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and insider tipsPAGE
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HELP YOU HAVE A SMOOTH TRIP

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THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

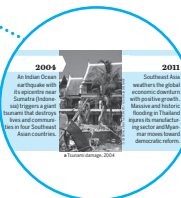
China Williams

**Greg Bloom, Celeste Brash, Stuart Butler, Jayne D'Arcy, Shawn Low,
Brandon Presser, Nick Ray, Simon Richmond, Daniel Robinson,
Adam Skolnick, Iain Stewart, Ryan Ver Berkmoes, Richard Waters**

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➤ Every listing is recommended by our authors, and their favourite places are listed first

➤ Look out for these icons:



Our author's top recommendation



A green or sustainable option



No payment required

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Southeast Asia



Top Experiences >





Iain Stewart

[Vietnam](#) Iain Stewart first visited, and was captivated by Vietnam as a traveller in 1991 (armed with a trusty Lonely Planet). He's now a Brighton-based writer, specialising in hot countries a long way from his English seaside abode. For this trip he biked the Ho Chi Minh Highway, sailed to the Chams, drank in Danang and explored the heart of Phong Nha.



Ryan Ver Berkmoes

[Indonesia Chapter Coordinator](#), [Bali](#), [Maluku](#), [Sulawesi](#) Ryan Ver Berkmoes first visited Indonesia in 1993. On his visits since he has criss-crossed the archipelago, trying to make a dent in those 17,000 islands. Recent thrills included finally reaching the amazing Banda Islands after 18 years of trying, finding the perfect flat on Bali and being given the seat of honour at a Torajan funeral ceremony (it wasn't his, fortunately). Off-island, Ryan lives in Portland, Oregon and writes about [Indonesia, travel and more at ryanverberkmoes.com](http://ryanverberkmoes.com).



Richard Waters

[Laos](#), [Kalimantan](#) A visit to Laos in 1999 as the country was still warming to the west, began a close association with the country that sees Richard returning regularly. His first travels were around Europe as a teenager, then Central America and US by camper van. Writing the Kalimantan chapter was like a journey back in time and a privilege. These days he writes and shoots for *The Sunday Times*, *Independent* and *Observer*. To read more of his work and articles

about Laos, visit www.richardwaters.co.uk. He lives with his family in the Cotswolds.

**Jayne D'Arcy**

Timor-Leste Writing about Timor-Leste always stirs up a bit of passion in Jayne. After a stint working in community radio there in 2003 and 2004, she frequently dreams of boarding an Air North plane and returning (and sometimes she does). Partly it's to catch up with former colleagues, but mostly it's to see how the country is changing and adapting to its freedom. Jayne is a Melbourne-based author who has a particular fondness for writing about countries that are

recovering after turbulent times.

**Shawn Low**

Singapore Shawn grew up in hot, humid, food-crazy Singapore but later made his way further south to less hot, less humid, food-crazy Melbourne (Australia, not Florida). He's spent the last five years working for Lonely Planet: as an editor, commissioning editor, author, TV host, and now, travel editor at large. Devouring chilli crab, guzzling Tiger beer and more in the name of research is a hard job, but someone's gotta do it. So he did. Who knows, he might actually be led home

by his stomach one day. He's also on Twitter @shawnlow.

**Brandon Presser**

Southern Thailand Growing up in a land where bear hugs are taken literally, this wanderlust-y Canadian always craved swaying palms and golden sand. A trek across southeast Asia as a teenager was the clincher — he was hooked, returning year after year to scuba dive, suntan, and savour spoonfuls of spicy *sôm-dam* (papaya salad). After leaving his job at the Louvre, Brandon picked up his pen and rucksack and became a fulltime freelance travel writer. He's since

co-authored over 40 guidebooks, from *Iceland to Thailand* and many 'lands' in between.

**Nick Ray**

Cambodia A Londoner of sorts, Nick comes from Watford, the sort of town that makes you want to travel. He lives in Phnom Penh with his wife Kulikar and his young children Julian and Belle. He has written for countless guidebooks on the Mekong region, including Lonely Planet's *Cambodia*, *Vietnam* and *Laos* books. When not writing, he is often out exploring the remote parts of Cambodia as a

location scout and manager for the world of television and film, including movies *Tomb Raider* and *Two Brothers*. Motorbikes are a part-time passion (riding them a passion, maintaining them part-time) and he has travelled through most of Indochina on two wheels.

