

# Overseas Adventure Travel<sup>®</sup>

THE LEADER IN CUSTOMIZED SMALL GROUP ADVENTURES SINCE 1978

Your O.A.T. Adventure Travel Planning Guide<sup>®</sup>



New! Discover Thailand: Bangkok to Chiang Rai  
2026

# Overseas Adventure Travel®

347 Congress Street, Boston, MA 02210

Dear Traveler,

I am thrilled that you are considering exploring the world with O.A.T. There are so many wonderful destinations to discover, and the itinerary described inside is a perfect way to fulfill a travel dream.

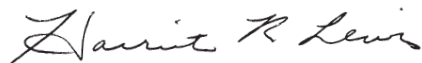
When you join us, you will slip seamlessly into local life as you explore off the beaten path in your small group. Like all our itineraries, this one is designed to give you an intimate understanding of your destination, not just a superficial view. You will get to know community leaders and try your hand at local trades during your *A Day in the Life* experience, share traditional fare and lively conversation during a Home-Hosted Visit, discuss the Controversial Topics impacting everyday life, and visit sites supported by Grand Circle Foundation. And if you choose to travel solo, you will enjoy all these cultural experiences at an unmatched value, with our FREE Single Supplements—just one of the reasons we continue to be the leader in solo travel.

To ensure you experience the true culture and feel supported every step of the way, we provide the services of a local Trip Experience Leader from the beginning of your adventure to the end. Along with introducing you to the history and culture of their homeland, these friendly experts will gladly help you out with any special requests to make your trip even more special. You can also rely on the seasoned team at our regional office, who are ready to help 24/7 in case any unexpected circumstances arise.

Plus, you can put your own personal stamp on your trip, like the **87% of our travelers who customize their experience**. Perhaps you will choose to see more of your destination by adding an optional trip extension to your itinerary. You can also arrive a few days early to explore independently and get acclimated, customize your air itinerary, and more.

I hope you find this Travel Planning Guide helpful. If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact one of our Travel Counselors at **1-800-955-1925**.

Warm regards,



Harriet R. Lewis

Chair

Overseas Adventure Travel

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Sukhothai Historical Park, Thailand

## New! Discover Thailand: Bangkok to Chiang Rai Small Group Adventure

**Thailand:** Bangkok, Kanchanaburi, Nakhon Sawan, Sukhothai, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai

Small groups of no more than 16 travelers, guaranteed

**16 days starting from \$4,695**

including international airfare

Single Supplement: **FREE**

For departure dates & prices, visit [www.oattravel.com/thi2026pricing](http://www.oattravel.com/thi2026pricing)

Exploring Thailand from the cosmopolitan south to the remote northern hill tribes, you'll witness Buddhist monks receiving alms at a dawn ceremony ... walk alongside a jungle stream to a waterfall ... and experience the bustle of Bangkok's floating market. You'll also get an insider's perspective into Thai culture as you spend **A Day in the Life** of Ban Na Sraloi Village, join a local family for a **Home-Hosted Dinner**, and more.

### IT'S INCLUDED

- 14 nights accommodation
- International airfare, airport transfers, government taxes, fees, and airline fuel surcharges unless you choose to make your own air arrangements
- All land transportation and 1 internal flight
- 32 meals—14 breakfasts, 10 lunches, and 8 dinners (including 1 Home-Hosted Dinner)
- 20 small group activities
- Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters
- 5% Frequent Traveler Credit toward your next adventure

*Prices are accurate as of the date of this publishing and are subject to change.*

Discover Thailand: Bangkok to Chiang Rai





## ITINERARY SUMMARY

DAYS	DESTINATION
1	Fly to Bangkok, Thailand
2-4	Bangkok
5-6	Kanchanaburi • River Kwai
7	Nakhon Sawan
8-9	Sukhothai
10-12	Chiang Mai
13-14	Chiang Rai
15	Bangkok
16	Return to U.S.

## WHAT TO EXPECT

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Moderately Easy

**Pacing:** 6 locations in 15 days with one 1-night stay

**Physical Requirements:** You must be able to walk 2-3 miles unassisted and participate in 5-7 hours of physical activities each day; travel over bumpy, unpaved roads at times, on foot and by bus. 3 overland drives between 4 and 7 hours long, and 1 internal flight of 1.5 hours.

**Flight Time:** Travel time will be 20-28 hours and will most likely have one to two connections

View all physical requirements at [www.oattravel.com/thi](http://www.oattravel.com/thi)

## THAILAND: THE O.A.T. DIFFERENCE

**Unbeatable Value:** Travel at the lowest price and per diems in the industry.

**People-to-People Experiences:** Experience what rural life is like during **A Day in the Life** of Ban Na Sraloi village when locals show you their typical routines and customs—including a visit to a local school, supported by **Grand Circle Foundation**. Plus, get an intimate glimpse of daily life when you join a local family in Chiang Mai for a traditional **Home-Hosted Dinner**.

**O.A.T. Exclusives:** Enjoy intimate cultural encounters, such as an alms-giving ceremony in Sukhothai, and a visit to a village inhabited by Thailand's Karen hill tribe. You'll also join a local student activist for a candid conversation about the **Controversial Topic** about the legal limits of free expression against the government in Thailand, and about the divided attitudes of local people toward this policy.

