire coastal walk from start to end will take you roughly three hours to complete, but we guarantee you, it will be worth every minute. We also recommend embarking on the journey in the mid-afternoon so that on your way back, you are able to stop at one of the local restaurants to have dinner and watch the sun set over the horizon.

BELOW
Haengnam coastal walking path

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP
The photogenic Bongnae Falls

CHEONBU UNDERWATER OBSERVATORY

A rather fascinating attraction, the Cheongbu Underwater Observatory allows visitors to walk down a long pier out into the water, before hopping into an elevator and going six metres down beneath the waves.

As you travel down, you will begin to notice the drop in temperature and subtle change in pressure. Once in the observatory, you will be greeted by wide windows on every side, allowing you to witness the full beauty of the marine life underwater. There are even food cages attached to the sides of the observatory to attract fish, which include yellowtail, blowfish and filefish. Entry to the observatory costs 4,000 won (USD3.60). Interested visitors should always check in advance to make sure the observatory is open for entry.





BONGNAE WATERFALL & WIND CAVE

A three-tiered 25-metre-tall waterfall, the Bongnae Waterfall is a magnificent sight that makes for an excellent photo opportunity. Beyond its natural beauty, the waterfall is also a main source of drinking water for the residents of the island, and for those who run restaurants and inns in the area. From Jeodong Ferry Terminal, visitors will have to embark on a two-kilometre hike up to the waterfall through the cedar forest. Fortunately, upon arrival at the falls, the water is so clean that you can just drink directly from the waterfall. Afterwards, head over to Punghyeol, the nearby wind cave. What makes this cave interesting and unusual is that cold air blows through the rocks, which allowed it to serve as a natural fridge for the locals back in the day. If you are visiting Ulleungdo

Island in the summer, this is definitely the best spot to cool off on a hot day.

BELOW
Cheonbu Underwater
Observatory





HONGDO ISLAND

Located 115 kilometres from the southwest coast of South Korea, Hongdo Island comprises one main island and around 20 other small isles. Hongdo (meaning “Red Island”) was declared part of the Dadohae Marine National Park in 1981. Known for its reddish hue whenever the sun sets over the island, Hongdo Island is regarded as a national monument.

Bordered by towering sea cliffs with diverse rock formations, the island is one of the most spectacular sights in the Yellow Sea. In addition to its incredible natural beauty, Hongdo is home to over 270 kinds of evergreens and 170 types of animals. In a bid to protect the wildlife and preserve the natural state of Hongdo, the government declared the entire island a natural monument, which means visitors are not allowed to enter areas other than the villages and designated tourist zones.

Featuring mainly cliffs, caves, jagged rock formations, and small islets, the island is often more popular amongst local travellers, many of whom travel to the island for a quick day trip to either take in the sights or embark on a hike for the day. One of the only ways (and probably the best way) to see most of the island is by boat. It is important to note that the locals living in the villages on the island are fiercely protective of the environment, so it is important to explore the island with caution, and treat it respect.

WHEN TO GO

May to October

GETTING THERE

The only way to reach the island is via ferry from Mokpo, a city in South Jeolla Province. The quickest way to get to Mokpo is to catch either a train or domestic flight from a major city such as Seoul. Ferries leave from Mokpo Ferry Terminal, taking around two-and-a-half hours to reach Hongdo Island

TOP

Impressive rock formations at Hongdo Island

The government declared the entire island a natural monument, which means visitors are not allowed to enter areas other than the villages and designated tourist zones



WHAT TO SEE AT HONGDO



BOAT TOURS AROUND THE ISLAND

One of the best ways to appreciate the island and its rocky islets and arches, this two-hour boat trip around the island lets travellers take in all the sights along the coast, including the areas you wouldn't normally be able to access. Along the way, you'll come across the designated sites such as Nammun Rock, Seokhwagul Cave and Doknipmoon Rock. The best comes at the end of the tour when a small boat usually pulls up next to you, and fishermen slice up live fish on the spot, to serve you a plate of freshly cut sashimi. It doesn't get much fresher than that!



VENTURE ON YOUR OWN

If a small, crowded boat tour isn't your thing, there are options to walk around the island on your own, once you hop off the ferry onto the island. Although the national park is strictly off-limits to crowds, you may follow the carefully designated paths. The northern section of the island is mostly open to the public, so travellers have the opportunity to explore the steep, sun-baked lanes of the town. At the intersection between the northern and southern areas, you'll find Mongdol Beach where many locals stop for a picnic or just simply soak up some sun.



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JEJU ISLAND

Some call Jeju Island the crown jewel of South Korea. Others have dubbed it the “Hawaii of South Korea”. Located in the southernmost part of the country, Jeju Island is also known as the “Island of the Gods” and its history is still largely unknown and debated by historians. Many believe that the island came into existence around two million years ago in a series of volcanic eruptions. And while the mainland was being ruled by the famed Three Kingdoms of Silla, Baekje and Goguryeo, Jeju was governed by the mysterious Tamna Kingdom.

Beyond the spectacular landscapes and visiting local honeymooners lies a dark history that islanders have lived with for more than 70 years. After the end of World War II, an uprising pitted Jeju islanders against the police, the US military and the newly formed South Korean government. To stop

the unrest, the government in Seoul declared military rule to put an end to the uprising, which led to an ensuing conflict that left 30,000 civilians dead and those who survived were branded traitors and communists. For a long time, the memories of the massacre (now known as “Jeju 4.3” after the date it began, on April 3, 1948) were suppressed but in recent years, the South Korean government, police and defence ministry have apologised for their roles in the killings. Tourists who visit Jeju Island are now even able to learn first-hand about one of the most gruesome incidents in Korean history.

An incredibly diverse and fascinating island, Jeju may have had a dark past, but that has not stopped the locals from living every day to the fullest, and the island has remained one of the country’s must-visit places.



WHEN TO GO

April to June,
September
to October

GETTING THERE

The quickest and most convenient way of getting to Jeju is by air, via Jeju International Airport, located in the northern part of the island

ABOVE

A beautiful canola field at Seongsan Ilchulbong



CONQUER MOUNT HALLASAN

Rising from the centre of the island, Hallasan Mountain is South Korea's tallest peak and can be seen from most vantage points around the island. Standing 1,950 metres above sea level, Hallasan is a dormant volcano with a lake crater at its summit. The entire area around the mountain is called Hallasan National Park and was designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 2002 and a World Heritage Site in 2007. For hiking junkies, there are a total of six courses that you can climb but only two – Gwaneumsa Trail and Seongpanak Trail – go to the peak, where Baengnokdam Lake is located. Every season at Hallasan provides a different view, but it is most renowned for its springtime beauty when the azaleas are in full bloom.

MANJANGGUL LAVA TUBE (MANJANGGUL CAVE)

Another UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Manjanggul Lava Tube is one of the largest in the world and is definitely a must-visit for anyone visiting Jeju. This natural phenomenon was formed when lava that was beneath the ground flowed up to the surface, hardened and formed a crust. The lava below then continued flowing until it hollowed out forming a tunnel. The beauty of the Manjanggul Lava Tube is that its features are all distinct and extremely well maintained. Only around a kilometre of the 13-kilometre-long tube is open to tourists, so a round-trip around this attraction will only take you around an hour.

The Manjanggul Lava Tube is one of the largest in the world





HIKE UP SEONGSAN ILCHULBONG

Otherwise known as Sunshine Peak, Seongsan Ilchulbong is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and another one of Jeju's must-see natural attractions. The 180-metre-tall crater, which rose from under the sea over 10,000 years ago due

to a volcanic eruption, is considered the best spot on Jeju to watch the sun rise over the ocean. A rather steep hike, it will take you around an hour to get to the crater rim and is best visited in the spring.





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123rf



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Catch a Glimpse of the Incredible Haenyeo Ladies

Translating to “sea women”, the *haenyeo* are traditional divers who harvest seafood by hand from the ocean floor. These incredible ladies catch seafood for a living with only a knife and a mask, typically freediving to around 10 metres. They will often slice up their catch straight away, offering watching tourists fresh seafood right out of the ocean. It is important to note that these ladies don’t put on a scripted performance, rather tours are set up as a way for travellers to be able to experience the culture of the locals on Jeju. The *haenyeo* should always be treated respectfully, so ensure you always enquire politely whether you can take photos.

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP

The stunning Seongsan Ilchulbong from the air

OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM

The start of the climb to the Seongsan Ilchulbong “tuff cone”

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

The *haenyeo* have been diving Jeju’s waters for centuries; the all-female freedivers gather shellfish, seaweed and other sea life; the *haenyeo*’s fresh catch of the day; *haenyeo* numbers are steadily declining, the majority being well over 50 years old



OPPOSITE PAGE TOP

Sublime autumn colours at Aomori, Tohoku

OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM

Hot springs at Yamagata, Tohoku

{ EAST ASIA }

Japan



EXPEDITION INFORMATION

WHEN TO GO

March to May, September to November or December to February (for those looking for winter weather)

GETTING AROUND

The most efficient way to travel around Japan is by train, as stations are usually located in the heart of the city. Additionally, for longer journeys to places further out, travellers have the option to take the Shinkansen (bullet train), which travels at a maximum speed of 300km/h through the countryside

GETTING THERE

The best way of travelling to Japan is by air, arriving either at Narita Airport (Tokyo), a Airport (Tokyo) or Kansai Airport (Osaka). Additionally, many visitors are increasingly choosing to fly to Chitose International Airport in Sapporo, Hokkaido

Japan is one of the most talked about countries in Asia. From the incredible cuisine, friendly locals, fascinating theme parks and rejuvenating hot springs, to the hustle and bustle of modern-day Tokyo and laid-back Okinawa, the country has plenty to offer travellers.

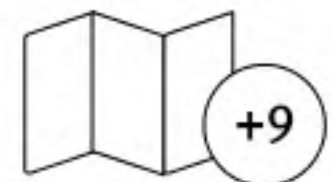
Lying just off East Asia's Pacific coast, Japan consists of a string of islands in a northeast-southwest arc, stretching for approximately 2,400 kilometres through the western North Pacific Ocean. Japan is home to over 7,000 islands, but only around 400 are currently inhabited. Many of the other remote and small islands have been left undisturbed and underdeveloped since pre-war times.

On the surface, Japan stands out as one of the world's most highly developed countries. But beneath all the technology and modernity is a timeless country where ancient history and tradition has fused with modern life.

Amongst its skyscrapers and neon signboards, you can find zen rock gardens and majestic temples standing in perfect harmony, making it clear that as a country always progressing with its technology and architecture, Japan still continues to pay homage to its past and traditions. Travel beyond the capital city of Tokyo or big cities such as Kyoto and Osaka and you'll be able to encounter incredible off-the-beaten-track destinations where stays are not at hotels but traditional Japanese inns, and where the roads are so narrow, no cars are allowed.

Though the beauty of visiting Japan is being in the heart of all the big city action, the true thrill is being able to travel like a local and gain authentic experiences you won't find anywhere else in Asia. With that in mind, here are three island destinations in Japan that are considered hidden gems of the country.

Time zone



UTC+09:00

Capital



Tokyo

Language



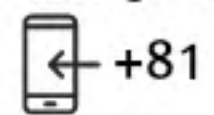
Japanese

Currency

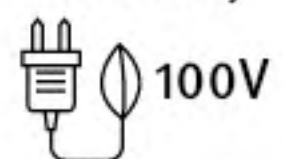


Japanese yen (¥)

Calling code



Electricity



Plug type

A, B (US-style)



YAKUSHIMA ISLAND

A subtropical island off the northern coast of Kyushu and part of Kagoshima Prefecture, Yakushima is a secluded island that exudes an air of mystery and adventure, unlike anywhere else in Japan. A Nature lover's paradise, the island is home to ancient cedar forests that have been left untouched for decades. Ringed by small towns with a single main road that connects them to one another, the island is the ultimate destination for those looking to explore a different side of the country.

Designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1993, Yakushima Island has maintained its pristine and almost fairy-tale-like atmosphere for decades. Blanketed in ancient cedar forests, the island's mountainous, wooded interior has remained mostly undeveloped. It is also famous as the backdrop and inspiration for animated film director Hayao Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli movies – most notably the 1997 film, *Princess Mononoke*.

With a population of around 13,000 people, Yakushima Island's pristine and unspoiled natural beauty has been left largely untouched by modern commercialisation. If you need a place to go to just spend time with yourself and the party you came with, this is the place to be. And when you need some human interaction, head to the island's main town of Miyanoura, where you'll find a great selection of hotels, restaurants and cafés.