**Simon Richmond**

Myanmar A freelance author and photographer, Simon first visited Myanmar in 2001; he found a country brimming with beautiful sights and gentle people who were delighted to have the chance to interact with those from beyond their borders. A decade later he returned to coordinate Lonely Planet's *Myanmar* guide. The many guides for Lonely Planet Simon has worked on since 1999 include several in Southeast Asia.

**Daniel Robinson**

Malaysian Borneo, Brunei Daniel has been writing about Southeast Asia since 1989, when he researched the award-winning first editions of Lonely Planet's guides to Vietnam and Cambodia. He takes a special interest in tropical rainforest habitats and the role that sustainable tourism can play in their conservation. In Borneo, Daniel is especially fond of tramping through Gunung Gading National Park in search of giant *Rafflesia* flowers and watching orang-utans cavort in

Semenggoh's jungle canopy.

**Adam Skolnick**

Nusa Tenggara, Papua Adam Skolnick writes about travel, culture, health, sports, and the environment for Lonely Planet, *Men's Health*, *Outside*, and *Travel & Leisure* among others. He has authored and co-authored 12 previous Lonely Planet guidebooks, and has travelled and reported extensively throughout Indonesia since 2004. To get around Nusa Tenggara and Papua he took three buses,

11 boats and ferries, 13 planes, and hired or hitched 12 cars and 17 motorbikes.

You can read more of his work at www.adamskolnick.com.



OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



China Williams

Coordinating author, Thailand China first came to Thailand to teach English in Surin way back in 1997, a few months prior to the currency crisis. She then backpacked through Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos, just like you're doing now. And it was the highlight of a fun-filled decade. Since then, she has shuttled across the Pacific to work on various Lonely Planet guidebooks, mainly to Thailand, for nine years. This is her third trip with her son, who is a four-year-old backpacker-in-training. China lives in Catonsville, Maryland (USA), with her husband, Matt, and son, Felix.



Greg Bloom

Philippines Greg lived in Manila for five years before moving to Cambodia in 2009. Travelling the Philippines for Lonely Planet, Greg has fallen off a tricycle, flown out of a jeepney, and survived a bus crash on the back roads of Bicol. But mostly it's been good. When not writing about Southeast Asia, Greg might be found snouting around the former Soviet Union (he once called Kyiv home) or running around Asia's ultimate frisbee fields.

Read more about Greg at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/glbloom4



Celeste Brash

Malaysia Celeste first visited Malaysia while studying at Chiang Mai University, Thailand in 1993 and she's grazed through the hawker capital of the world several times since on cross-Asia trips and for a handful of Lonely Planet titles. When not de-sensitising her taste buds with *sambal* Celeste lives in street food-laden Portland, Oregon, with her husband and two children. She's contributed to about 30 Lonely Planet guidebooks. You can follow her travels via her blog

<http://coconutradio.blogspot.com>.



Stuart Butler

Java, Sumatra Stuart Butler first hit the shores of Indonesia many years ago at the end of a long trans-Asia surf trip. Not surprisingly it was the highlight of his trip. Today Stuart lives with his wife and son on the beautiful beaches of southwest France. His travels for Lonely Planet and a variety of international surf magazines have taken him across Indonesia and beyond, from the desert beaches of Yemen to the coastal jungles of Colombia.

OVER MORE PAGE WRITERS

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itineraries

Whether you've got six weeks or six months, these itineraries provide a starting point for the trip of a lifetime. Want more inspiration? Head online to lonelyplanet.com/thorntree to chat with other travellers.



Eight Weeks The Best of Southeast Asia

If you want a 'sampler plate' of Southeast Asia, then plan on jetting between countries to hit the highlights. Most international airlines fly to **Bangkok**, a chaotic but fantastic city. Fly to **Siem Reap** to see Angkor's magnificent temples. Bus to **Phnom Penh** and on to Vietnam's bustling **Ho Chi Minh City**. Work your way north with a stop in adorable **Hoi An** and on to **Hanoi**. Air-lift out of Vietnam to laid-back **Luang Prabang**. Laos' world heritage city, and then fly to chic **Chiang Mai**.