## PERSONALIZE YOUR ADVENTURE

### OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

**Malaysia & Singapore: A Beacon of Cultural Diversity**

**PRE-TRIP:** 7 nights from **\$2,595**

**The Philippines: Exploring Cebu**

**POST-TRIP:** 6 nights from **\$2,995**

### ARRIVE EARLY

We recommend that you relax after a long flight or explore more in depth before your trip. Prices shown include accommodations and private airport transfer.

- Arrive early in **Bangkok** before your main adventure from **\$100** per room, per night
- Arrive early in **Kuala Lumpur** before your

# Discover Thailand: Bangkok to Chiang Rai

## YOUR DETAILED ITINERARY

### BEGIN YOUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OPTIONAL PRE-TRIP EXTENSION

#### **7 nights in *Malaysia & Singapore: A Beacon of Cultural Diversity***

**Day 1** Depart U.S.

**Day 2** Overnight flight to Kuala Lumpur

**Day 3** Arrive in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

**Day 4** Explore Kuala Lumpur

**Day 5** Kuala Lumpur • Visit Independence Square • Malaysian batik experience

**Day 6** Transfer to Malacca • Cruise on Malacca River

**Day 7** Explore Malacca

**Day 8** Transfer to Singapore

**Day 9** Explore Singapore

**Day 10** Fly to Bangkok • Begin main trip

#### **Day 1** Depart U.S.

Depart the U.S. today for your international flight to Bangkok.

#### **Day 2** Arrive in Bangkok, Thailand

- Destination: Bangkok
- Accommodations: Bizotel Premier Hotel or similar

**Afternoon/Evening:** An O.A.T. representative greets you at the airport and assists with your transfer to the hotel, where you'll meet the travelers who joined the pre-trip extension to *Malaysia & Singapore: A Beacon of Cultural Diversity*.

**Dinner:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for local restaurant recommendations.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

#### **Day 3** Bangkok • Visit Kudi Chin community • Lunch in local home

- Destination: Bangkok
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Bizotel Premier Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Our Trip Experience Leader, who will be with us throughout our trip, gives us a Welcome Briefing about Bangkok. We will review our itinerary in more detail (including any changes that may need to occur). Our Trip Experience Leader will also discuss logistics, safety and emergency procedures, and answer any questions we may have.

Then, we'll depart by bus to Kudi Chin, one of Bangkok's oldest and most diverse neighborhoods. Located on the banks of the Chao Phraya River, this eclectic community was initially settled by Portuguese traders in

the 17th century, and grew to become a melting pot for Bangkok's foreign residents, including Chinese, Malay, French, and other people from around the world. Then, we'll take a boat ride along the canal to view some of the homes built on stilts and observe daily life along the canal. Afterwards, we'll stop at the home of one of the local residents.

**Lunch:** We'll join a local family for lunch in their home, which will give us an opportunity to sample homemade cuisine and enjoy intimate cultural exchange with our hosts.

**Afternoon:** Our conversation will continue after lunch. Then, we'll thank our hosts and take a bus back to our hotel. Later, you may choose to join your Trip Experience Leader for an orientation walk to familiarize yourself with the neighborhood surrounding our hotel.

**Dinner:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for local restaurant recommendations.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

#### **Day 4 Explore Grand Palace & Emerald Buddha • Controversial Topic: LGBTQ+ rights in Thailand**

- Destination: Bangkok
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Bizotel Premier Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll enjoy a tour of Bangkok's crown jewel. Step into the Old Kingdom of Siam at the Grand Palace of Thailand, a sprawling compound of ceremonial halls, gilded spires, and ornate buildings. The ancient city's defining landmark since 1782, the palace became the centerpiece of a new Thai capital

called Krung Thep (City of Angels), known outside of Thailand as Bangkok. It was King Mongkut (or Rama IV) who ruled from this palace, expanded trade with the West, and was romanticized in the musical *The King and I*.

The focal point of the palace is the Emerald Buddha. Carved out of jade and adorned with gold, the Emerald Buddha made a dramatic appearance in 1434, when it was found hidden in a temple *stupa*. Since 1785, the Emerald Buddha—the most highly revered image of the Buddha—has resided in the Royal Chapel of the Grand Palace. Then, we'll return to our hotel.

**Lunch:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for local restaurant recommendations.

**Afternoon:** After some free time, we'll regroup in the hotel to learn about the **Controversial Topic** of LGBTQ+ -rights in Thailand. While one of the most LGBTQ+ -friendly countries in Asia, Thailand still has a complicated relationship with its thriving transgender community. We'll be joined at the hotel by a speaker from an NGO that supports healthcare for the LGBTQ+ community who will share with us some of the obstacles faced by members of the transgender community including areas such as healthcare and discrimination in the workplace.

**Dinner:** We'll drive to a local restaurant where we'll enjoy an included Welcome Dinner.

**Evening:** After dinner, we'll return to our hotel by Tuk-Tuk and then you'll have the remainder of the evening free to spend as you please.

## **Day 5 Bangkok floating market • Transfer to Kanchanaburi • Visit the bridge on the River Kwai**

- Destination: Kanchanaburi
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hin Tok River Camp or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll check out of the hotel and begin our transfer to the Kanchanaburi province, stopping along the way to visit one of Bangkok's iconic floating markets. These markets are set up along the city's waterways, where merchants' boats take the place of stalls, with a dizzying array of seasonal produce and local handicrafts available for sale. We'll spend a little time browsing before continuing our journey.

