



Southeast Asia

on a shoestring



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Itineraries



8 WEEKS The Best of Southeast Asia

This Southeast Asia sampler hits the highlights: cool cities, ancient kingdoms, beautiful beaches and smouldering volcanoes. Start in fun-filled **Bangkok**, then bus it to **Siem Reap** for Angkor's magnificent temples. Continue to party HQ **Phnom Penh**, then to Vietnam's bustling **Ho Chi Minh City**. Head north to adorable **Hoi An**, then hit the antique streets of **Hanoi** and dramatic karsts of **Halong Bay**.

Fly out of Vietnam to laid-back **Luang Prabang**, Laos' world-heritage city; fly to chic **Chiang Mai** for hill-tribe adventures and Thai cooking courses.

Head south through Bangkok to **Ko Tao** and learn to dive before hitting the rock-climbing retreat of **Krabi**. Cross the border from Ko Lipe to Malaysia's **Pulau Langkawi**, then on to the food paradise of **George Town** (Penang) and overland to Malaysia's multi-ethnic capital **Kuala Lumpur**, with a stop in the lush **Cameron Highlands**.

Fly from Kuala Lumpur to **Jakarta**, Indonesia's capital; soak up Java's renowned culture in **Yogyakarta**. Bus it to active volcano **Gunung Bromo**, then leapfrog to **Bali** for sun, fun and the island's unique culture. Double back to bustling, multiculti **Singapore** for an onward flight anywhere.



6 MONTHS

Almost Everything

If you're really going to *do* Southeast Asia, go for an extended expedition from top to toe. Starting in **Bangkok**, follow the coast to forested **Ko Chang**, cross the Hat Lek-Cham Yeam border bound for **Siهانoukville's** sublime beaches and up-and-coming islands of Koh Rong and Koh Rong Samloem. Stop in Franco-influenced **Kampot** and the nearby Bokor Hill Station. Turn inland to **Phnom Penh** to pay your respects at its genocide museums then bus it to **Siem Reap** and the monumental splendour of Angkor.

Board a flight to **Pakse**, gateway to the river life 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 Vieng Xai Caves and Na Meo border, a remote, adventurous crossing to **Hanoi**.

Work your way through Vietnam, sampling history, culture and beaches. Fly from **Ho Chi Minh City** to **Bangkok** and travel down the Malay peninsula, swimming and diving around **Ko Pha-Ngan** and **Krabi**.

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

Fly to **Jakarta** (Java) and immerse yourself in cultural **Yogyakarta** and the Unesco treasure of Borobudur. Bask on the beach in **Bali** or the **Gili Islands**, escape the crowds in **Flores**, and spot dragons on **Komodo**. Catch a flight from Bali to **Dili** in Timor-Leste, a fledgling tourist nation.

Or fly from Jakarta to **Banjarmasin** (Kalimantan) for a jungle excursion into Borneo. Fly to **Pangkalan Bun** for the orangutan research camps of **Tanjung Puting National Park**, then fly from Banjarmasin to **Pontianak** and bus to the border to reach Malaysia's **Kuching**, a gateway to more Borneo nature reserves.

Fly back to **Kuala Lumpur** and connect to **Yangon** (Myanmar) and the beautiful Buddhist temples of **Bagan**. Take a trek to **Kalaw** or relax on the placid waters of **Inle Lake**. Or turn things on their head by starting off in Myanmar.



10 WEEKS

Mainland to Borneo & the Philippines

Cruise around mainland Southeast Asia, hitting the beaches and the highlands, and then bound over to Borneo and the Philippines to climb into the heavens and dive under the sea. From **Bangkok**, head to **Ko Chang**, then cross the border to **Sihanoukville** for lots of sand and suds. Scoot to shabby-chic **Phnom Penh**. Admire the architectural wonder of the Angkor temples from **Siem Reap**. Fly to full-throttle **Ho Chi Minh City**. Migrate to the beaches of **Mui Ne** or **Nha Trang**, the antique city of **Hoi An**, the imperial capital of **Hue** and the extensive caves of **Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park**. Rest in mature capital **Hanoi**. Cruise karst-filled **Halong Bay** and detour to **Sapa** and its ethnic highland communities. Return to Hanoi.