Return to Bangkok by overnight train and work your way south to **Ko Tao** to learn how to dive before hitting the beachy hot spots on Thailand's Andaman coast: **Phuket**, Ko Phi-Phi and **Krabi**.

Fly from polished Phuket to **Penang** and overland to Malaysia's multiethnic capital **Kuala Lumpur**. Catch a flight from Kuala Lumpur to **Jakarta** and soak up the culture in **Yogyakarta** and then bus to **Gunung Bromo**, an active volcano. Leapfrog to blessed **Bali** for sun, fun and culture. Then catch a cheap flight to sophisticated **Singapore**, which has air connections to everywhere else.



Four to Eight Weeks Mainland Explorer

From **Bangkok** head to **Nakhon Ratchasima**, gateway to Khmer temples. Get muddy in **Khao Yai National Park**, then hightail it to the border at **Poipet**, aiming for **Siem Reap** and Cambodia's Angkor temples. Scoot into shabby-chic **Phnom Penh**.

Overland through **Bavet**, crossing to full-throttle **Ho Chi Minh City**. Migrate to the beaches of **Mui Ne** or **Nha Trang**, the antique city of **Hoi An** and imperial **Hue**. Rest in **Hanoi**, a mature, manicured capital. Cruise karst-filled **Halong Bay** and detour to **Sapa** and its highland communities. Return to **Hanoi**.

Fly to the Lao capital, **Vientiane**, bus to athletic **Vang Vieng** and on to **Luang Prabang**, a reverential riverside city. Continue to the trekking centre of **Luang Nam Tha**. Ride the Mekong River to the Laos-Thailand border at **Huay Xai**.

Slide into **Chiang Rai** for hill-tribe treks, or **Chiang Mai**. Escape to the mountains of **Pai** or **Mae Hong Son**. Pay homage to ancient capitals at **Sukhothai** and **Ayuthaya**.

Return to **Bangkok**. Fly to Myanmar's **Yangon** and continue to the island monasteries of **Inle Lake**, the ancient capital of **Mandalay** and the ruins of **Bagan**.

Three to Four Weeks Beaches, Beaches

From **Bangkok**, make a beeline for the beach-bum islands in the Gulf of Thailand: dive-crazy **Ko Tao**, hippie **Ko Pha-Ngan** and resorty **Ko Samui**. Get certified on Tao, then follow the herd across to the Andaman coast. **Khao Lak** is the base for live-aboard dive trips to the world-class Surin and Similan islands. Skip down to adrenalin-charged **Krabi**, home to rock-climbing and cave exploring and then chill-out on laid-back **Ko Lanta**. Island-hop across the border at **Pulau Langkawi** to **Penang** to balance beaching with hawk-centre bingeing.

From Penang, bus to **Kota Bharu**, the jumping-off point for the fabulous jungle islands of **Pulau Perhentian**. Chase the coastline south to **Mersing**, the mainland port for sleepy **Pulau Tioman**, before returning to civilisation in **Kuala Lumpur**.

There are even more beaches to explore on even bigger islands. See our Indonesia to Timor-Leste itinerary.



DANIEL BOAG / LONELY PLANET IMAGES ©



MICHAEL COVNE / LONELY PLANET IMAGES ©

- » (above) Woman working the fields outside her home in Vietnam's far north
- » (left) Worshipper praying at Wat Phra That Doi Suthep Buddhist temple (p685) in Chiang Mai, Thailand



Four to Eight Weeks Indonesia to Timor-Leste

Start at Indonesia's tip in **Medan** on the island of Sumatra, trundle to the orang-utan outpost of **Bukit Lawang** and go volcano hiking in **Berastagi**. Return to Medan and fly to lovely **Banda Aceh** and dive-tastic **Pulau Weh**.

Buzz to Java, touching down in **Jakarta**. Cruise **Yogyakarta's** culture trail. Day trip to the giant stupa of **Borobudur** or huff-and-puff up **Gunung Bromo**.

Leapfrog to **Denpasar**, in Bali, to nuzzle the sandy beaches of the Bukit Peninsula or get cultured in Ubud. Party in **Gili Trawangan**, spot dragons on **Komodo** and go rustic on the beaches of **Flores**. Check your visa and apply for an extension before flying to **Makassar** on the island of Sulawesi. Bus to **Tana Toraja**, where funeral rituals are ancient and bloody. (Stay tuned for a Tana Toraja airport in 2013.) Travel to the **Togaean Islands** and the northern diving board of **Pulau Bunaken**. Fly from **Manado** to **Kuala Lumpur**.