ABOVE
Rainforest along the Shiratani Unsuiikyo trail on Yakushima

RIGHT
Yakushima Island's Oko-no-taki Waterfall



SHIRATANI UNSUIIKYO

Yakushima Island is known for its many hiking trails and waterfalls, and one of the most popular spots is the Shiratani Unsuiikyo Ravine. This lush, green Nature park is filled with the island's ancient cedars and offers you a network of well-maintained hiking trails that run along the ravine. Trekkers are able to choose and wander around the different paths, which vary in length from roughly one to five hours long. Additionally, for anyone who is a Studio Ghibli fan, this forest may seem familiar as part of it served as the inspiration for the animated film *Monoke Hime (Princess Mononoke)*.



OKO-NO-TAKI WATERFALL

One of the most revered waterfalls in Japan, Oko-no-taki stands at a height of 88 metres, making it the highest waterfall on Yakushima Island. The beautiful waterfall creates a scene straight out of a movie, and in the summer, it's the perfect spot to just relax and cool off. Water from the Ogawan river falls over the edge of a steep and broad mountainside, which then lands in a pool below before flowing out into the ocean just a few hundred metres down. Located near the waterfall is where the Oko Yusui Spring bubbles up and it is believed that drinking from it will bring good health.

A Nature lovers paradise, the island is home to ancient cedar forests that have been left untouched for decades



WHEN TO GO

March to April,
November to
February (for the
winter season)

GETTING THERE

Most visitors
to Okinawa,
locally and
internationally,
travel by air, as
it is the most
convenient and
cost-efficient way,
with the island's
primary airport
of Naha located
on the main island



123rf

OKINAWA

The centre of the former Ryukyu Kingdom, Okinawa, meaning “Rope in the Open Sea”, is by far the largest and most populous island in Okinawa Prefecture. Consisting of 160 large and small islands, 47 of which are inhabited, Okinawa stretches from the southern tip of Japan to the northern tip of Taiwan. This island is the central transportation hub for the region and is known for its incredible food and friendly locals – who, interestingly enough, are known to have some of the longest lifespans in the world.

Considered one of seven Blue Zones in the world (a country where its people live the longest and are the healthiest), Okinawa is said to hold the secret to longevity. According to the locals, their healthy eating habits and “mindset”, coupled with the island’s warm climate and rich natural environment, are the reasons that they are able to live to a ripe old age.

Only officially becoming part of Japan in 1872, Okinawa is home to different ethnicities, dialects, cultures and cuisines. Though the central part of the island is urbanised, its southern part is a

lot less densely populated, and its northern area, the Yambaru area, still remains mainly covered by forested hills and small fishing and farming villages. The Okinawa Archipelago is formed by several islands, which include:

1. Okinawa Island (or Okinawa Honto), the main island for the area
2. Iheya-Izena Islands, consisting of Iheya and the Izena Islands
3. Ie Island
4. Sesoko Island
5. Yokatsu Islands, consisting of Yabuchi, Henza, Miyagi, Ikei, Hamahiga, Tsuken, Ukibara, Minamiukibara and the Kudaka islands
6. Kume Island
7. Kerama Islands, consisting of Tokashiki, Zamami, Aka and the Geruma Islands
8. Aguni Islands, consisting of Aguni and the Tonaki Islands

In addition, Okinawa has been known to be an incredible diving location, often being compared to popular destinations such as Bali and Phuket. In fact, its subtropical weather makes it accessible to divers all-year round.





DIVING ADVENTURE

An up-and-coming spot for divers, Okinawa's subtropical islands south of mainland Japan have often been referred to by divers as the "Japanese Hawaii", and feature hundreds of kilometres of coastline. From caves and tunnels to WWII wrecks and mysterious ruins, the islands around Okinawa provide divers endless exploration opportunities. The various islands in the archipelago include:

- Okinawa Island: Popular for beach diving
- Kerama Islands: Known for having some of the world's clearest water and has over 100 dive sites
- Kume Island: Known for its endless sand dunes and large marine species
- Miyako Region: Loved by divers for cave diving
- Yaeyama Region: Island hopping and diving on unique islands
- Yonugauni Island: Famous for wrecks and undersea ruins

OPPOSITE PAGE

A view of the prefecture from a hill on Zamami Island in the Kerama Islands

BELOW

Okinawa Island's waters are among the world's clearest



SOME OF THE BEST DIVE SITES



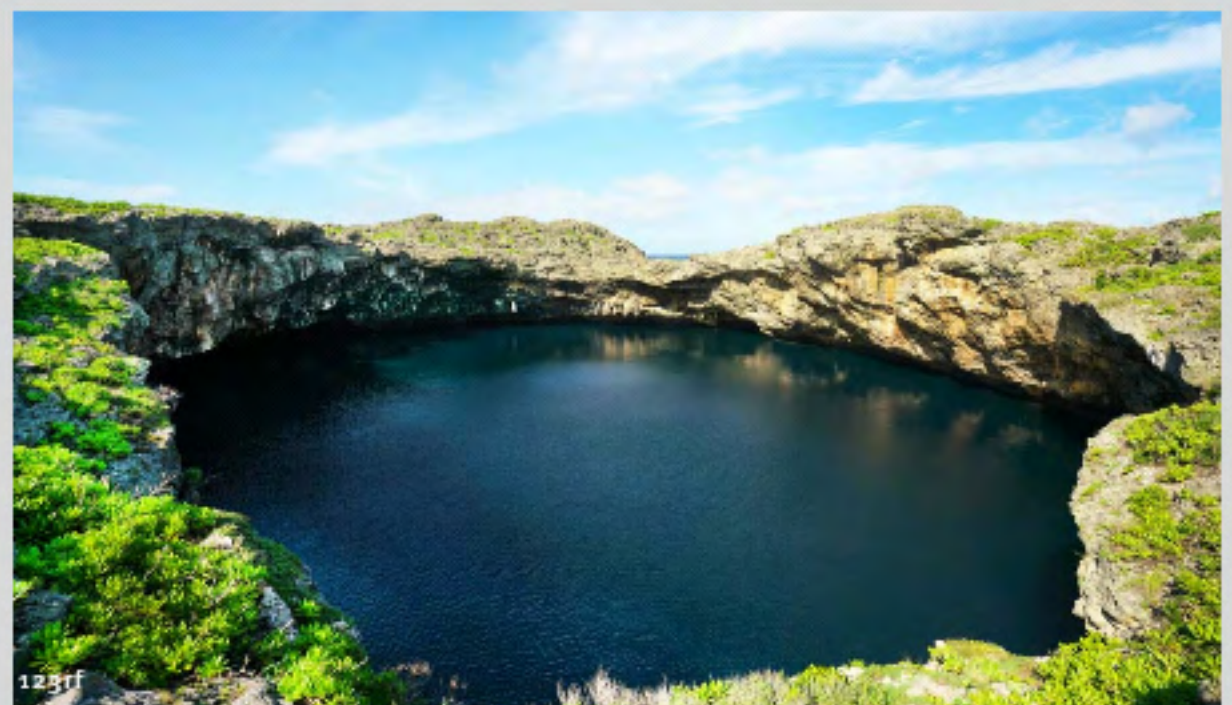
CAPE MAEDA (NORTHERN OKINAWA)

One of the best spots in Okinawa Island, this area includes Blue Cave (a semi-submerged cave with stunning light), healthy coral, and huge fish schools. Suitable for beginners, the sites have a maximum depth of 40 metres and divers can encounter marine life such as sea turtles, Napoleon wrasses, and more



IMAZUNI (KUME ISLAND)

Here, divers have the opportunity to encounter the famous large marine life around the island, such as arrow barracuda, bigeye trevally, and dogtooth tuna. This dive site has a maximum depth of 25 metres and is suitable for beginner divers. There are also some impressive reefscaapes to explore



SATAN'S PALACE (SHIMOJI ISLAND)

This unique dive site gets its name from the complicated terrain found here and features a vertical hole called "Palace". Divers are required to dive through dark, narrow walkways and arches. The maximum depth is 27 metres, but the current here is usually moderate to strong so the site is only recommended for intermediate to advanced divers



VISIT THE CASTLE RUINS OF RYUKYU

Up until 1609, when the islands of Okinawa were invaded by the Satsuma domain (known presently as Kagoshima Prefecture), Okinawa existed entirely as a separate state from Japan, known as the Ryukyu Kingdom. After the invasion, Ryukyu Kingdom served as a tributary state to Japan, but continued being governed by the royal family from Shuri Castle (today, a city district of Okinawa's capital, Naha). It wasn't until 1879, a few years after the Meiji Restoration, that the kingdom was abolished and incorporated into Japan as Okinawa Prefecture.

The remains of more than 300 castles (*gusuku*) can be found in Okinawa, five of which have been registered in UNESCO's World Heritage List and are must-visits when in Okinawa.

Shuri Castle (Shurijo): One of the most important castles of the Ryukyu Kingdom, serving as both the central government office as well as the royal residence, this castle is the only one in Okinawa that has been reconstructed. (Note: Tragically, the castle's seven key buildings were razed to the ground in a fire in October 2019.)

Nakagusuku Castle Ruins: Considered the best-preserved castle ruins across Okinawa, the castle is divided into multiple citadels and the site offers an incredible view of the surrounding area and Nakagusuku Bay, thanks to the hilltop location.

Katsuren Castle Ruins: Located on the Yokatsu Peninsula along the eastern coast of Okinawa Honto, Katsuren Castle was built on a steep hill close to the coast and offers views of the surrounding area. The castle is best known for being the former seat of the 15th-century Lord Amawari. This spot is also great for catching sunrises and sunsets.



Zakimi Castle Ruins: Located on a hill near Cape Zampa in central Okinawa Honto, Zakimi Castle served as a safeguard against rebels in the north of the island.

Nakijin Castle Ruins: The castle is located on the Motobu Peninsula in northern Okinawa Honto and served as the seat of the northern kings before the island was united into the Ryukyu Kingdom in the 15th century. The sparsely populated hillside and wild forests provide a unique character and atmosphere for the castle.

TOP
The beautiful Shuri Castle, before it was destroyed by fire in 2019. Rebuilding plans have been confirmed

ABOVE
A scenic view of the site of Nakijin Castle



123rf

ABOVE

One of the iconic views of Matsushima's islands in Miyagi Prefecture

TOHOKU

Looking for that authentic off-the-beaten-track experience? Then, the Tohoku region is the place to go – and it's by far one of Japan's lesser-visited areas. Translating to "North East Region", Tohoku consists of six prefectures in the north of Japan's largest island, Honshu, and is best known for its countryside, mountains, lakes, hot springs, rough winters and high-quality products such as rice and apples. Highly regarded by the Japanese, the area is one of the least visited by international tourists, despite easy access from Tokyo.

One of Tohoku's main attractions is its hot springs, otherwise known as *onsen*. The region is considered the preeminent hot spring location in Japan, providing the best and most traditional Japanese hot springs. The culture of the country's original spa therapy is one that has existed for thousands of years and visiting one of the many hot springs is often on the bucket list for travellers. One of the most beautiful hot spring towns is Ginzan Onsen, with its charming row of luxurious bathhouses. A spectacular 22-metre-tall waterfall also rushes constantly at the back of the

town and not too far away is one of the entrances of a historic silver mine built during the Edo Period, perfect for history buffs keen to find something new and exciting to explore.

With foreign visitors to this region being scarce, travellers will be treated to a hideaway from the modernity of urbanised cities such as Tokyo and Osaka. Couple that with the region's rich history and revitalising waters, Tohoku will provide you a unique opportunity to experience the best of Japan.