Fly to **Vientiane** (Laos), bus to **Vang Vieng** and on to **Luang Prabang**, a sublime world-heritage town. Ride the Mekong River to the Laos-Thailand border at **Huay Xai** and the fabled Golden Triangle.

On to **Chiang Mai**; escape to the mountains of **Pai** or **Mae Hong Son** for stunning mountain vistas and intriguing border cultures. Descend to the lowlands for the ancient capitals at **Sukhothai** and **Ayuthaya** before returning to **Bangkok**.

Budget flight or bus it to **Kuala Lumpur**. Explore **Taman Negara**, an ancient wilderness. Cruise through colonial **Melaka**. Return to KL for a tour of Malaysian Borneo. Fly to **Kota Kinabalu**, Sabah, and ascend Mt Kinabalu, Borneo's highest peak. Head east to **Sepilok**'s orangutan sanctuary, then to **Semporna**, gateway to dive sites. Detour to oil-rich Brunei's unassuming capital, **Bandar Seri Begawan** (BSB), surrounded by pristine rainforests and water villages.

Cheap flights link **Kota Kinabalu** with **Manila** (Philippines). Bus to the incredible Ifuagao rice terraces in the mountains of **North Luzon**, then return to Manila and hit up party isle **Boracay** via dive hotbed **Puerto Galera** (Mindoro). Spend a few days unwinding in Boracay, then fly to **Cebu City** – in easy range of several laid-back beach destinations, including **Malapascua** and **Bohol**. Fly from Cebu to **Puerto Princesa**, Palawan; go north to **El Nido** via the lonely beaches and pristine jungles of Palawan's west coast. Take the all-day boat trip to wreck-diving hotbed **Coron** before flying back to Manila.



8
WEEKS

Mainland Beaches to Indonesia

Become a beach connoisseur by tracing the coastline of Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. In between grab some culture to keep things balanced. From **Bangkok**, make a beeline for the islands in the Gulf of Thailand: dive-crazy **Ko Tao** and hippy trippy **Ko Pha-Ngan**. Get certified on Tao, then follow the herd to the Andaman coast. **Hat Khao Lak** is the base for dive trips to the world-class Surin and Similan islands. Skip down to adrenaline-charged **Krabi** for rockclimbing and cave exploring, then island-hop to rasta-vibed **Ko Lipe**. Cross the border at Pulau Langkawi for **Penang**'s famous hawker centres.

From Penang, take a bus to **Kota Bharu**, jumping-off point for the fabulous jungle islands of **Pulau Perhentian**. Head south to **Mersing**, the mainland port for sleepy **Pulau Tioman**, before returning to **Kuala Lumpur** to pick up a flight to Indonesia.

From Indonesia's tip in **Medan**, Sumatra, visit the orangutan reserve of **Bukit Lawang** and hike a volcano in **Berastagi**. From Medan fly to lovely **Banda Aceh** for dive-tastic **Pulau Weh**.

Say goodbye to rugged Sumatra and buzz over to Java, touching down in **Jakarta**, Indonesia's intense capital. Explore **Yogyakarta** and its culture trail; day-trip to the giant Buddhist stupa of **Borobudur** or the ancient Hindu temple of **Prambanan**. Continue eastwards to **Gunung Bromo** volcano for a sunrise spectacle over a lunar landscape.

Leapfrog to **Denpasar**, 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 back in Denpasar, then fly to **Makassar**, Sulawesi. Pay your respects in **Tana Toraja**, known for ancient funeral rites and effigies standing guard over cliffside burial sites. Travel to the remote and pristine **Togean Islands** and the northern diving destination of **Pulau Bunaken**; it might feel far away, but it's well worth it. 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.

4
WEEKS

Mekong River Meander

This trip follows the famous river downstream from northern Laos all the way to its terminus in Vietnam's Mekong Delta. En route you'll encounter a wide range of landscapes and cultures as you slice through all four countries of the Mekong region. Leave behind bustling **Bangkok** and make a beeline for **Chiang Rai**, near the Golden Triangle, where the borders of Laos, Myanmar (Burma) and Thailand converge. Crossing into Laos at **Huay Xai** is like stepping back in time. Take a slow boat down the Mekong to **Luang Prabang**, stopping overnight in **Pak Beng**. Soak up the magic before leaving the river for some relaxation in **Vang Vieng**.

