

Welcome to Southeast Asia

Lush landscapes, urban jungles, blissful beaches, brooding volcanoes, ancient temples, modernist architecture, creative cuisine: Southeast Asia seamlessly delivers the accessible, affordable exotic.

Elemental Forces

Water has sculpted many Southeast Asian landscapes. The jungle-topped islands are fringed by coral reefs that calm the ocean into turquoise pools. The languorous Vietnamese coastline greets the South China Sea from tip to tail, while inland dramatic karst mountains soar skywards. The meandering Mekong River winds its way from the densely packed mountains of northern Laos to the pancake-flat Mekong Delta. The traditional 'highways' of Borneo are coffee-coloured, jungle-clad rivers. And the volcanoes of Indonesia and the Philippines provide a glimpse into the earth's volatile heart.

Spiritual Sojourns

Southeast Asia is a spiritual space. As dawn breaks, the smoke of incense wafts from earth to heaven. Barefoot monks embark on their call to alms; the muezzin's call reverberates from mosques; and family altars are flush with fruit and flowers for the guardian spirits. The region's great monuments were wrought from divine inspiration, from Angkor's heaven incarnate to Bagan's shimmering spires. The spiritual side of life is omnipresent and travellers can boost their karmic balance at meditation retreats or by hiking to a golden temple atop a sacred mountain.

Urban Adventures

The cities of Southeast Asia are stepping into the future with one foot dragging in the past. Bangkok is the gateway to many Asian adventures, where Skytrains whisk shoppers from mall to mall and hawkers ply their wares on the steaming pavements below. Singapore is a gleaming testament to Asia at its most efficient. For old meets new, explore the backstreets of Phnom Penh, Hanoi's Old Quarter or downtown Yangon, which have a beguiling blend of traditional architecture, colonial-era gems and a contemporary twist. One thing all the cities have in common is a buzz.

Epicurean Encounters

With a burning sun and cooling rains, the earth here delivers a colourful palette of fruits, spices once as prized as gold, and the Southeast Asia staple, rice. From Indian curries to Chinese dim sum, the regional cuisine tells a tale of migration and mixing. And there is no better way to meet the region's melting pot of people, with their infectious spirit and irrepressible love of life, than with a meal in a market or a drink at a street stall. Despite the rapid development, the street remains the stage for the real-life drama that unfolds each day.

Southeast Asia's Top 20

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