WHEN TO GO

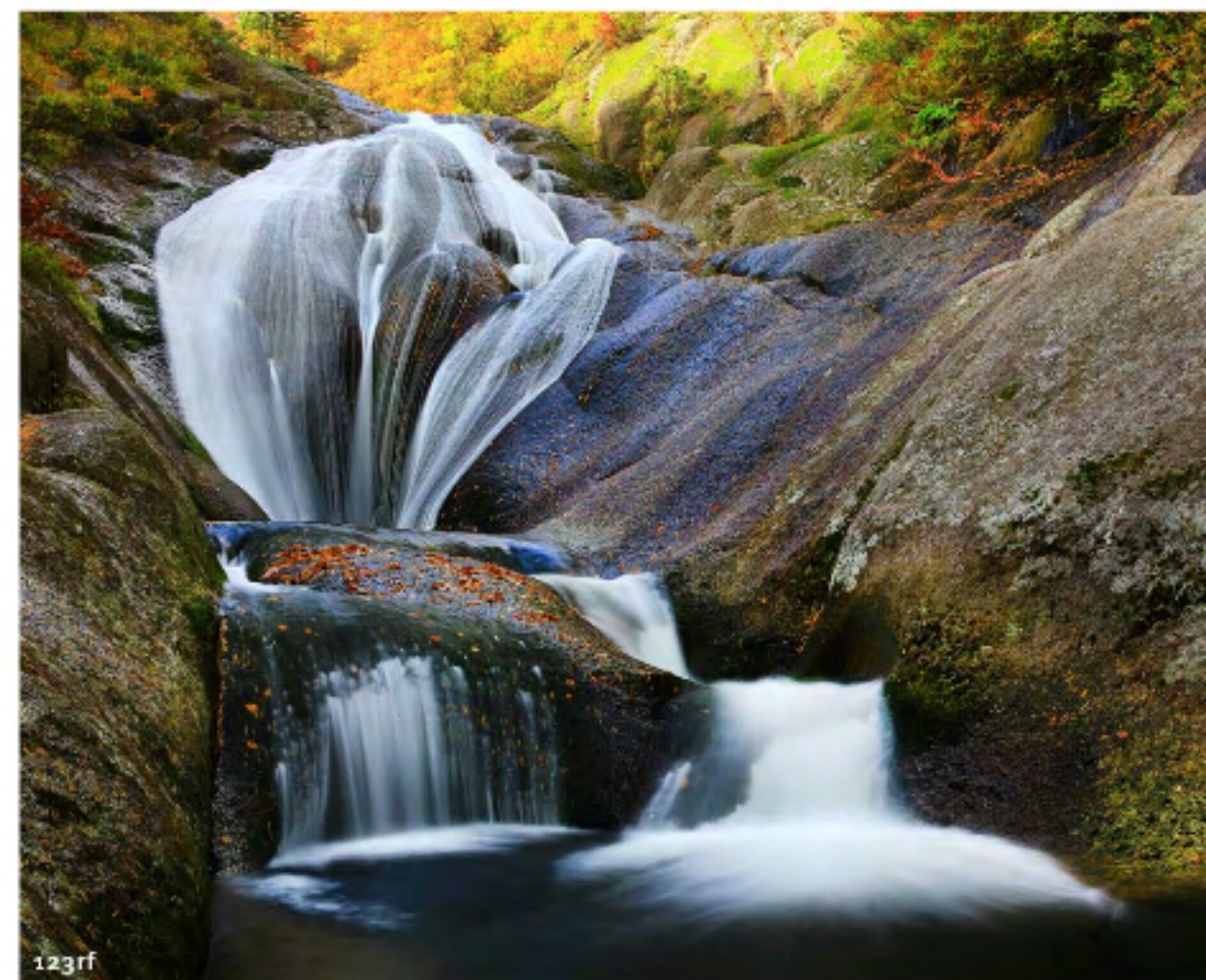
June to September (during summer)

GETTING THERE

For travellers coming in internationally, there are no direct flights to the Tohoku region. Hence, travellers will be required to transfer to a domestic flight via either Haneda Airport or Narita International Airport in Tokyo. If you are coming from Tokyo, you can travel to the Tohoku region via the Shinkansen (bullet train)

RIGHT

Tohoku's Akita Prefecture is among Japan's most scenically beautiful



123rf



THE MIRACLE LONE PINE TREE

In 2011, the Tohoku Region was struck by tragedy after it was hit by an earthquake and tsunami, which triggered the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, the most severe nuclear accident since the infamous Chernobyl disaster in 1986. The earthquake was the most powerful ever recorded in Japan, and the event has since been labelled the “Great East Japan Earthquake” or the “Great Tohoku Earthquake”. As the tsunami unfolded, over 70,000 pine trees were knocked down and washed away along the stretch of coast in Tohoku. Only one managed to withstand the raging waters, and it was subsequently dubbed the “Miracle Lone Pine Tree”, a poignant reminder of the devastation caused by the fourth most powerful earthquake ever recorded. This lone pine tree was a source of reassurance to the locals who sought to rebuild their lives after the tragedy and has remained a symbol of hope for future generations. Preserved as a monument, the Miracle Lone Pine Tree is visited by both locals and tourists both day and night, and many stand before it and pray for reconstruction.

TOP LEFT

The miracle pine tree of Rikuzentakata

TOP RIGHT

Picture-postcard Ginzan Onsen with winter snow

GINZAN ONSEN

The name of this secluded hot spring town translates to “Silver Mountain Hot Spring” and is nestled in the mountains of Yamagata Prefecture. Regarded as one of Japan’s prettiest *onsen* towns, the area was originally developed around a silver mine with historic *ryokan* (traditional Japanese inns) lined up along the river. Indeed, Ginzan Onsen is the home of the Notoya Ryokan, which was a major inspiration for the famous fantasy film *Spirited Away*. Walking around this quaint town, you will be transported back in time to the late 1920s, as the town’s traditional architecture and *ryokans* will invoke a strong sense of nostalgia.

SAKATA

The port city of Sakata is one of the highlights of Yamagata Prefecture. Historically, rice was the main commodity traded and used for feudal tribute payments. The beautifully preserved Sankyo rice warehouses feature a museum that tells the story of rice and includes gift shops and restaurants.



Highlights in Sakata

- Experience historical monuments at Hiyoriyama Park
- Sankyo-soko is a rice storehouse and museum built in 1893
- Enjoy the graceful performances of the *maiko* (apprentice geisha) at the Somaro Teahouse
- Marvel at the breathtaking Tamasudare Falls
- Discover the The Ken Domon Museum of Photography
- See the mummified monks of Kaikoji Temple, the only temple in Japan that hosts two such "Buddha mummies"

BELOW (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT)

Hiyoriyama Park Lighthouse Tower in Sakata, built in 1813, one of the oldest wooden lighthouses in Japan; locals in Sakata dressed up to perform a traditional dance during the Yamagata Hanagasa Festival; an old shrine in winter snow at the Sankyo Soko Storehouses; young *maiko*, apprentice geisha, wearing colourful kimonos





{ EAST ASIA }

China

A country of fascinating history and breathtaking natural beauty, China is home to one of the longest-running civilisations on the planet. The world's most populous country is also one of the most economically driven, with incredible wealth concentrated in its countless huge cities.

The country is divided into 33 administrative regions: 22 provinces, five autonomous regions, four municipalities and two special administrative regions. China is also a country of topographical extremes, from the giant mountain

peaks of Tibet to one of the lowest points on Earth, the Turpan Depression in the country's far west.

China is the home of one of the four ancient civilisations of the world, the other three being the Babylonian, Mayan and Egyptian. The history of China has generally been presented in accordance with the different dynasties that have ruled the country: Starting with the very first one from around 2070 BCE to the abdication of the last emperor in 1912, China has been ruled by 13 successful dynasties.

ABOVE

The photogenic mud flats of Xiapu County in Fujian Province

RIGHT

A thatched cottage on the coast of Weizhou Island in the Gulf of Tonkin





With more than 4,000 years of recorded history, China has flourish culturally, technologically and economically since the very early days of human civilisation, and though it has faced numerous political and social upheavals, China has maintained its position as the most influential and most powerful country in Asia.

China's unique cultures, thriving metropolises and incredible natural wonders – as well as sheer size and scale of the country – are sure to leave a lasting impression on you, long after you have left its shores.

EXPEDITION INFORMATION

WHEN TO GO

March to May (spring),
September to early
November (autumn)

GETTING AROUND

The most efficient way of travelling within China is via high-speed bullet train or domestic flights. Within cities, trains, buses and taxis are the easiest ways to get around

GETTING THERE

Many of China's major cities have international airports, with the majority of international visitors arriving via Beijing (Beijing Capital International Airport/Beijing Daxing International Airport), Shanghai (Shanghai Pudong International Airport) and Guangzhou (Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport)

Time zone



UTC+08:00

Capital



Beijing

Language



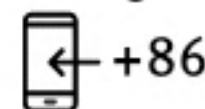
Mandarin Chinese

Currency

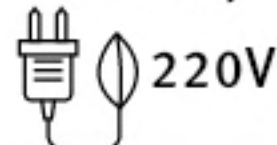


Chinese renminbi (YUAN)

Calling code



Electricity



Plug type

A, C (European-style)

123rf

123rf



HISTORY OF CHINA



Yu the Great reigned in the 21st century BCE and founded the Xia Dynasty

Xia Dynasty (c. 2070 – 1600 BCE)

Founded by the legendary Yu the Great (c. 2123 – 2025 BCE), the Xia Dynasty inaugurated dynastic rule in China. Yu is remembered for devising a system of irrigation canals that put an end to the floods that plagued the Chinese heartland, allowing communities to flourish along the Yellow River and its tributaries



A map depicting various advanced, stratified societies that existed during the period of the Shang state, [wikipedia.org](https://www.wikipedia.org)

Shang Dynasty (c. 1600 – 1050 BCE)

The earliest recorded Chinese dynasty supported by archaeological evidence, the Shang Dynasty saw more than 30 kings ruling much of the area along the Yellow River. Under this dynasty, there were advances in maths, astronomy, art and military technology. They also used a highly developed calendar system and an early form of the Chinese language



WEIZHOU ISLAND

An island off the south of Beihai city in the Gulf of Tonkin, Weizhou Island is one of China's largest and youngest volcanic islands. Declared as a national park, the island is the perfect destination for anyone looking for a relaxing day trip from the mainland to experience a different side of China.

WHEN TO GO
November to April

GETTING THERE
Travellers will have to first take a domestic flight to Beihai, before hopping onto a boat from Beihai International Passenger Port Station to Weizhou Island

Formed by volcanic eruptions 7,000 years ago, Weizhou Island has an extremely unique geological and geomorphological landscape. In addition, the surrounding waters are extremely rich in nutrients and are home to a variety of corals and aquatic animals. To protect and preserve its volcanic features and the rich ecosystems on the island, Weizhou Island (alongside smaller Xieyang Island) is a dedicated Nature reserve named Beihai Weizhoudao Volcano National Geopark.

The unspoiled natural landscapes and thriving wildlife coupled with the plump cacti that blanket the cliffs give the island an air of mystery.

CROCODILE CRATER PARK

The most popular attraction on the island, Crocodile Crater Park is home to volcanic rocks of all different shapes and sizes, the largest being a well-preserved black rock. Visitors are treated to crystal clear waters, white sand beaches and stunning views. The Crocodile Crater Park Museum nearby offers travellers the opportunity to learn more about various volcanic rock specimens, corals and other sea creatures that are found here.

TOP

Crocodile Crater Park, Weizhou Island

BOTTOM

A church in Shengtang Village, Weizhou Island

OPPOSITE PAGE

The golden statue of the bodhisattva Guanyin on Mount Putuo, Putuoshan Island

Formed by volcanic eruptions 7,000 years ago, Weizhou Island has an extremely unique geological and geomorphological landscape



GREAT CHURCH TOURISM ZONE

Interestingly, Weizhou Island is also home to two of the first Catholic churches that were ever built in China. From 1869 to 1879, French missionaries discovered the island and went on to build a Gothic-style Catholic church in the small fishing village of Shengtang (now known as Weizhou Catholic Cathedral), before moving on to building the Saint Maria Church in Chengzai. The churches were built using a special type of coral rock, giving the structures a unique appearance. The Great Church Tourism Zone is located in the northeast of the island and has been well-preserved for nearly 100 years. The churches have also recently become an extremely popular site for couples taking wedding photos.



PUTUOSHAN ISLAND

WHEN TO GO

March to November

GETTING THERE

The most convenient and affordable way of travelling to Putuoshan Island is via bus from either Shanghai or Ningbo. The bus journey to the area will take around 4 to 5 hours. Though it can be expensive, it is also possible to fly to Putuoshan. Flights land at the airport on Zhujiajian Island, which is the adjacent island to Putuoshan. From the airport, catch a bus to Wugongzhi Wharf and then take a ferry to Putuoshan

One of the larger islands belonging to the Zhoushan Archipelago (which comprises over 1,400 islands located at the mouth of Hangzhou Bay), Putuoshan Island is one of China's most celebrated isles, as it is home to one of China's four sacred Buddhist mountains.

As such, the island is a fascinating mix of Nature and culture, with hidden grottoes and temples nestled amongst the island's pine groves and sandy beaches.