Continue to **Vientiane** and reunite with the mighty waterway. The sleepy Lao capital has some great cafes, restaurants and bars (which you won't be encountering for a while after leaving). Board a bus and follow the river southeast, stopping off in **Tha Khaek** and **Savannakhet** before arriving in **Pakse**. Visit the imposing Khmer sanctuary of **Wat Phu Champasak**; explore the waterfalls and villages of the **Bolaven Plateau**; or enjoy the laid-back islands of **Si Phan Don**.

Cross into Cambodia. If you missed the Irrawaddy dolphins near Si Phan Don, you can see them further south in the laid-back riverside town of **Kratie**. From Kratie, consider a visit to the mountains of **Monduliri Province**, home to elephants, hill tribes and pristine nature.

Weeks in rural provinces will have you happy to see **Phnom Penh**, where the Mekong merges with another vital regional waterway, the Tonlé Sap. Take a sunset boat cruise and hit the bars for a well-deserved night on the town. Recharged, board a fast boat downstream to **Chau Doc**, Vietnam, gateway to the Mekong Delta; check out **Can Tho**, its commercial heart. Hotfoot it to **Ho Chi Minh City** for some fun; delve deeper into the delta with a homestay around **Vinh Long**, or make for the tropical retreat of **Phu Quoc Island**, a well-earned reward. If you still have time and stamina, the rest of Vietnam beckons.



6 WEEKS

Where the Wild Things Are

Southeast Asia is home to diverse wildlife, including tigers, elephants, primates, whale sharks and the Komodo dragon. Start out in **Bangkok**; explore **Khao Yai National Park** to see wild elephants and Asian black bears. Heading south, explore **Khao Sok National Park**, home to gibbons and macaques. Explore the underwater wilds of the **Similan Islands** for the chance to see whale sharks.

Continue to **Kuala Lumpur** to hop a flight to **Sarawak** in Borneo. See rare proboscis monkeys in Bako National Park and the gentle orangutans of Semenggoh Wildlife Centre. Head to **Kota Kinabalu**, Sabah, to explore the Kinabatangan River and perhaps see wild orangutans and rare pygmy elephants. Wind down on the beaches and reefs of the **Semporna Archipelago**, one of Malaysia's top dive sites.

Head south into Kalimantan (Indonesia) and explore the jungle waterways of **Tanjung Puting National Park**. Stay overnight in a *klotok* (boat) and visit **Camp Leakey**, an orangutan research station. Fly to **Bali** and head east to the rocky outcrops of **Komodo** and **Flores**, home to the Komodo dragon and some superb diving.

6 WEEKS

Temple Trails

When it comes to spectacular temples, Southeast Asia is in a league of its own. Start in **Bangkok**, home to the iconic Temple of the Dawn, before heading to the stupa-studded former capital **Ayuthaya**. Further north is the ancient Khmer capital of **Sukothai**.

Cross the Mekong River border at **Huay Xai** and cruise to **Luang Prabang**, a gilded city of active temples and saffron-clad monks. Travel to Laos' deep south to see the Khmer mountain temple of **Wat Phu Champasak**.

Continue into Cambodia, the region's temple heavyweight. Pass through **Phnom Penh** to the pre-Angkorian temples of **Sambor Prei Kuk**. Make an adventurous diversion north to the mountain temple of **Prasat Preah Vihear** before arriving at the **Temples of Angkor** – arguably the most inspired collection of temples on earth, including soaring Angkor Wat.

Hop a flight to **Yangon**, home to the shimmering Shwedagon Paya. Finish at **Bagan**, home to the greatest concentration of temples in the region, where hundreds of stupas stretch into the infinite horizon.