Alternatively, from Denpasar hop over to Timor-Leste's capital of **Dili** to tour old colonial towns and uncrowded reefs.

Four Weeks Tramp Malaysia & Beyond

Touchdown in **Kuala Lumpur**, an easy city for international arrivals. Bus to the tranquil Cameron Highlands and its glossy green tea plantations. Follow the northern migration to **Penang** for street eats and Malaysian fusion culture. Detour to the beaches of **Langkawi**. Return to Georgetown and bus to **Kota Bharu**, the jump-off point for car-free, care-free ambience on **Pulau Perhentian**. Pick up the Jungle Railway to **Taman Negara**, an ancient, accessible wilderness.

Return to **Kuala Lumpur** for a well-planned, well-funded tour of Malaysian Borneo. Fly to **Kota Kinabalu**, in Sabah, ascend Borneo's highest peak **Mt Kinabalu**. Head east to **Sepilok** and its orang-utan sanctuary. Swing over to **Semporna**, the gateway to dive sites. Culture vultures should detour to the oil-rich oddity of Brunei and its unassuming capital, **Bandar Seri Begawan (BSB)**, surrounded by pristine rainforests and water villages. Or fly from Kota Kinabalu to **Kuching** in Sarawak state, formerly known as the land of the headhunters.

If you're a city slicker, skip Borneo and cruise through **Melaka**, a colonial port of call, and then into **Singapore** for an immersion in modern Asia.



Six Months The Whole Shebang

Start off in Bangkok and follow the eastern seaboard to forested **Ko Chang**, cross the Hat Lek–Cham Yeam border bound for **Sihanoukville's** collection of scruffy and sublime beaches. Stop in Franco-influenced **Kampot** and its nearby hill station. Turn inland to **Phnom Penh** to pay your respects at its genocide museums then bus to **Siem Reap** and the monumental splendour of Angkor.

Board a flight to **Pakse**, gateway to the easy river living of Si Phan Don. Bus to **Vientiane** and on to **Vang Vieng** then **Luang Prabang**. Trundle to Nong Khiaw for tribal trekking. Follow the rugged, revolutionaries' trail through the **Na Meo** border; a remote and adventurous crossing to **Hanoi**.

Work your way through Vietnam, sampling history, culture and beaches. Fly from **Ho Chi Minh City** to **Bangkok** and slide down the Malay Peninsula, swimming and diving around **Ko Pha-Ngan** in the Gulf of Thailand and around **Krabi** in the Andaman Sea.

Slip into Malaysia for the street eats of **Penang**. Cross the peninsula for the peaceful beach retreat of **Pulau Perhentian**. Pick up the Jungle Railway to **Taman Negara**, a wilderness preserve. Detour to the mist-shrouded hills of **Cameron Highlands** and then alight in **Kuala Lumpur**.

Fly to **Jakarta** (Java) and immerse yourself in the cultural city of **Yogyakarta** and the Unesco treasure of Borobudur. Bask on the beach in **Bali**, escape the beach crowds in **Flores**, and go dragon-spotting on **Komodo**. Return to Bali and catch a flight to **Dili** in Timor-Leste, a fledgling tourist nation.

Alternatively, from Jakarta fly to **Banjarmasin** (Kalimantan) for a jungle excursion into Borneo. Catch another flight to **Pangkalan Bun** with connections to the orang-utan research camps of **Tanjung Puting National Park**.

Fly from Banjarmasin to **Pontianak** and then bus to the Entikong–Tebedu border to Malaysia's **Kuching**, a gateway to more Borneo nature reserves and former headhunting cultures. After a cheap flight back to **Kuala Lumpur**, catch a connection to **Yangon** (Myanmar) and its Buddhist temples and isolated people, or to **Manila** (Philippines) and its Catholic population and volcanic setting. Bus to the mountains of **North Luzon**, then fly to **Cebu**, gateway to the Visayas beaches. If you opt for the Philippines route, you can then hop into East Asia (China or Japan) without having to backtrack.

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