One of the biggest attractions on the island is Mount Putuo, which is dedicated to bodhisattva Guanyin, and visitors can find a 33-metre tall statue of Guanyin, who is often known in English as the "Goddess of Mercy" here. As the lowest and among the most accessible of the four sacred mountains of Chinese Buddhism,

HISTORY OF CHINA



Fittings in the form of tigers, Baoji, Shaanxi province, Middle Western Zhou dynasty, c. 900 BC, bronze, wikipedia.org

Zhou Dynasty (c. 1046 – 256 BCE)

The longest-running dynasty in the history of China, the Zhou Dynasty ruled the region for almost eight centuries. Under the Zhou, culture flourished, and civilisation spread. Writing was codified, coinage was developed, and chopsticks came to be used. It was also during this time that Chinese philosophy blossomed with the birth of the philosophical schools of Confucianism, Taoism and Mohism. This was when some of the greatest Chinese philosophers and poets emerged – Lao-Tzu, Tao Chien, Confucius and Sun-Tzu amongst many others. The Zhou Dynasty ended with the Warring States period (476 – 221 BCE), in which many city-states began battling one another to become independent entities. It finally came to an end with the victory of Qin Shi Huangdi, who became the first emperor of a unified China



These rammed earth ruins of a granary in Hecang Fortress (Chinese: 河仓城), located around 11 kilometres northeast of the Western-Han-era Yumen Pass, were built during the Western Han (202 BCE–9 CE), and significantly rebuilt during the Western Jin (280–316 CE), wikipedia.org

Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE)

Considered the golden age in Chinese history, the Han Dynasty was an era of prolonged stability and prosperity. A central imperial civil service was established to create a strong and organised government. During this period, the Silk Road was opened to connect to the West and bring in trade, foreign cultures and Buddhism



Six Dynasties – 16 Kingdoms Period of Division, www.museocinese.parma.org

Six Dynasties Period (220 – 586 CE)

Six Dynasties is the collective term for the six successive Han-ruled dynasties, all of which had their capitals at Jianye, which is present-day Nanjing



Yang Guang depicted as Emperor of Sui, wikipedia.org

Sui Dynasty (581 – 681 CE)

The relatively short-lived Sui Dynasty saw great changes as the rule of ethnic Han was reinstated across China and Chang'an (modern-day Xi'an) became the dynastic capital. This period also saw Buddhism gain prominence, encouraged by Emperor Wen, who converted to Buddhism. The Great Wall was expanded, and the Grand Canal was completed in this time period

Tang Dynasty (618 – 906 CE)

The Tang Dynasty is considered the high point in Chinese civilisation by historians. Its second emperor, Taizong, was regarded as one of the greatest emperors in China. This period was one of the most peaceful and prosperous periods in Chinese history

The Fengxian cave (c. 675 CE) of the Longmen Grottoes, commissioned by Wu Zetian, wikipedia.org



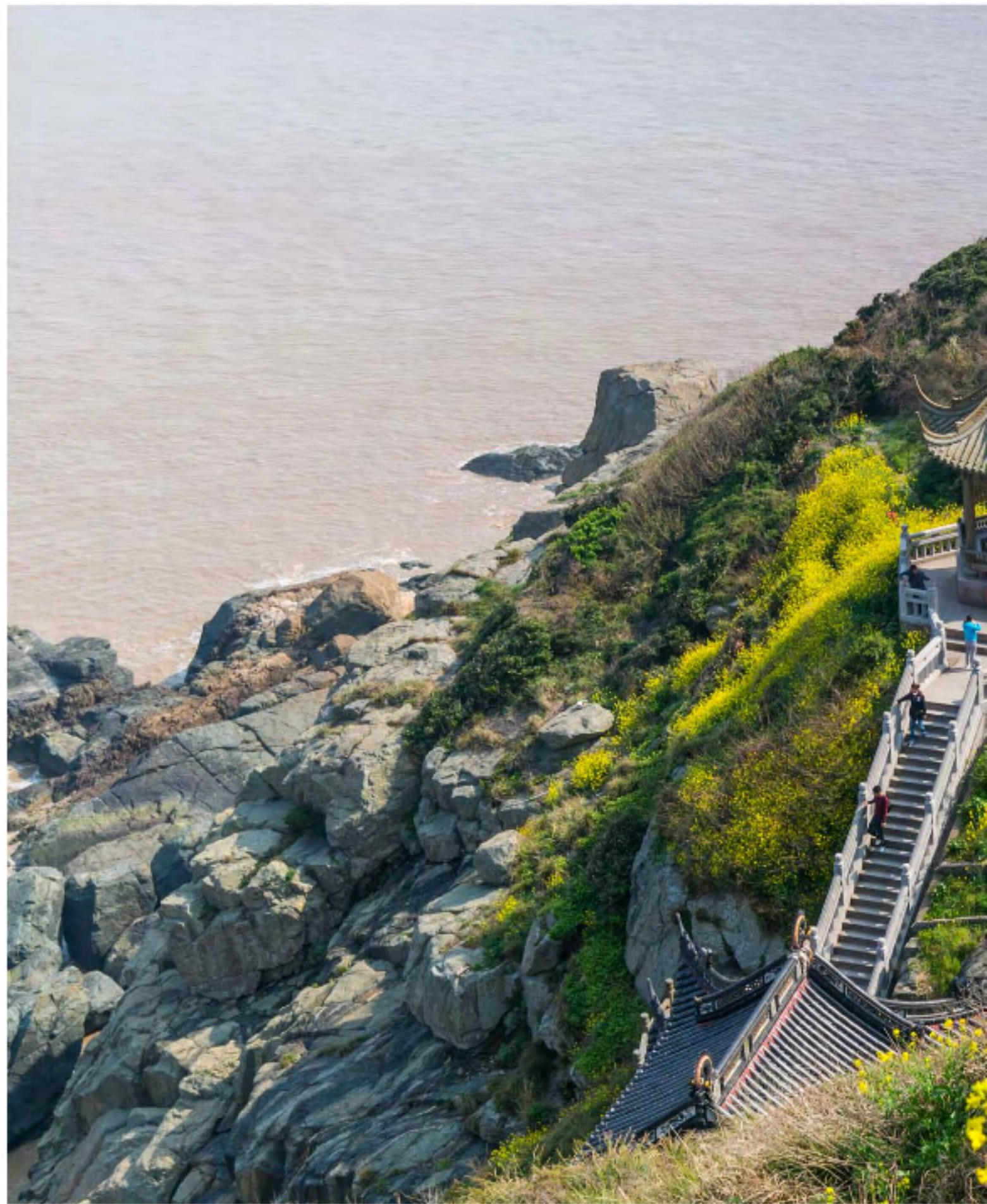


The island is a fascinating mix of Nature and culture

Putuoshan attracts visitors from far and wide, but the small forested area can become rather overrun with tourists, which can impact the tranquillity of the area at times. However, the island is still able to maintain a unique atmosphere and coupled with its natural surroundings, provides for an incredibly laid-back and fulfilling trip for anyone visiting. With more than 30 temples scattered throughout the island, travellers are sure to find somewhere that is more off the beaten path and less crowded.

VISIT THE GUANYIN STATUE ON MOUNT PUTUO

A pilgrimage site for over 1,000 years, Mount Putuo became the centre of Guanyin worship after the Tang Dynasty. It is believed that Guanyin once showed her bodily presence here and left behind a number of historical sites as a result. The impressive statue of Guanyin here weighs over 70 tonnes and stands at a height of 33 metres. The landmark of the island, the statue was made using a mixture of copper and gold by Henan Luoyang Copper Processing Plant. While Jesuit missionaries in China gave Guanyin the name “Goddess of Mercy”, the Chinese is short for Guanshiyin, which means “The One Who Perceives the Sounds of the World.”





ABOVE

The pavilion on Luojiashan, a small island to the southeast of Putuoshan

ABOVE

One of the pavilions at Puji Temple, Putuoshan Island

PUJI TEMPLE

One of the most popular temples on Putuoshan, Puji Temple is also the largest and oldest of its kind on the island. Covering an area of around 14,000 square metres, this impressive temple complex is home to nine halls, 12 pavilions and an 18-metre multi-treasure pagoda. In addition to that, adding to the extravagance of the place is the large Haijin Pool with three different bridges.

HISTORY OF CHINA



Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period, 923 CE, wikipedia.org

Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (907 – 960 CE)
For 50 years, between the fall of the Tang Dynasty and the establishment of the Song Dynasty, there was internal strife and chaos



A portrait of Song Taizu (宋太祖, 927–976, r. 960–976), wikipedia.org

Song Dynasty (960 – 1279)

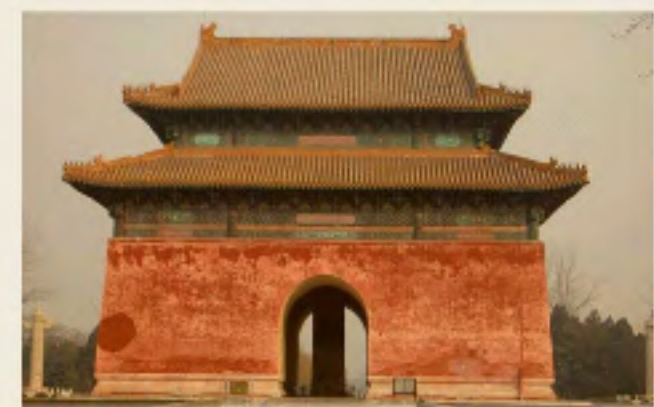
This dynasty saw the reunification of China under Emperor Taizu. Major inventions included gunpowder, printing, paper money and the compass. This dynasty fell to the Mongols during the invasion



A painting of a 14th-century Yuan Dynasty junk, wikipedia.org

Yuan Dynasty (1279 – 1368)

The Yuan Dynasty was established by the Mongols and ruled by Kublai Khan, grandson of Genghis Khan. He was the first non-Chinese ruler to take control of the entire country



The Ming Tombs, located 50 kilometres north of Beijing; the site was chosen by the Yongle Emperor, wikipedia.org

Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644)

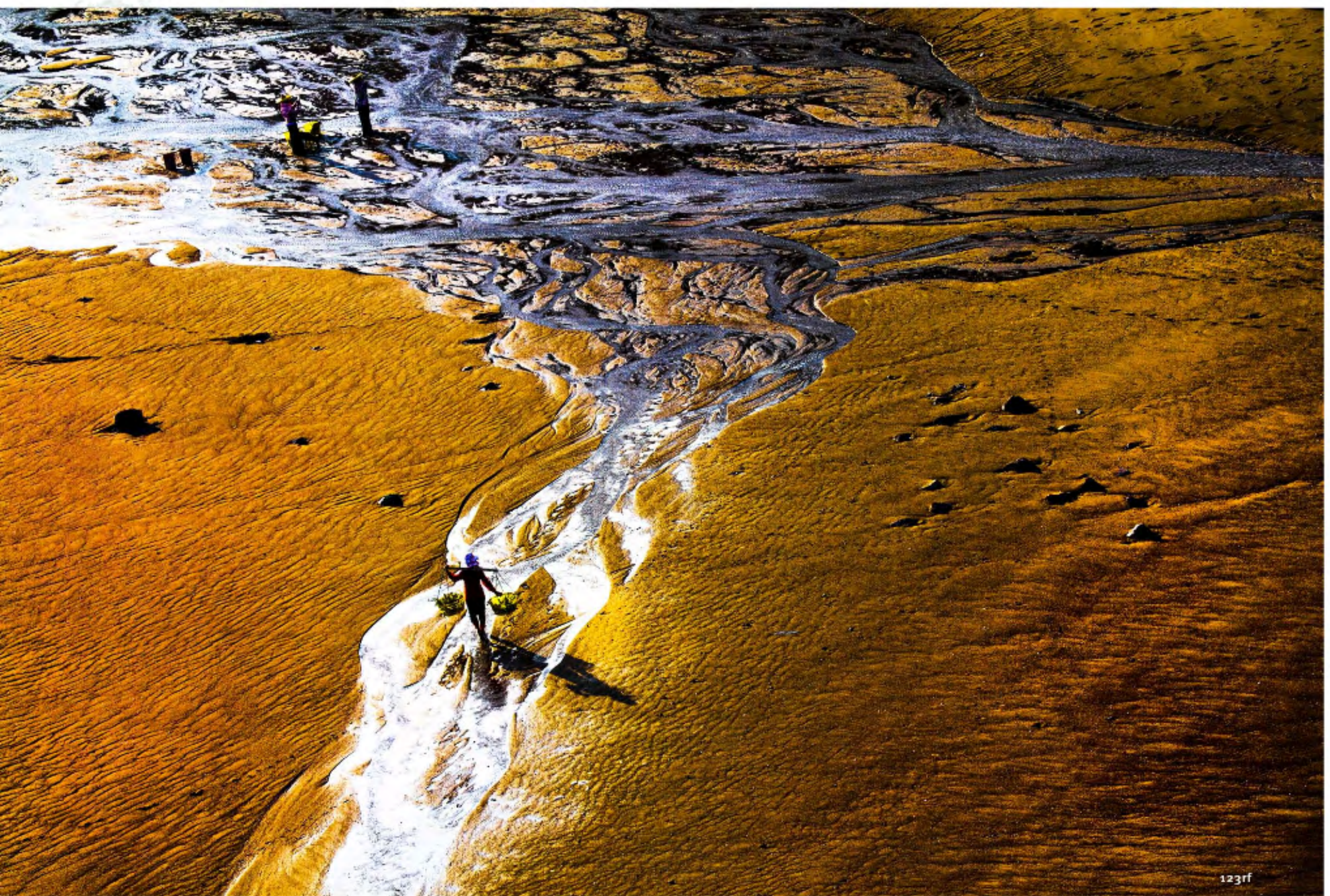
This dynasty saw a huge growth in China's population and general economic prosperity. However, the reign of the Ming emperors eventually collapsed due to the invasion of the Manchus. During this period, the Great Wall of China was completed, and the construction of the Forbidden City, the imperial residence in Beijing, began

Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1912)

The last imperial dynasty in China, the Qings were made up of ethnic Manchus from the northern Chinese region of Manchuria. The abdication of the last emperor of China brought an end to the thousand-year imperial rule of China and marked the beginning of republic and socialist rule

Lord Macartney saluting the Qianlong Emperor, wikipedia.org





123rf

XIAPU COUNTY, FUJIAN PROVINCE

WHEN TO GO

October to December (during seaweed harvest time to see the fishermen at work)

GETTING THERE

International travellers to Xiapu have to first fly to Fuzhou Changle International Airport in Fujian Province, Xiamen Gaoqi International Airport or Xiamen Xiang'an International Airport, before taking the high-speed rail to Xiapu. If you are travelling from cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Jinan, Shenzhen, Hangzhou and others, you can take direct bullet trains to Xiapu

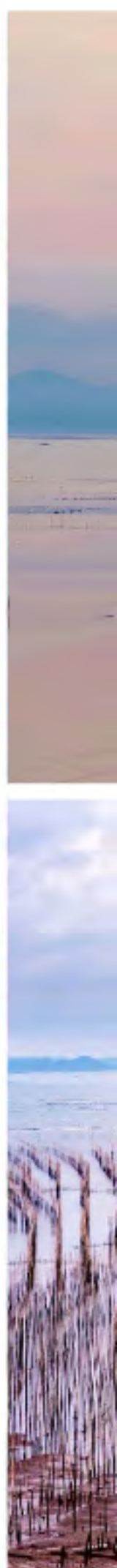
One of the oldest counties in eastern Fujian Province, Xiapu is home to China's most stunning coastline. Hailed as the "offshore Venice", Xiapu is a mecca for photography enthusiasts, who come here to shoot amazing sunsets over golden mud flats, silhouetted fishermen at work in the early morning, and ancient banyan tree forests shrouded in mist. The region is rich in seafood products, especially kelp and oysters, and some fishermen still live on boats along the shore.

One of the most spectacular scenes that photographers travel to Xiapu to capture is at low tide, when the fishermen erect bamboo poles and nets on the mud flats to dry their catch. This creates a striking web contrasting with the shimmering sunlight on the shallow



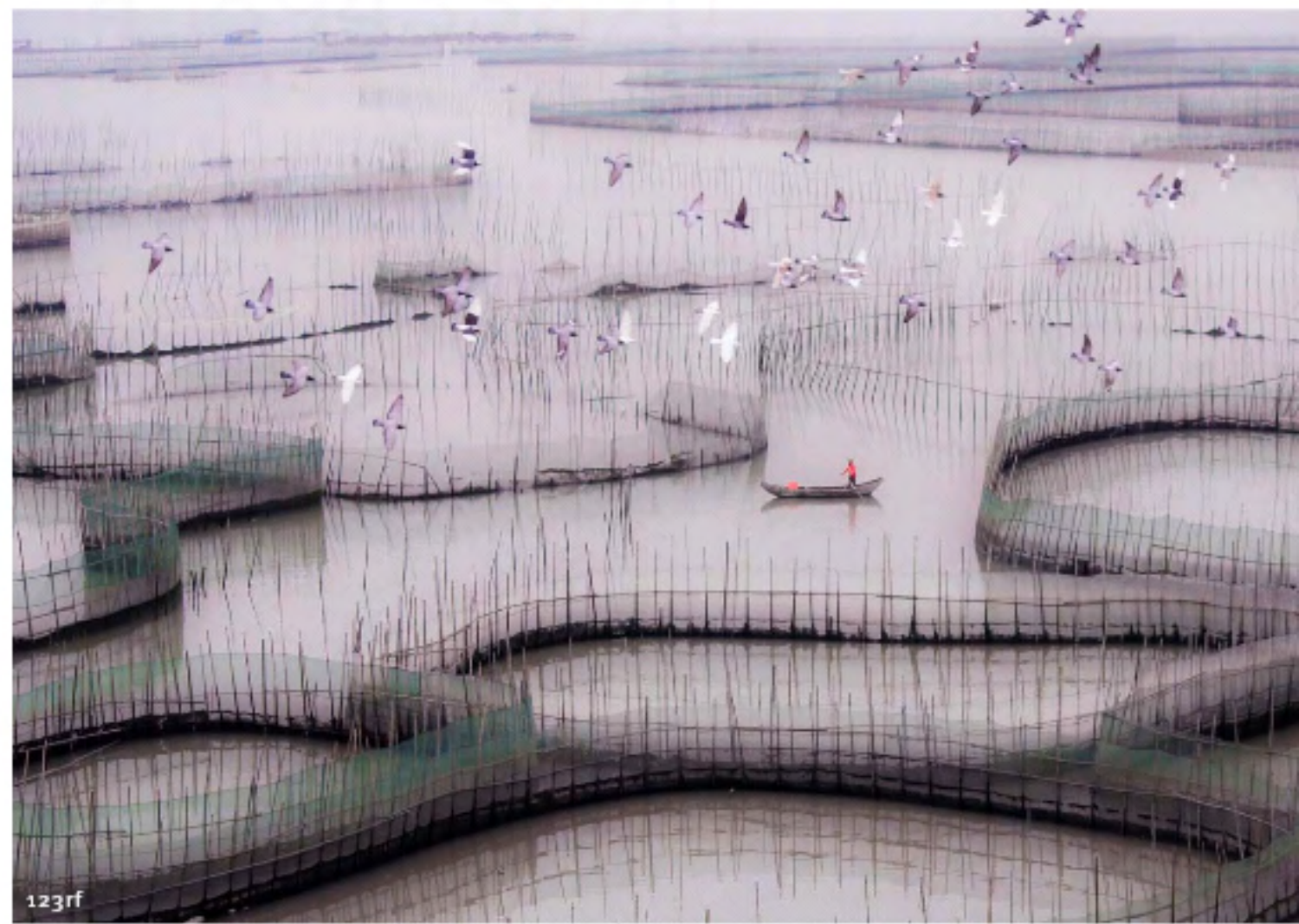
water that looks as though it was plucked from an old traditional painting.

Xiapu has a warm and humid climate, and its four distinct seasons mean the landscape is always changing. The autumn harvest season (October to December) tends to be the best time of year for photography, but there are amazing photo opportunities all year round.





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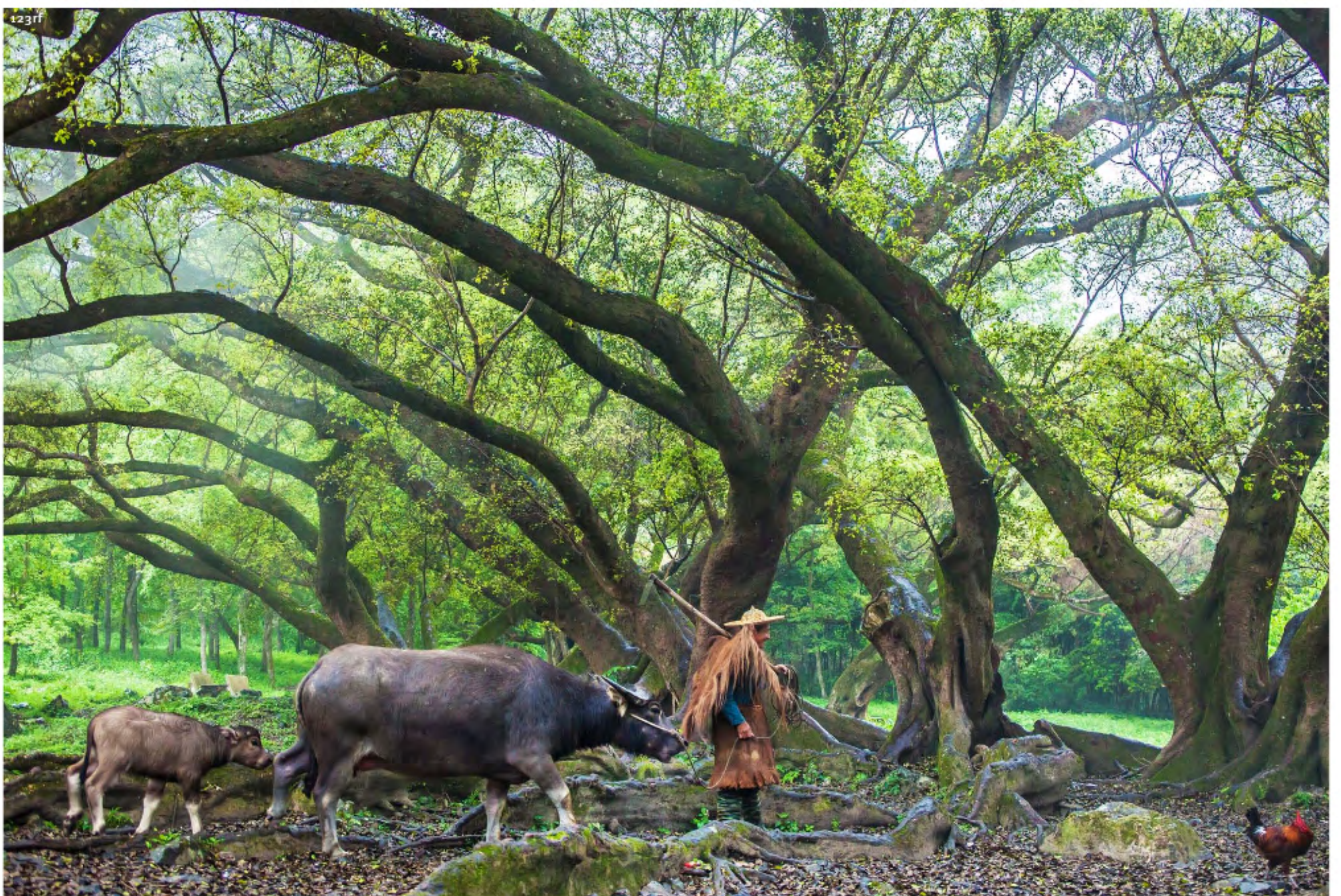
Hailed as the “offshore Venice”, Xiapu is a mecca for photography enthusiasts

Some important sites for photography include:

- Beiqi village: For sunrise photos and a chance to catch the fishermen at work out on the mud flats
- Xiaohao village: For sunset images
- Weijiang: To capture the fishermen during the seaweed harvest period
- Huazhu village: A good place to shoot fishermen cultivating crabs on the mud flats
- Shajiang village: Fisherman cultivating kelp
- Sha'ao Bay at Qida village: A great place to capture images of an abalone farm with its floating houses

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Dawn and dusk provide the perfect times to capture high-contrast scenes; bamboo poles at low tide near Bachimen village; fishermen at work near Beiqi village; beautiful light over the mud flats at Shajiang village





The She are the largest ethnic group in Fujian province

Banyueli, Xiapu County Historic and cultural village of the She people

Located in Ningde, the village of Banyueli is home to a number of people of the She ethnic minority, the largest ethnic group in Fujian province. Like most She historic sites in eastern Fujian, Banyueli is known as a renowned historic and cultural village. Many ancient buildings and cultural relics are well preserved here. Visitors will find villagers wearing ethnic costumes, practising traditional crafts, and preparing food much as they have for centuries ◆ AG

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Farmers hard at work on the mud flats; an ancient village of the She people; an elderly She woman from Banyueli Village; a She elder shows off her sewing skills

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP

Boats form a floating village alongside the hundreds of bamboo poles inserted into the mud flats

OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM

Dwarfed by a huge banyan tree, a farmer heads off to work on a foggy morning in Yangjiaxi village

You're invited!