Kanchanaburi is a green region where the riverside scenery belies its dramatic history, portrayed in the film *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. It was here that Allied POWs and Asian conscripts were forced to build the infamous World War II railway. In the summer of 1942, World War II was raging across Europe and Asia. The Allies were rapidly capturing the sea routes to Burma, forcing the Japanese to develop an overland supply route from the east to support their troops. The Japanese decided that the most viable option was a railway that followed the River Kwai through the dense jungle on either side. About 200,000 Asian laborers and 61,000 Allied prisoners of war built this 260-mile stretch of rail in abominable conditions—for every half-mile of track laid, 38 POWs perished.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant upon arrival in Kanchanaburi.

**Afternoon:** We'll walk from the restaurant to the original bridge on the River Kwai. Our Trip Experience Leader will share more of the

history of this iconic site. Later, we'll set off for the camp that will be our home for the next two nights. We'll have time to get settled in this afternoon.

**Dinner:** At the camp.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

## **Day 6 Visit Hellfire Pass • Boat ride on the River Kwai**

- Destination: Kanchanaburi
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hin Tok River Camp or similar

**Breakfast:** At the camp.

**Morning:** We depart our hotel and set off for the Hellfire Pass Museum where we'll trace the World War II history of the "Death Railroad," before we walk down the former River Kwai Railway. The area is now peaceful, but many lives were lost during the construction of one of the most difficult sections of the railway. After getting a glimpse into this sobering piece of history, our small group will board a longtail speedboat for a cruise on the River Kwai.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** Free for your own discoveries—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

**Dinner:** At the camp.

**Evening:** Enjoy a free evening in camp to spend according to your own agenda.



## **Day 7 Overland to Nakhon Sawan • Boat ride on the Tha Chin River**

- Destination: Nakhon Sawan
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: 42C The Chic Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll travel to Nakhon Sawan, with stops along the way.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant in Supan Buri.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll enjoy a boat ride along the Tha Chin River, where we can observe floating markets and traditional ways of life that still exist in many of these riverside communities. After our boat ride, we'll continue to Nakhon Sawan.

After checking in to our hotel, you'll have free time to settle in or start exploring this locale that is lovingly referred to as the "Heavenly City." You may choose to set off for Sawan Park, a large public space where natural and man-made splendors abound. You can take a stroll through the park and interact with the locals to get a true glimpse into daily life here.

**Dinner:** At a local restaurant near our hotel.

**Evening:** Spend the evening relaxing at the hotel or exploring the area independently.

## **Day 8 Sukhothai Province • Explore Sukhothai**

- Destination: Sukhothai
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Le Charm Sukhothai Resort or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We head for Sukhothai, Thailand's largest collection of historic ruins. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is the place where the Thai

nation was born, the kingdom's magical and spiritual center. With its cache of remarkably preserved columns, shrines, temples, and palaces, it epitomizes old Siam.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant upon arrival.

**Afternoon:** We'll set out to explore the well-kept grounds of this historical park to view the remains of the royal palace and some 26 temples, and to learn about its most famous king, Ramkamhaeng. Not only did this legendary ruler leave a great legacy of art and architecture, he left stones inscribed with a chronicle of his achievement. King Ramkamhaeng is credited with inventing Thai script, as well as excelling at hand-to-hand combat on elephant back, teaching Theravada Buddhism, and developing relations with China. But even his colorful legend pales in comparison to the evocative palette of Sukhothai, which translates to "Dawn of Happiness."

We arrive at our hotel later this afternoon where we'll check in and have some free time to get settled in or explore independently.

**Dinner:** At a local restaurant.

**Evening:** The night is yours to spend as you wish.

## **Day 9 A Day in the Life of a Thai village • Grand Circle Foundation school visit**

- Destination: Sukhothai
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Le Charm Sukhothai Resort or similar

**Activity Note:** School visit can only be made when school is in session. Along with national holidays, most schools in Thailand are closed during the month of October and from April 1 to May 15.

**Early morning:** You have the option to rise early and give alms to local monks before shopping at a nearby market for ingredients to bring to our ***A Day in the Life*** experience. After, you'll stop at a café for a traditional breakfast.

**Breakfast:** At the hotel for travelers who choose not to participate in the alms-giving ceremony.

**Morning:** We'll depart for Baan Pho Tanod village, where we will have a chance to experience ***A Day in the Life*** of the local people. First, we'll meet with a schoolteacher, who will join us for a visit to the local village school supported by **Grand Circle Foundation** (when in session).

### **Grand Circle Foundation**

#### **Pakklongrua School**

Total donated: **\$2,213**

Partner since: **2024**

Pakklongrua is a small rural school in Thailand's Sukhothai region with just 83 students who receive kindergarten through primary education. Grand Circle Foundation looks forward to partnering with the school and local community to help improve the educational environment for these young and enthusiastic learners.

We'll learn more about the education system in rural Thailand during our visit and also have an opportunity to interact with several of the young students while we're here.

After our school visit, we'll walk over to the main village. We'll also stop at a farmer's house and a rice mill to learn what agricultural life is like in Thailand. Then our village guide will invite us into her home for a round table conversation and to help prepare a traditional meal.

**Lunch:** We'll sit down to enjoy lunch with members of the community.

**Afternoon:** Free for your own discoveries in Sukhothai. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

**Dinner:** On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can recommend a local restaurant.

**Evening:** You have a free evening to relax or pursue your own discoveries.

## **Day 10 Overland to Chiang Mai • Home-Hosted Dinner**

- Destination: Chiang Mai
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Amora Hotel Tapae or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll begin our journey to Chiang Mai—the principal city of the north, a major cultural center, and a favorite with visitors. The city's medieval walls encircle more than 30 active Buddhist temples, and the metropolitan region boasts another 80 religious sites.