Top: Temple, Bagan
(p521), Myanmar

Bottom: Whale shark,
Similan Islands Marine
National Park (p759),
Thailand

ARMILBLU/GETTY IMAGES ©



Off the Beaten Track: Southeast Asia

MRAUK U (MYANMAR)

Deep in little-visited Rakhine State, the 700-odd temples of Mrauk U date back hundreds of years – they're one of Myanmar's best-kept secrets. (p532)

○ MRAUK U

MYANMAR (BURMA)

NAY PYI TAW

Yangon

Bay of Bengal

INDIA ANDAMAN SEA

LAOS

BA BE NATIONAL PARK

Luang Prabang

VIENTIANE

HANOI

THAM KONG LO

Hainan CHINA

Hoi An

Paracel Islands

THAILAND

BANGKOK

MONDKIRI PROVINCE

CAMBODIA

PHNOM PENH

VIETNAM

Ho Chi Minh City

Gulf of Thailand

SOUTH CHINA SEA

KO TARUTAO

Pulau Weh

Pulau Langkawi

Pulau Simeulue

Pulau Nias

Danau Toba

MALAYSIA

Taman Negara

KUALA LUMPUR

SINGAPORE

INDONESIA

Sumatra

Natuna Islands

BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN

Sarawak

Kuching

Kalimantan

INDONESIA

Pulau Bangka

Pulau Belitung

JAKARTA

JAVA SEA

Java

Madura

Bali

KO TARUTAO (THAILAND)

Tarutao, part of a marine park, is so far south it's practically in Malaysia. But its secluded alabaster beaches make it a top castaway contender. (p774)

MONDKIRI PROVINCE (CAMBODIA)

Cambodia's up-and-coming adventure centre, Mondulkiri offers walking with a herd of elephants, ziplining over a waterfall, quad-biking, and authentic encounters with indigenous Bunong people. (p136)

BA BE NATIONAL PARK (VIETNAM)

A stunning landscape of limestone mountains, sloping valleys, mist-shrouded lakes and evergreen forests provides a full dose of nature exploration. For a cultural hook, ethnic minorities host rustic homestays. (p836)

THAM KONG LO (LAOS)

A watery underworld awaits at this 7.5km-long cave explored by longtail boat. Daylight recedes as you putter deep into the darkness and bulbous-shaped calcified sculptures decorate the vaulted ceiling. (p356)

SIARGAO (PHILIPPINES)

Famous for its surf break, this Catholic island in northern Mindanao is blessed with pretty coves, fine blonde beaches and laid-back villages. Nearby Camiguin has volcano hikes, reef dives and scenic places to wander. (p590)

ULU TEMBURONG NATIONAL PARK (BRUNEI DARUSSALAM)

This pristine tract of primary rainforest, reachable only by boat, is one of the few remaining expanses of the truly wild jungle that once covered all of Borneo. (p64)

TOGEAN ISLANDS (INDONESIA)

The blissful Togeian Islands are an unadulterated vision of the tropics. Wander blinding white-sand beaches fringed by coconut palms and enjoy world-class snorkelling and diving on majestic coral reefs. (p288)

ATAURO ISLAND (TIMOR-LESTE)

If you've made it all the way to Timor-Leste, take one more hop over to this blissfully undeveloped isle off Dili for excellent snorkelling, diving, hiking and hammock-swinging. (p798)



Map Legend

Sights

- Beach
- Bird Sanctuary
- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Islamic
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

Activities, Courses & Tours

- Body surfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkelling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

Sleeping

- Sleeping
- Camping

Eating

- Eating

Drinking & Nightlife

- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

Entertainment

- Entertainment

Shopping

- Shopping

Information

- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

Geographic

- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

Population

- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

Transport

- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro/MRT/MTR station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- Skytrain/Subway station
- Taxi
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- Underground station
- Other Transport

Routes

- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

Boundaries

- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

Hydrography

- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

Areas

- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Forest
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove

Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book



David Eimer

Myanmar David first travelled to Myanmar back in the days of the military junta. Since then he's made repeated visits that have taken him throughout the country. When not travelling, David lives in Bangkok and works as a journalist for several newspapers and magazines. Originally from London, he was previously based in Beijing and LA. He has contributed to over a dozen Lonely Planet books.



Sarah Reid

Timor-Leste Lonely Planet Destination Editor and travel writer Sarah Reid added Timor-Leste to her travel wish list after interviewing the cast of *Balibo* in her past life as an entertainment journalist in Sydney. Getting the chance to visit this poor but wonderful country for the first time six years later (on the 40th anniversary of the events that inspired the film) to research this guide was a great privilege. Originally hailing from Byron Bay, Australia, Sarah has lived on three continents, and visited more than 80 countries in between.