Your Calendar Guide to the Festivals of Asia in 2022



China
JAN 5–MAR

HARBIN ICE & SNOW FESTIVAL

The biggest winter festival in the world, the 38th annual Harbin Snow and Ice Festival takes place in the northeastern Chinese city of Harbin in Heilongjiang province



Philippines
JAN 16

SINULOG

The Sinulog Festival celebrates one of the country's most famous historic relics: the *Santo Niño de Cebú*. This was the statue of the baby Jesus that was handed to the Rajah Humabon of Cebu by the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan in 1521



Korea
FEB 1

KOREAN SEOLLAL

A festival and national holiday that commemorates the first day of the Korean calendar. This is one of the most important traditional Korean holidays and generally occurs on the second new moon after the winter solstice. During the celebration, many return to their hometowns to visit their parents and other relatives where they perform an ancestral ritual called *charye*

Japan
JAN 22

WAKAKUSA YAMAYAKI

Taking place every year on the 4th Saturday of January, Wakakusa Yamayaki is an annual festival where the grass on the hillside of Nara's Mount Wakakusayama is set on fire

India
FEB 14–16

JAISALMER DESERT FESTIVAL

This festival is an annual event that takes place in Jaisalmer and is held in the Hindu month of Magh (February)



Japan
FEB 23

THE EMPEROR'S BIRTHDAY

Known as "Tennou Tanjyobi", this holiday is celebrated on the birthday of the current emperor and thus, if the emperor changes, the national holiday will change accordingly



India
MAR 18–19

HOLI

Holi is a joyous Hindu festival that celebrates the coming of spring and triumph of good over evil. It gets its alternative name "Festival of Colours" from massive gatherings during which participants throw coloured powder and water on each other

Russia
FEB 28
MAR 6

MASLENITSA / PANCAKE WEEK

This week-long Slavic holiday celebrates the start of spring with feasts of Russian pancakes (*bliny*) before the fasting period of Lent

January

February

March

India
JAN 14

UTTARAYAN (INTERNATIONAL KITE FESTIVAL)

Considered one of the biggest and most important festivals celebrated in India, the festival of Uttarayan marks the day when winter begins to turn into summer according to the Indian calendar. Residents spend months preparing grand, colourful and decorative kites



Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Singapore and India

JAN 18

THAIPUSAM

This festival commemorates the occasion when Parvati gave Murugan a spear so he could vanquish the evil demon Soorapadman and his brothers



Vietnam
FEB 1

TET FESTIVAL

Tet Nguyen Dan, to give it its full name, is one of the most important and widely celebrated public festivals of the year in Vietnam. During the celebration, Vietnamese express their respects for ancestors as well as welcome the Lunar New Year with family members

Countries with Chinese communities such as China, Singapore, Malaysia

FEB 1

CHINESE NEW YEAR

Also known as Spring Festival or Lunar New Year, this is the most important festival on the Chinese calendar. The holiday was traditionally a time to honour household and heavenly deities as well as ancestors

Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar

FEB 16

MAGHA PUJA

Observed on the first full moon day of the month of Magh, Magha Pukais a day that commemorates a time when 1,250 Buddhists spontaneously came together to pay respect to the Buddha



Taiwan
FEB 15

PINGXI LANTERN FESTIVAL

Held annually in Pingxi, Taiwan, the Lantern Festival is one of the most famous celebrations in all of Taiwan. During the festival, attendees release beautiful lanterns into the night sky, creating a spectacular scene

Tibet
MAR 3

LOSAR

The Tibetan New Year marks the start of the Tibetan year. The main celebrations happen on the eve and the first three days of the new year

Indonesia
MAR 3

NYEPI

The Balinese welcome the Balinese New Year with Nyepi, a day of reflection and contemplation known as the Day of Silence, which falls on the third day of the Saka New Year

Central Asia
MAR 20

NOWRUZ

Rooted in Zoroastrianism, an ancient Persian religion that predates both Christianity and Islam, the Persian New Year has been celebrated for some 3,000 years



Myanmar
JAN 16

ANANDA PAGODA FESTIVAL

Devotees pray and give offerings at the most revered Ananda Temple built in 1105 CE, where 1,000 monks chant for 72 hours during the week-long event





>>

Countries with Christian communities across Asia such as Singapore, Philippines and Malaysia

APR 10-16

HOLY WEEK
During Holy Week, Christians across Asia recall the events that led up to Jesus' death by crucifixion and his subsequent resurrection. This week includes five days of special significance



Countries with Muslim communities such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore

APR 2-MAY 1

RAMADAN
Ramadan is the holy month of fasting, introspection and prayer for Muslims. It is celebrated as the month during which Muhammad received the initial revelations of the Quran

April



Japan MAY

HAMAMATSU FESTIVAL
This festival is a city festival where locals celebrate children, in particular baby boys, and local restaurants pray for success and prosperity. Additionally, it is also a huge kite flying festival



>>

Asian countries with Chinese communities such as China, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and Myanmar

JUN 3

DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL
Listed as a UNESCO World Intangible Cultural Heritage, the Dragon Boat Festival is celebrated on the fifth day of the fifth month of the Chinese lunar calendar. Exciting dragon boat races accompanied by vigorous drumming action and consumption of sticky rice dumplings wrapped in bamboo leaves are highlights of this festival



Tibet JUNE 14

SAGA DAWA FESTIVAL
This festival honours the life of Buddha. On this day, Buddhists try to do what the Buddha instructed and many give alms and pray as it is thought to be auspicious to partake in acts of benevolence during the festival

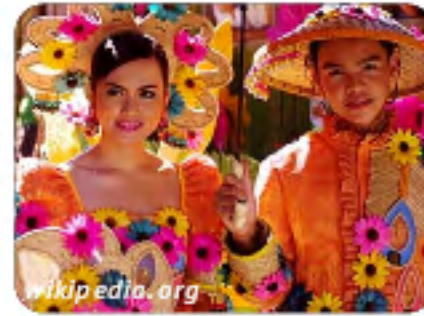
June



India APR 13

THRISSUR POORAM ELEPHANT FESTIVAL
This annual temple festival is held at the Vadakkunnathan (Shiva) Temple in Thrissur every year during Pooram (annual festival which is celebrated in temples dedicated to goddesses Durga or Kali)

May



Philippines MAY 15

PAHIYAS FESTIVAL
Every year on this day, locals of Lucban, Quezon decorate their houses with fruits, vegetables and colourful *kiping* (leaf-shaped wafer made of rice and dyed with food colouring) in celebration

Laos, Thailand

APR 13-15

SONGKRAN
Also known as the Water Splashing Festival, Songkran is a celebration to mark the start of the Buddhist New Year



Myanmar

APR 13-16

THINGYAN WATER FESTIVAL
Thingyan, meaning a "changing over", is the celebration of Myanmar's New Year and is traditionally held over a three-day period. Water-throwing or dousing one another with water is a distinguishing feature of this festival and is very similar to Songkran in Thailand Buddhist New Year

<<



Japan APR 14-15

SPRING TAKAYAMA FESTIVAL
Starting in the 16th to 17th century, the Takayama festival is believed to have begun during the rule of the Kanamori family. Held twice a year in spring and autumn in the old town of Takayama, this festival attracts large numbers of spectators



South Korea

MAY 7

LOTUS LANTERN FESTIVAL
Also known as Yeon Deung Hoe, this festival stems from an ancient Korean folk festival that dates back over 1,000 years. Having begun during the Shilla period, this annual month-long celebration marks Buddha's coming into the world



Malaysia MAY 20

GAWAI DAYAK
An annual festival celebrated by the Dayak people in Sawarak, this festival was first celebrated in 1965, and is a symbol of unity, aspiration and hope for the Dayak tribes. The festival is an integral part of their social life and festivities include cock-fighting matches, *ngajat* dance competitions and feasting on traditional delicacies



Malaysia

JUN 18-20

RAINFOREST WORLD MUSIC FESTIVAL
Every year the Sawarak Tourism Board welcomes music enthusiasts to the Sawarak Cultural Village at the foot of Mount Santubong to celebrate the diversity of world music. The three-day festival runs workshops and features a wide range of musical performances from traditional to world fusion and contemporary



*Dates are subject to change
Images: 123rf



FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS



Indonesia
JUL-AUG

BALI KITE FESTIVAL
Hundreds of colourful kites in a myriad of shapes, sizes and designs fill the skies of the island when local and foreign teams compete in numerous kite competitions. It is also a festival that is used to thank the heavens for abundant crops and harvests



Mongolia
JUL 11-15

NAADAM FESTIVAL
Meaning "games" in Mongolian, Naadam centres on traditional wrestling, archery and horseback riding tournaments that young and old partake in. The festivities include elaborate local music and dance performances



Throughout Asia
AUG 12

HUNGRY GHOST FESTIVAL
Celebrated on the 15th day of the seventh lunar month, the festival sees people preparing food offerings for the visiting spirits of their deceased ancestors



Kyrgyzstan
AUG

BIRDS OF PREY FESTIVAL
This festival is the perfect opportunity for people to learn more about Kyrgyz culture and the traditions of local people, through dances, horse games and demonstrations of hunting with eagles. The heart of the festival, as its name suggests, are the performances with hunting eagles which is a tradition enjoyed across Central Asia

Armenia
JUL 24

VARDAVAR
Like Songkran, Vardavar is a festival where people drench each other with water and although it is now a Christian tradition, this ancient festival is traditionally associated with the deity Astghik, the goddess of water, beauty, love and fertility

Turkey
JUL 10

KURBAN BAYRAMI
Known as Eid al-Adha in most Muslim countries, Kurban Bayrami commemorates Ibrahim's willingness to submit to God's will and sacrifice his son; Allah rewards him by instead providing a lamb to slaughter



July



September



SEP 10

MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL
Also known as the Mooncake Festival, it is believed that this festival started more than 2,000 years ago as a post-autumn harvest celebration devoted to thanking the gods

August

Japan
JUL 1-29

GION MATSURI
Originating more than a millennium ago as a ceremony to appease the gods during the outbreak of an epidemic, Gion Matsuri features two float processions with elaborately decorated floats that are up to 25 metres tall and weigh up to 12 tonnes



Countries with Muslim communities such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore

JUL 9-13

EID AL-ADHA
The first day of the 10th month of the Islamic calendar marks the end of the fasting period (Ramadan). During this joyous time, it is customary for Muslims to attend morning mosque prayers, visit relatives, decorate their houses, and buy new clothes



India
JUL 30-31

KORZOK GUSTOR FESTIVAL
This ancient Buddhist festival is held in the Korzok Monastery and is known for its Black Hat Dance, which is a masked dance performance meant to ward off evil force of Nature

Japan
AUG 13-15

OBON FESTIVAL
The Japanese have been remembering their deceased relatives on this occasion for over 500 years. During this Buddhist festival, locals believe that their spirits return to visit and light paper lanterns to guide them from their graves back home and then back again



Cambodia
SEP 24

PCHUM BEN
Similar to the Hungry Ghost Festival celebrated by the Chinese, this 15-day Cambodian religious festival is where locals show respect to their ancestors. Everyone goes to the pagoda every year during this festival to honour the tradition, while people who live close to a pagoda take turns cooking food for the monks and the many visitors from other regions who come to the pagoda during this time. During this period it is believed that the gates of hell are opened and manes (spirits) of the ancestors are especially active



Malaysia
JUL 7

GEORGE TOWN FESTIVAL
Held since 2010 to commemorate the town's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the festival showcases local and international artists in around 100 events devoted to dance, music, theatre, photography and more





Bhutan
OCT
5-7

THIMPHU TSHECHU
This festival is also known as the Mask Dance Festival and is the most important religious festival in Bhutan. It is held annually in various monasteries and is witnessed by thousands of people. For locals, Tshechu is a time to socialise, to entertain, to receive blessings and wash away their sins