**Lunch:** Along the way to Chiang Mai, we'll pause in the town of Lampang to enjoy lunch at a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** We continue on, arriving in Chiang Mai early this afternoon and check in to our hotel. Then, we'll take an orientation walk around the neighborhood before you have some free time to get settled in. Or, you may choose to start exploring the city on your own. Perhaps you'll visit the Gems Gallery where you can shop for precious stones and beautiful, detailed jewelry.

**Dinner:** We'll split into smaller groups to make personal connections with the Thai people during a special **Home-Hosted Dinner** with local families. Enjoy a taste of everyday

home-cooked cuisine, and an opportunity for real conversation with local people about daily life in Thailand.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

### **Day 11 Chiang Mai • Visit Karen hill tribe • Elephant care center**

- Destination: Chiang Mai
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Amora Hotel Tapae or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll meet members of the Karen Long Neck Village where we'll discover age-old traditions, including how the women of the village wear large rings around their necks to give the appearance of elongated necks. More than 20 distinct, semi-nomadic tribes inhabit northern Thailand and the borderlands of Burma and Laos. Some have obscure origins; most have their own language; and all have unique customs. Take note of their compact huts, their traditional clothing, and a way of life that has changed little in centuries. After our village visit, we'll set off for an elephant care center.

**Lunch:** Enjoy a picnic lunch at the elephant care center.

**Afternoon:** We'll learn more about these gentle giants, and we may even have a chance to feed and help bathe the elephants living at the center. Then, we'll return to the hotel for some free time this afternoon.

**Dinner:** At a local restaurant.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

### **Day 12 Chiang Mai • Optional Doi Inthanon National Park nature walk**

- Destination: Chiang Mai
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Amora Hotel Tapae or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We have a free day in Chiang Mai to pursue individual discoveries. Or, you may join an optional tour to Doi Inthanon National Park for a full-day nature walk in this region of pristine natural beauty. Nicknamed “the roof of Thailand,” this approximately 400-square-mile park is composed of a variety of ecosystems, including cloud forests, jungles, grasslands, and, notably, Thailand's highest mountain, from which the park takes its name.

Along with witnessing a variety of local flora and fauna and other park highlights during our nature walk, we'll stop at a village inhabited by members of the local Karen hill tribe, where we'll learn about the way of life in this community.

**Lunch:** For those not participating in the optional tour, lunch is on your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for local restaurant recommendations. Travelers who join our optional tour will enjoy lunch at a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** Today's optional tour continues after lunch as we continue our nature walk. One highlight of our walk is sure to be Wachirathan Waterfall, an approximately 130-foot cascade that crashes into a cooling mist which spreads across the jungle below. After we conclude our hike, we'll return to our hotel, where the rest of the day is free to spend as you choose.

**Dinner:** On your own—ask your Trip Experience Leader for local restaurant recommendations.



**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

### **Day 13 Overland to Chiang Rai • Wat Suan Dok temple monk visit • Visit Wat Rong Khun White Temple**

- Destination: Chiang Rai
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Wiang Inn Hotel or similar

**Activity Note:** Today's transfer to Chiang Rai will take about 7 hours, including stops along the way.

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll depart Chiang Mai and begin our transfer to Chiang Rai. Our first stop will be a visit to the temple of Wat Suan Dok, where we'll have a conversation with its Buddhist monks to learn more about their role in Thailand's spiritual life.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant en route to Chiang Rai.

**Afternoon:** We'll make another stop at Wat Rong Khun, commonly referred to as the "White Temple." This contemporary and controversial temple was constructed in 1997 by local artist Chalermchai Kositpipa. The striking all-white exterior is the least shocking aspect of this architectural treasure. Access the temple by crossing over a bridge that was built over a pit of reaching arms, meant to symbolize souls reaching up from hell. Then, step inside Wat Rong Khun where we'll be met by Buddhist art and murals of pop culture icons, including Harry Potter and Michael Jackson. While photography is prohibited in this temple, it will surely be an experience that you won't forget.

We'll depart the "White Temple" and continue our journey to Chiang Rai. Founded in the 13th century, Chiang Rai has no shortage of

historical treasures, which we may discover today. We'll also get to know the laidback culture of this quiet town. Upon arrival, we'll head to our hotel where we'll check in.

**Dinner:** On your own.

**Evening:** The evening is free to rest or explore independently. Perhaps you'll head to Chaing Rai's bustling night market to experience this local tradition.

### **Day 14 Chiang Rai • Explore Golden Triangle**

- Destination: Chiang Rai
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Wiang Inn Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll depart for Doi Tung Royal Villa. Upon arrival, we'll board *songthaews* (large pick-up trucks that have been converted into the local mode of transport) to explore this royal residency that was constructed in the late 20th century under the order of the late Princess Srinagarindra. It is believed that besides serving as a home for the princess, Doi Tung's purpose was to dissuade the nearby hill tribes of growing opium. While exploring this area, we'll also see the villa's vibrant garden as well as the Hall of Inspiration, which traces the history of the royal family and their contributions to Thailand.