Simon Richmond

Peninsular Malaysia Simon first travelled in the region back in the early 1990s. A lot has changed since, but Malaysia remains among Simon's favourite destinations for its easily accessible mix of cultures, landscapes, adventures and, crucially, delicious food. An award-winning travel writer and photographer, Simon has helmed Lonely Planet's *Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei* guide for five editions. He's also the author of Lonely Planet's *Kuala Lumpur, Melaka & Penang* guide as well as a shelf-load of other titles for this and other publishers. Read more about Simon's travels at www.simonrichmond.com and on Twitter and Instagram @simonrichmond.



Iain Stewart

Vietnam Iain has been visiting Vietnam since 1991 and has explored virtually every province in the country in search of the perfect *bia hoi* and *ca phe sua*. On this trip he travelled the coastal road between Vung Tau and Hoi An taking in some stunning coastal scenery and numerous memorable meals.



Ryan Ver Berkmoes

Indonesia Ryan 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 the ancient villages of West Timor and finding his new favourite beach on Flores (it's near Paga). Off-island, Ryan travels the world writing and calls New York City home. Read more at ryanverberkmoes.com and at @ryanvb.

Richard Waters



Laos Richard's first night in Laos was back in '99 when he broke down in a speedboat on the Mekong and, while marooned on the riverbank, twilight sent a body floating past. Since then it got a lot better (that very night he eventually saw Luang Prabang for the first time). As a Lonely Planet author he's also written about Malawi, Transylvania, Greece and Borneo; while as a journalist he regularly works for the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Sunday Times* and the *Independent*, and has won the odd international writing award. He lives with his wife and kids in the Cotswolds. He also writes a wellbeing blog called Soul Tonic.

China Williams



Thailand China first travelled to Thailand in 1997 to teach English in the rural northeast. Since then she has filled two passport books and has inaugurated both of her children's passports with Thai entry and exit stamps. Before children she wandered all over the US but is now firmly planted in the suburbs of Baltimore, MD, USA.



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 Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, 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



Nick Ray

Coordinating author, 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 children, Julian and Belle. He has written for numerous guidebooks covering Southeast Asia, including Lonely Planet's *Cambodia*, *Indonesia*, *Laos*, *Myanmar* and *Vietnam* as well as *Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos & Northern Thailand*. When not writing, he is often out exploring the remote parts of the Me-

kong region as a location scout and manager for the world of television and film, including projects from *Tomb Raider* to *Top Gear Vietnam*. 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.



Isabel Albiston

Brunei, Malaysian Borneo Since her first trip to Malaysia six years ago, Isabel has grown to love clambering up slippery trails on sweaty jungle hikes. After three months exploring Borneo's forests and longhouses, feasting on Sarawak laksa, downing shots of *tuak*, dancing at the Rainforest World Music Festival and dropping in on the sultan at his palace in Brunei, the temptation to stay nearly won out. Isabel is a journalist who has written for a number of newspapers and magazines including the UK's *Daily Telegraph*.



Greg Bloom

Philippines Greg has lived in Southeast Asia for more than a decade, dividing his time between Cambodia and his current home of Manila. This is his fifth straight stint on Lonely Planet's *Southeast Asia*. His latest assignment brought plenty of highs (*ginebra*-fueled *begnas* in Ifugao and Sagada) as well as the occasional low (losing a money-filled wallet mid-typhoon Ineng in Bontoc). When not writing about Southeast Asia, Greg might be found snouting around Russia or patrolling

Asia's ultimate frisbee fields.



Ria de Jong

Singapore Ria started life in Asia, born in Sri Lanka to Dutch/Australian parents; she has always relished the hustle and excitement of this continent of contrasts. After growing up in Townsville, Australia, Ria moved to Sydney to work as a features writer before packing her bags for a five-year stint in the Philippines. Having moved to Singapore in 2015 with her husband and two small children, Ria is loving discovering every nook and cranny of this tiny city-country-nation. This

is Ria's first Lonely Planet title.

OVER MORE PAGE WRITERS

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