Thailand
NOV

NAGA FIREBALL FESTIVAL
In this festival, people gather along a certain 250 kilometres stretch of the Mekong river and witness glowing red "fireballs" shoot up into the sky. These red glowing orbs randomly spring from the water for a few seconds before disappearing into thin air

Thailand
NOV 9

YEE PENG & LOY KRATHONG FESTIVAL
Celebrated on the full moon of the 12th lunar month every year, this festival is celebrated by locals who believe that the rivers are filled to their fullest and the moon is at its brightest



India
DEC

HORNBILL FESTIVAL
This festival is held in Nagaland, which is home to several tribes. The festival is a celebration of the people and culture of Nagaland, including cuisine, song and dance

October

November

December

Japan
OCT 9

TAKAYAMA AUTUMN FESTIVAL (HACHIMAN FESTIVAL)
Similar to the spring festival, the autumn festival is centred around the Sakurayama Hachiman Shrine and is held after the crops are harvested. The festival is a way for locals to pray and give thanks



Cambodia
NOV
7-9

BON OM TOUK (KHMER WATER FESTIVAL)
This festival marks the reversal of the flow of the Tonle Sap River and corresponds to the lunar mid-autumn festival. This festival is marked by dragon boat races, similar to the Chinese Dragon Boat Festival



Japan
NOV 15

SHICHI-GO-SAN (7-5-3)
This festival is a traditional rite of passage in Japan for three- to seven-year-old girls and three- to five-year-old boys – a celebration of the growth and well-being of young children. People visit shrines and prayers are offered



Japan
DEC
2-3

CHICHIBU YOMATSURI
One of the greatest *hikiyama* (float) festivals in Japan, Chichibu Yomatsuri is held in December every year and attracts 400,000 visitors over two days. Famous throughout Japan, the festival was recognised as an Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO in 2016



Turkey
DEC

WHIRLING DERSHES FESTIVAL
A mesmerising spectacle of dizzy twirling, this ritual whirling is seen as an act of love and performance of faith for the Sufi arm of Islam



India
OCT 24
DIWALI

A five-day festival of lights, Diwali is celebrated by millions of Hindus, Sikhs and Jains across the world. The name comes from the Sanskrit word *deepavali*, meaning "rows of lighted lamps". During the festival, houses, shops and public places are decorated with small oil lamps called diyas



*Dates are subject to change
Images: 123rf

The Rolex Watches That Have Accompanied Intrepid Explorers in Some of Humanity's Greatest Adventures



Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay climbing Mount Everest in 1953

First Rolex Oyster Perpetual Explorer, 1953

For the founder of Rolex, Hans Wilsdorf, the world was like a living laboratory. From the 1930s, he began to use it as a testing ground for his watches, sending them to the most extreme locations, supporting explorers who ventured into the unknown.

Long History of Support for Exploration

For nearly a century, Rolex has been an active supporter of pioneering explorers, individuals who have pushed back the boundaries of human endeavour by venturing to the most extreme places on Earth to shed light on the natural world. Rolex watches have accompanied these explorers to the highest mountains and to the deepest oceans, serving as precise, reliable tools. In turn, these ground-breaking expeditions have proved to be the perfect living laboratories for the brand to test and develop its timepieces.



The Exceptional Vision of Hans Wilsdorf

At the beginning of the 20th century, the pocket watch was the most common and practical way for people to tell the time. Hans Wilsdorf, who began his career in 1900 working for a watch company in La Chaux-de-Fonds in Switzerland, observed how lifestyles were changing and particularly the rise in popularity of sports and outdoor pursuits. The man who was to found Rolex a few years later realised that pocket watches, which had to be protected within the folds of clothing, were not suited to these new kinds of use. An enterprising man of vision, he decided he would create watches to be worn on the wrist that their owners could count on for reliability and accuracy in their modern, active lives.

Rolex was one of the first brands to accompany exceptional individuals in their ventures and explorations. To test the reliability of its timepieces, Rolex asked professional divers to wear them on their missions, afterwards gathering impressions and suggestions for ergonomic or technical improvements. This procedure became an integral part of the Rolex development process.

Exploring the Extremes: From the Highest Mountains...

Rolex has been associated with some of the greatest feats of exploration of the past century. In 1933, the brand first accompanied the British Everest Expedition and again in 1953 on Sir John Hunt's historic expedition, where Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay became the first men to reach the summit of Mount Everest.

Oyster Perpetual Explorer and Oyster Perpetual Explorer II

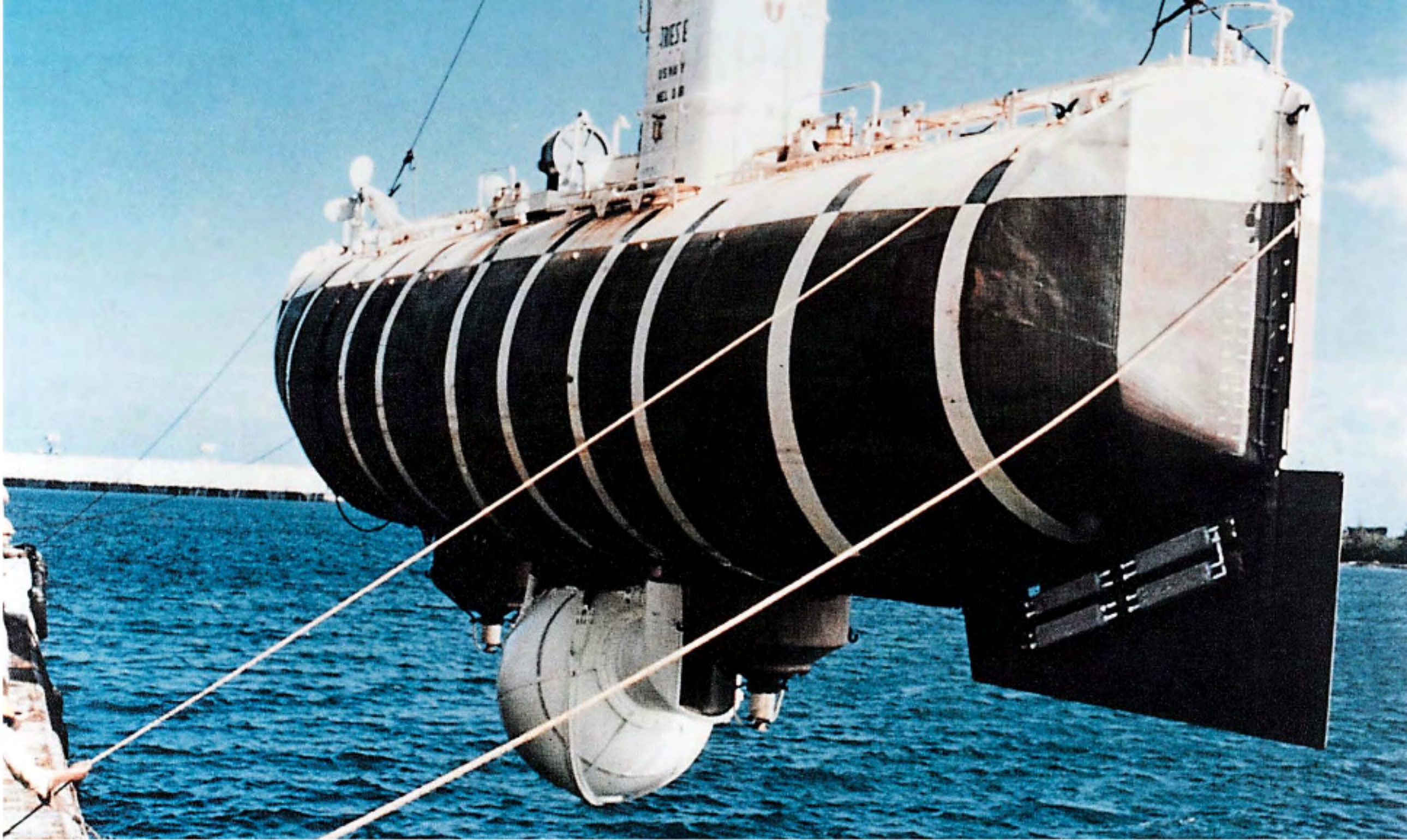
In honour of this milestone, Rolex launched the Explorer watch in 1953. The Explorer model was eventually improved with a reinforced case and a more legible dial for extreme conditions. While the Explorer's appearance has remained substantially the same, the watch has benefited from every technical advance to Rolex timepieces.

In 1971, Rolex launched the Explorer II, featuring a date display, an additional 24-hour hand and a fixed bezel with a 24-hour graduation, enabling the wearer to distinguish hours of the day from those of the night. This was essential for exploration in dark environments – caves, for example – or polar regions that experience six months each of daylight and darkness.

Over the years, many explorers, mountaineers and scientists became Rolex Testimonees and were breaking records and testing their endurance and courage in creative ways, often equipped with Explorer and Explorer II watches. These intrepid men and women were increasingly concerned about the impact of humanity on the delicate balance of Earth's ecosystems. The purpose of their expeditions started to change from pure exploration to missions designed to find solutions that will protect the planet.

Swiss Everest 50th anniversary expedition, 1952–2002





The bathyscaphe *Trieste*, 1960

...To the Deepest Oceans

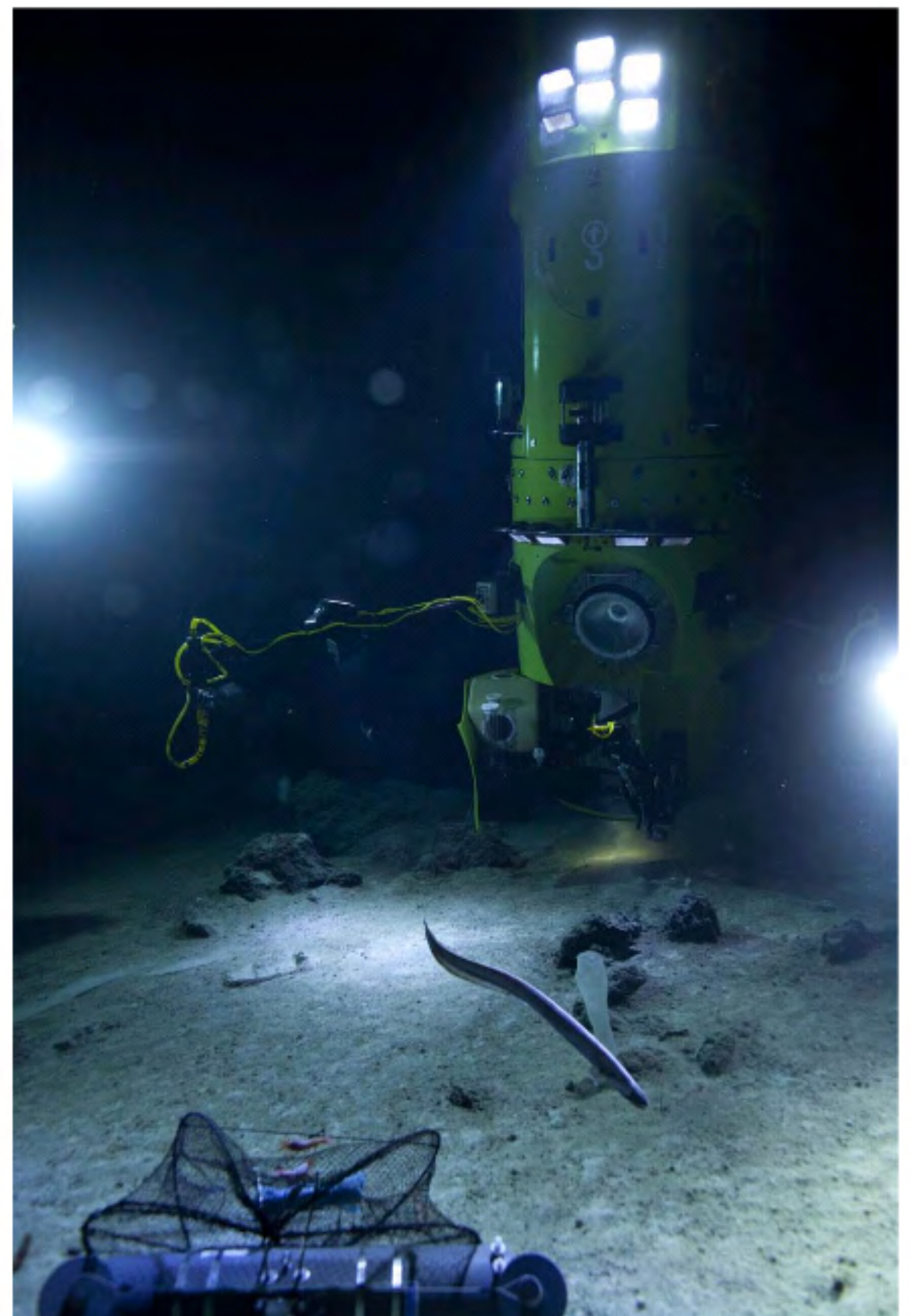
Oyster Perpetual Rolex Deepsea

By 1960, Rolex's involvement with exploration took a new turn – down to the Mariana Trench in the western Pacific, the deepest point in the oceans, the equivalent of the height of Mount Everest plus some 2,000 metres.