Later this morning, we'll travel to the region formerly known as the Golden Triangle.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** We'll explore this region where opium warlords once held sway. At one time, the hill tribes in this region relied on the cultivation of opium for survival—including several bands of Chinese nationalists, followers of Chiang Kai Shek, who have been living

here (somewhat in hiding and in dwindling numbers) since the revolution. But times have changed. The government has established many programs to introduce more viable crops, and most of the people are law-abiding farmers. Today, tourism has become a preferable alternative to drug smuggling, and the hill tribes are more concerned with preserving their old traditions.

During our explorations, we'll have the opportunity to see where the borders of Thailand, Laos, and Burma meet as we walk along the Mekong River. Then, we'll return to the hotel and enjoy the rest of the afternoon free to explore independently.

**Dinner:** Tonight, we'll enjoy an included Farewell Dinner at a local restaurant to toast our discoveries.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

### Day 15 Fly to Bangkok

- Destination: Bangkok
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Bizotel Premier Hotel or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** After breakfast, we depart for the airport for our flight to Bangkok.

**Lunch:** On your own.

**Afternoon:** Upon arrival in Bangkok, we'll transfer to our hotel. You can spend a free afternoon making your own discoveries in the city.

**Dinner:** On your own. Perhaps you'll revisit a favorite restaurant from the beginning of your adventure. Or, your Trip Experience Leader can recommend a restaurant.

**Evening:** You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish—ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

### Day 16 Bangkok • Return to U.S.

- Included Meals: Breakfast

**Early Morning:** We set off for the airport for your flight home. You cross the International Date Line, arriving in the U.S. on the same day, in time to make connecting flights home. Or, begin your post-trip extension to *The Philippines: Exploring Cebu*.

## END YOUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OPTIONAL POST-TRIP EXTENSION

### 6 nights in *The Philippines: Exploring Cebu*

**Day 1** Fly to Cebu, the Philippines

**Day 2** Explore Cebu City

**Day 3** Cebu • Visit Adlawon organic farm

**Day 4** Overland to Aloguinsan • Visit Argao

**Day 5** Aloguinsan • Bojo River Eco-Cultural Tour

**Day 6** Overland to Cebu City • Visit Casa de Cacao

**Day 7** Return to U.S.

## OPTIONAL TOURS

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During your trip you will be able to book optional tours directly with your Trip Experience Leader. He or she will ask you to confirm the payment for these tours by filling out a payment form. Optional tours can only be purchased with a credit or debit card. We accept Visa, MasterCard, and Discover credit cards. We also accept Visa and MasterCard debit cards, but it must be a debit card that allows you to sign for purchases.

In order to correctly process these charges, there can be a delay of 2–3 months from the date of your return for the charges to be posted to your account. Therefore we ask that you use a card that will not expire in the 2–3 months following your return.

**Please note:** *Optional tour prices are listed in U.S. dollar estimates determined at the time of publication and are subject to change. Optional tours may vary.*

### Doi Inthanon National Park

(Day 12 \$105 per person)

Enjoy a full-day nature walk in Doi Inthanon National Park. Nicknamed “the roof of Thailand,” this approximately 400-square mile reserve is composed of a variety of ecosystems, including cloud forests, jungles, grasslands, and, notably, Thailand’s highest mountain, from which the park takes its name.

We’ll drive to the park by van from our hotel, and begin a guided nature walk once we arrive. Expect to be walking uphill for some portions of our walk this morning—a leisurely descent will be our reward later on. Enjoy sights of some of the park’s highlights, including rushing waterfalls, as well as local flora and fauna. Then stop at a village inhabited by members of the local Karen hill tribe, where we’ll learn about the way of life in this community.

Next, we’ll enjoy lunch at a local restaurant, then continue our hike. One highlight of our walk is sure to be Wachirathan Waterfall, an approximately 130-foot cascade that crashes into a cooling mist which spreads across the jungle below.



## PRE-TRIP

# Malaysia & Singapore: A Beacon of Cultural Diversity

## INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

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- » Airfare from Singapore to Bangkok
- » 7 nights accommodation
- » 13 meals—7 breakfasts, 4 lunches, and 2 dinners
- » 11 small group activities
- » Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- » Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters
- » All transfers

## PRE-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

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*Journey to Malaysia and Singapore, beginning in the vibrant Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur, followed by the coastal city of Malacca, where you'll uncover its Dutch colonial history and embark on a cruise along the Malacca River. Round out your discoveries in the Republic of Singapore and its melting pot of cultures.*

### Day 1 Depart U.S.

You depart today on your overnight flight from the U.S. to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

**Evening:** You are free to rest in your room after your long flight to prepare for tomorrow's discoveries, or venture out to experience Kuala Lumpur's nightlife.

### Day 2 Overnight flight to Kuala Lumpur

Continue on your overnight flight to Kuala Lumpur.

### Day 4 Explore Kuala Lumpur

- Destination: Kuala Lumpur
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Hotel Stripes Kuala Lumpur or similar

### Day 3 Arrive in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

- Destination: Kuala Lumpur
- Accommodations: Hotel Stripes Kuala Lumpur or similar

**Afternoon:** Arrive in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, where you'll be met by an O.A.T. representative and transfer to your hotel.

**Dinner:** On your own—check with your Trip Experience Leader for suggestions.

**Activity Note:** The National Mosque of Malaysia is closed on Fridays; if today falls on a Friday, the tour of the mosque will trade places with the tour of Independence Square on Day 5.

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll begin our city tour of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's vibrant capital, with a visit to the National Mosque of Malaysia. With a capacity of 15,000 worshippers, this enormous mosque is an important institution to resident Muslims, who make up about 63% of the local

population according to a recent census. As we explore, take note of the 240-foot-high minaret and 16-pointed, star-shaped roof that punctuate this magnificent structure.

Next, we'll continue on to the Islamic Arts Museum. This vast collection of more than 7,000 Islamic artifacts offers visitors a glimpse into the storied history and tradition of one of the world's most prominent religions.

After, we'll continue on to Kuala Lumpur's Central Market. From batik handicrafts, to antiques, and traditional delicacies, you'll have a chance to peruse the offerings of more than 350 local vendors. You may even witness craft-making demonstrations, or you might like to relax with a massage while you're here.

**Lunch:** At a restaurant in the Central Market.

**Afternoon:** You'll have the afternoon free to continue exploring the market, or perhaps you'd like to return to the hotel to rest.

**Dinner:** On your own. You might seek out *mee goreng mamak*, a traditional noodle dish consisting of beef or chicken, vegetables, eggs, soy sauce, and chili.

**Evening:** Free to explore on your own. Kuala Lumpur features a stunning skyline at night, and there are plenty of rooftop bars from which you can admire it.

### **Day 5 Kuala Lumpur • Visit Independence Square • Malaysian batik experience**

- Destination: Kuala Lumpur
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Stripes Kuala Lumpur or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll walk to Independence Square, situated in front of the colonial-style Sultan Abdul Samad building. Formerly known as the

Selangor Club Padang ("padang" meaning "field" in Malay), this area was once used as the cricket green of a local social club. It was also here that the Malaysian flag was raised for the first time on August 31, 1957. Today, Independence Square serves as a symbol of national pride and celebration. It also contains several historic buildings, including the Old City Hall of Kuala Lumpur.

Next, we'll visit the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation, an organization dedicated to the preservation of Malaysia's vibrant craft traditions. Here, we'll learn about the creation of the textile art of Malaysian batik.

**Lunch:** On your own. There are plenty of vendors to choose from here in Chinatown. Depending on your preferences, your Trip Experience Leader is happy to direct you to a nearby restaurant.

**Afternoon:** Free to continue exploring Chinatown on your own, or perhaps you'll head back to the hotel and enjoy the on-site amenities before we gather as a group for dinner.

**Dinner:** At a local restaurant.

**Evening:** You may choose to explore independently, or rest after the day's activities.

### **Day 6 Transfer to Malacca • Cruise on Malacca River**

- Destination: Malacca
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Hotel Puri Melaka or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll say goodbye to Kuala Lumpur this morning and head toward Malacca, the capital of the coastal state of Malacca.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant in Malacca.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll set off on an orientation walk of the neighborhood around our hotel before checking in. You'll then have some free time to settle in or explore independently before our group reconvenes for a cruise on the Malacca River. Once a vital trade route, the river boasts luxuriant scenery and a fascinating history.

**Dinner:** On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can provide dining suggestions.

**Evening:** Free to explore on your own.

### Day 7 Explore Malacca

- Destination: Malacca
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Hotel Puri Melaka or similar

**Early Morning:** Begin a full day of exploring Malacca. First, we'll head to the city's old quarter, where we'll join a morning prayer service at a Hindu temple. After, we'll meet with a resident priest to learn about his religion that's practiced by nearly 2 million Malay people.

**Breakfast:** We'll head to a nearby restaurant after our visit to the temple.

**Morning:** We'll return to the hotel, and enjoy some time to freshen up and relax after our early morning discoveries. Then, we'll head out once again for a walking tour. Our explorations will take us to the maroon-colored, colonial-style Dutch Square; the 16th-century, Portuguese fort of *A Famosa*; the ruins of the Church of Saint Paul; and more. Later, we'll conclude our explorations on Jonker Street, a former Dutch settlement and perhaps the most lively area of the city. The remainder of the day is free to explore on your own.

**Lunch:** On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can provide dining recommendations for Jonker Street or elsewhere.

**Afternoon:** Continue your independent exploration of Malacca. Your Trip Experience Leader can offer ideal discovery suggestions.

**Dinner:** On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can recommend a restaurant.

**Evening:** Free to explore independently.

### Day 8 Transfer to Singapore

- Destination: Singapore
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Grand Pacific or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll begin our overland transfer to the Republic of Singapore, an island country and city-state.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant en route to Singapore.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll continue our drive to Singapore and go through customs. Upon entering the city, we'll check in to our hotel and have free time to settle in. If you care to explore independently, your Trip Experience Leader can provide activity suggestions.

**Dinner:** At a local restaurant.

**Evening:** Free to rest after the long travel day or continue exploring on your own.

### Day 9 Explore Singapore

- Destination: Singapore
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Hotel Grand Pacific or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.



**Morning:** We'll spend the day exploring Singapore, first stopping to visit its magnificent Botanic Gardens. This 164-year-old tropical garden is the only tropical garden to be listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. From orchids to gingers and even native fruits and vegetables, admire this lush sanctuary nestled in the heart of the city.

Next, we'll walk through Chinatown, where we'll have a chance to admire the 19th-century, colonial architecture and taste local delicacies. Chinese Singaporeans constitute nearly 80% of the local population, making them the largest ethnic group in Singapore.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant in Chinatown.