The bathyscaphe *Trieste*, piloted by Jacques Piccard and Don Walsh, carried an experimental Rolex Oyster watch, the Deep Sea Special, fixed to its exterior as it descended to a record depth of 10,916 metres (35,800 feet). The watch was working perfectly when the vessel resurfaced despite the immense pressure it had been subjected to. Piccard and Walsh remained the only people to reach the bottom of the ocean for the next half century.

In March 2012, filmmaker and explorer James Cameron made a record-breaking solo dive 10,908 metres (35,787 feet) below the surface of the Pacific Ocean in the *Deepsea Challenger* submersible vessel to reach the world's deepest frontier. The inspirational *Deepsea Challenge* expedition paved the way for a new era in scientific exploration of the ocean floor, the least known area of the planet.

Like the *Trieste* before it, James Cameron's submersible was carrying an experimental Rolex watch. In Cameron's case, the specially made Rolex Deepsea Challenge watch was attached on the exterior of the submersible's hydraulic manipulator arm, with an additional two on its hull. The watches kept time perfectly throughout the nearly seven hours beneath the water and emerged unscathed.



Deepsea Challenger investigates the ocean floor



Leading oceanographer and Rolex Testimonee Sylvia Earle



The Oyster Perpetual Rolex Deepsea featuring a deep-blue to pitch-black gradient dial that is reminiscent of the ocean's twilight zone

The expedition included a team of scientists aboard the support vessel who helped to collect and analyse the samples and imagery that Cameron collected on his dives. In August 2014, James Cameron released a feature documentary, *Deepsea Challenge 3D*, tracing the expedition from its beginnings until the last of its 13 dives in the Pacific. The film serves as a reminder of just how much of this planet remains to be discovered.

Oyster Perpetual Sea-Dweller

A technical divers' watch, the Sea-Dweller was designed in 1967 for the pioneers of professional deep-sea diving. The first Sea-Dweller models were waterproof to a depth of 610 metres (2,000 feet); later, in 1978, the watch was certified to a depth of 1,220 metres (4,000 feet). Equipped with a helium escape valve, it was the ideal tool for saturation divers, the explorers and pioneers of the deep sea.

Perpetuating the Legacy

The vision and values of Hans Wilsdorf continue to guide the company today. As the 21st century has unfolded, exploration for pure discovery has increasingly given way to exploration as a means to preserve the natural world. Rolex continues the legacy of its founder, supporting the explorers of today on their new mission: to make the planet perpetual.

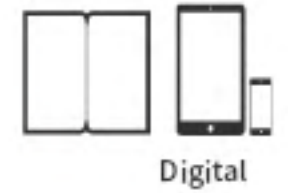
For more information, visit rolex.com

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Here's to a new and exciting editorial journey with *ASIAN Geographic* magazine in 2021!

Go Back to Basics and Rediscover Asia

In 2020, we have all undoubtedly gone through a testing year and many of our travel plans have been put on hold indefinitely. With the urge to travel now greater than ever, we have an exciting line-up ahead in 2021 that will look at bringing the exploration journey to you, all through the power of storytelling. Going back to basics, our *ASIAN Geographic* editorial calendar for 2021 delves into some of life's most important cornerstones and uncovers what makes our society what it is today. From learning about climate change and why it has become our Earth's deadliest threat, to understanding how our cultures have made us who we are, we take you on a journey through time to learn about Asia unlike ever before. With our special *PASSPORT* edition, we tie everything together, by taking you to some of Asia's hidden gems to discover what lies beyond just the tourist front and discover trails off the beaten path – wrapping up the entire year in the best way possible!



Digital



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Island
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NO. 147 ISSUE 2/2021
HISTORY OF ASIA EDITION
+ PASSPORT



History

In the second issue, we will travel back in time and take a look at how history has shaped the world we live in right now. This issue will look at various ancient civilisations that came before ours in countries such as China and India, and how iconic architectural masterpieces and global landmarks such as the Great Wall of China, Tai Mahal and Angkor Wat were built. Furthermore, we look at the rise and fall of different empires, and how they were essential in providing the foundations of our modern world.

NO. 148 ISSUE 3/2021
BLUEGREEN360 EDITION
+ PASSPORT



BlueGreen
360 Edition

In this issue, our "Blue and Green Edition", we will take a look at the world above and below the water's surface. Discover the beauty of Mother Nature on land and in the water, through stories that will pay tribute to our lush rainforests and expansive oceans, whilst shedding light on the reality of climate change and its impacts. Yet on the flip side, this issue allows for us to understand how through the protection of our environment, we are not only ensuring the survival of our planet, but also providing our economy an opportunity to prosper through initiatives and job creation. This issue will be released in June 2021, in conjunction with World Ocean Week.

NO. 149 ISSUE 4/2021
CULTURES OF ASIA EDITION
+ PASSPORT



Cultures

In the fourth issue, we will journey through Asia to learn about different cultures in the region. Through this issue, we take a walk back in time and learn about the many cultures that have existed throughout Asia, and how they have changed from the beginning of civilisations till now, and ultimately, how they have shaped the way people live their lives and why they have become the essence of who we are today.

NO. 150 ISSUE 5/2021
THE SCIENCE OF LIFE EDITION
+ PASSPORT



Science

In this final issue, we look at one of the oldest and most important academic disciplines. A common misconception among many is that science has had little to no impact on humans, but in fact, science has been an essential catalyst for the modernisation of society. Our modern world would not be what it is without the technology enabled by science. In this issue, we introduce you to this large and complex discipline, through bite-sized and easily digestible articles to provide a different perspective towards learning about science and how we can implement it into our daily lives through the simplest of actions.

NO. 151 ISSUE 6/2021
PASSPORT EDITION

Tribes of Asia

Wrapping up the year, AG will release its annual *Passport* magazine, which will take a deep dive into the lives of various tribes in Asia. Found in the furthest corners of the world, tribal people have been living in harmony for many years, and though they have managed to stay mostly out of the public eye, they have always been a keen point of interest for those living outside of these tribes. As modern-day technology, commercialisation and invasion from outsiders begin to threaten their way of life, this issue will shed light not just on how these tribes live, worship and speak, but also on how they have managed to maintain their traditions over time, and the fight many of them have to take on to protect the land they live on. We take a look also at how we have the ability on to protect and support these sacred and elusive tribes, through the simplest of actions, from the threat of modernity.



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FREEDIVING

ONE OCEAN, ONE LOVE
Ocean CITIZEN
Cleanup
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WORLD RECORD ATTEMPT
5 JAN 2022



2021- 2030
UNITED NATIONS
DECADE OF OCEAN
SCIENCE FOR
SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT



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SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY
DIVE INDUSTRY
NETWORKING DAY

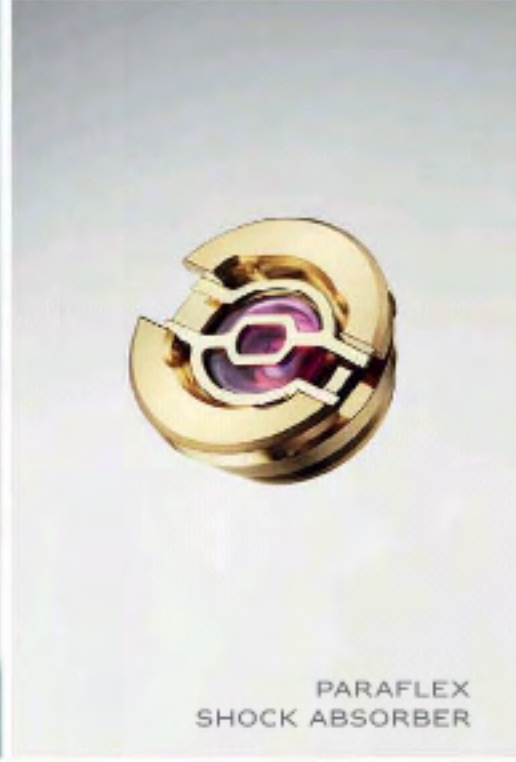
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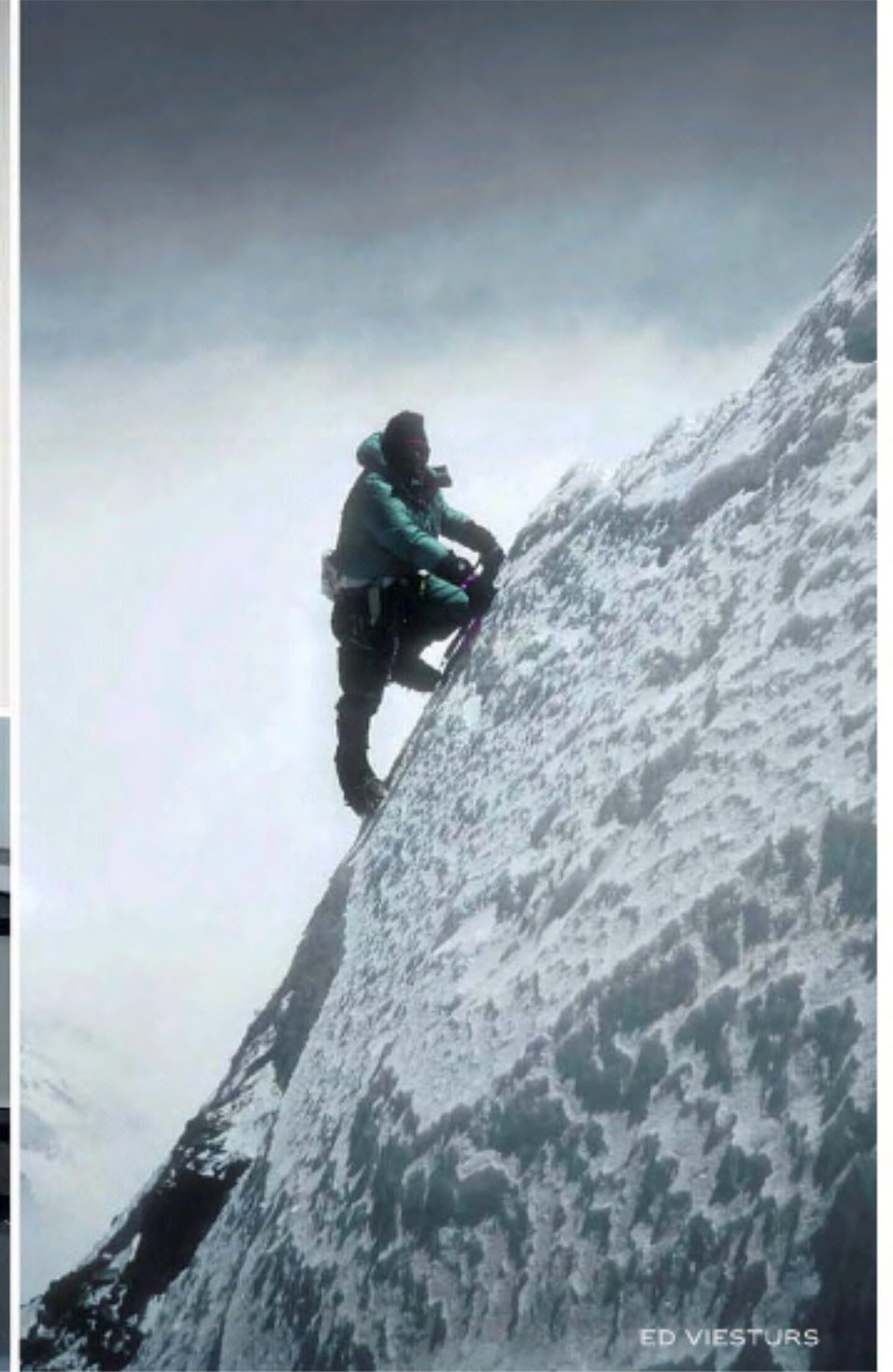
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