**Afternoon:** We'll return to our hotel and enjoy free time to explore independently. Perhaps you'll walk through the shopping district along Orchard Road, or glean suggestions from your Trip Experience Leader.

Later this afternoon, our group will reconvene to visit perhaps the most iconic landmark in the city: Gardens by the Bay. Spanning nearly 250 acres, this expansive, award-winning nature park consists of three waterfront gardens: Bay South Garden, Bay East Garden and Bay Central Garden. All together, the gardens house more than 1.5 million plants that are native to every continent except Antarctica.

**Dinner:** On your own. Singapore is famous for its night markets, which offer a variety of delicacies every night. Perhaps you'll return to Chinatown, or maybe you'll explore Tekka Center, known as "Little India."

**Evening:** Free to explore. You might like to grab a night cap with fellow travelers, or rest in your room.

## **Day 10 Fly to Bangkok • Begin main trip**

• Included Meals: Breakfast

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Transfer to the airport for your flight to Bangkok, where you'll arrive this evening to begin your *Discover Thailand: Bangkok to Chiang Rai* adventure.

## POST-TRIP

### *The Philippines: Exploring Cebu*

#### INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

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- |   |   |
|---|---|
| » Airfare from Bangkok to Cebu City               | » Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader         |
| » 6 nights accommodation                          | » Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters |
| » 13 meals—6 breakfasts, 4 lunches, and 3 dinners | » All transfers   |
| » 8 small group activities                        |   |

#### POST-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

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*Cebu is an idyllic island in the Visayas, one of the three main island groups of the Philippines, a far-flung archipelago of more than 7,000 tropical islands. Discover Cebu's historic capital; visit Aloguinsan, a tranquil town of unspoiled nature and palm-fringed beaches; and feel the warm embrace of the Filipino people on this discovery-filled extension in the heart of the Philippines.*

##### **Day 1 Fly to Cebu, the Philippines**

- Destination: Cebu
- Accommodations: Holiday Inn Cebu City or similar

Transfer to the airport in Bangkok before dawn, and fly to Cebu, the Philippines. Upon arrival in the Philippines around noon, an O.A.T. representative will assist with your transfer to your hotel in Cebu.

##### **Day 2 Explore Cebu City**

- Destination: Cebu
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Holiday Inn Cebu City or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Our Philippine discoveries begin with a tour of Cebu City. Known as the “Queen City of the South,” the bustling metropolis is the

namesake capital of Cebu, an idyllic island of rolling hills and rugged mountains ringed by white sand beaches and coral reefs that is part of the Visayas archipelago. Cebu City is also the oldest city in the Philippines, so perhaps it's fitting that our first stop is at Magellan's Cross. Housed in a small open-air pavilion, the wooden Christian cross is believed to have been planted by explorers of the Spanish expedition led by Ferdinand Magellan, who arrived in the port of Cebu on April 7, 1521. More expeditions followed, and in 1565 Cebu City became the first permanent Spanish settlement in the Philippines. Then, we'll head over to *Basilica Minore del Santo Niño*, the oldest church in the Philippines. Established in 1565, the church is home to the oldest religious relic in the Philippines: a statue of *Santo Niño*, or baby Jesus, that was originally given by Magellan to Queen Juana on the occasion of her baptism in

1521 and was found undamaged 44 years later by a Spanish soldier following a devastating fire that swept through Cebu.

Witness more remnants of Cebu's Spanish past at Fort San Pedro, the oldest military fortress in the Philippines, and at the Heritage of Cebu Monument, a towering sculpture of steel, brass, and concrete depicting important historic events from Cebu's past. You'll also discover the elegant lifestyle of the aristocracy in 19th-century Cebu at the Casa Gorordo Museum, a two-story Spanish home restored with period furnishings that is now a museum. Then, mingle with modern-day Cebuanos at the 100-year-old Carbon Market, the city's oldest and largest farmers' market.

**Lunch:** At a local restaurant.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll leave Cebu's colonial past behind and glimpse the future at the Kenneth Cobonpue Design Studio. Cebu-born Cobonpue is a world-renowned furniture designer who uses sustainable organic material such as abaca, bamboo, buri, and rattan to produce his innovative works.

**Dinner:** Enjoy a Welcome Dinner at a local restaurant.

**Evening:** On your own.

### Day 3 Cebu • Visit Adlawon organic farm

- Destination: Cebu
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Holiday Inn Cebu City or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** We'll drive to Adlawon farm, an idyllic 38-acre retreat and organic farm hidden in the mountains of Cebu. The grounds of Adlawon are carpeted in fields of plants and vegetation, and we'll discover how the

sustainable farming methods practiced here are helping to improve the lives of the wider farming community.

**Lunch:** Enjoy an organic farm-to-table lunch at Adlawon.

**Afternoon:** After returning to our hotel, you'll have free time to relax or explore on your own.

**Dinner:** On your own. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for dining recommendations.

**Evening:** On your own.

### Day 4 Overland to Aloguinsan • Visit Argao

- Destination: Aloguinsan
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: La Joya Farm Resort & Spa or similar

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Today, we'll journey to Aloguinsan, a sleepy resort town of palm-fringed beaches on Cebu's western coast. Along the way, we'll stop in Argao, one of Cebu's true hidden gems, to explore its charming Spanish-era town center and discover why their version of the torta using coconut sap (called *tuba*) is renowned throughout Cebu province. Then, we'll stop in Carcar, another of Cebu's picturesque heritage towns noted for its well-preserved colonial-era structures.

**Lunch:** On your own. You may want to try Carcar's culinary specialty, a version of *lechon* (roasted pig) with a local-grown herb called *patiates*.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll cross the island to Cebu's west coast, arriving in Aloguinsan by mid-afternoon. After checking in to our lodgings, you'll have a couple of hours to relax or enjoy the resort's idyllic surroundings before dinner.



**Dinner:** At the resort.

**Evening:** On your own.

### **Day 5 Aloguinsan • Bojo River Eco-Cultural Tour**

- Destination: Aloguinsan
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: La Joya Farm Resort & Spa or similar

**Breakfast:** At the resort.

**Morning:** Enjoy a scenic cruise along the Bojo River, a tranquil waterway lined by mangrove forests and towering limestone cliffs before it empties out into the Tañon Strait. The tour is operated by Aloguinsan fishermen and their wives who wish to preserve the mangrove ecosystem—and all have received training in mangrove and coral conservation and identifying flora and fauna. After being welcomed by the community with Cebuano folk songs, one of the families will join us aboard a *baroto*, a traditional Filipino boat equipped with outriggers for balance, and paddle us down the river. Our local guide will point out some of more than 20 types of mangrove and more than 60 bird species that call the river home. When we reach the point where the Bojo River meets the sea, we'll stop at a marine sanctuary where you can swim or snorkel to explore the pristine coral reef if you wish.

**Lunch:** We'll enjoy lunch with our host family featuring traditional dishes made with locally grown ingredients.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, you may wish to learn more about the surrounding eco-system during a walking tour through the mangrove forest. Then, after we say goodbye to our host family, we'll make one more stop at an area called Hermit's Cove—this secluded cove got its name from a hermit who chose this slice of paradise

of fine white sand, swaying palms, and colorful marine life as his home more than a hundred years ago.

**Dinner:** At the resort.

**Evening:** On your own.

### **Day 6 Overland to Cebu City • Visit Casa de Cacao**

- Destination: Cebu City
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Seda Ayala Center Cebu or similar

**Breakfast:** At the resort.

**Morning:** Our return journey to Cebu City will take us past Toledo, a city on Cebu's western coast that is home to the largest copper mine in the Philippines.

**Lunch:** We'll have lunch at one of the stalls at Il Corso Food Yard, one of Cebu City's newest dining hubs.

**Afternoon:** After lunch, we'll visit Casa de Cacao, where owner Raquel Choa will enlighten us about traditional indigenous chocolate making and why she is known as the "Queen of Chocolate." We'll also enjoy samples of her creations and perhaps you'll want to shop for the perfect souvenir of the Philippines: a ball of pure chocolate called *cacao de bola*.

Then, we'll check in to our Cebu City hotel and you'll have some time to relax before dinner.

**Dinner:** On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can recommend a restaurant.

**Evening:** On your own to relax or begin packing for tomorrow's return flight home.

## **Day 7 Return to U.S.**

- Included Meals: Breakfast

**Breakfast:** At the hotel.

**Morning:** Depart for the airport for our return flights to the U.S.

# TRAVEL DOCUMENTS & ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

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## Your Passport

- Must be in good condition
- Must be valid for at least 6 months after your scheduled return to the U.S.
- Must have the required number of blank pages (details below)
- The blank pages must be labeled “Visas” at the top. Pages labeled “Amendments and Endorsements” are not acceptable

## Need to Renew Your Passport?

Contact the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) at **1-877-487-2778**, or visit the U.S. Department of State’s official website at **[www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)** for information on obtaining a new passport or renewing your existing passport. The U.S. Department of State allows for passport renewal by mail or, for applicable citizens, renewal online. We advise you review the process and requirements for online passport renewal on the official website.

You may also contact our recommended visa service company, PVS International, at **1-800-556-9990** for help with your passport.

## Recommended Blank Pages

Please confirm that your passport has enough blank pages for this adventure.

- **Main trip only:** If you are taking only the main trip, you will require 2 blank passport pages.
- **Pre-trip extension to Malaysia and Singapore:** You will need 3 additional blank passport pages.
- **Post trip extension to The Philippines:** You will need 1 additional blank passport page.

## No Visas Required

Travelers with a U.S. passport do not need any visas for this adventure, including the optional trip extensions.

## Traveling Without a U.S. Passport?

If you are not a U.S. citizen, or if your passport is from any country other than the U.S., it is your responsibility to check with your local consulate, embassy, or a visa services company about visa requirements. We recommend the services of PVS International, a national visa service located in Washington D.C.; they can be reached at **1-800-556-9990** or **[www.pvsinternational.org](http://www.pvsinternational.org)**.

## **Traveling With a Minor?**

Some governments may require certain documentation for minors to enter and depart the country or to obtain a visa (if applicable). For further detail on the required documentation, please contact your local embassy or consulate.

## **Emergency Photocopies of Key Documents**

We recommend you carry color photocopies of key documents including the photo page of your passport plus any applicable visas, air itinerary, credit cards (front and back), and an alternative form of ID. Add emergency phone numbers like your credit card company and the number for your travel protection plan. Store copies separate from the originals.

If you plan to email this information to yourself, please keep in mind that email is not always secure; consider using password protection or encryption. Also email is not always available worldwide. As an alternative, you could load these documents onto a flash drive instead, which can do double-duty as a place to backup photos during your trip.

## **Overseas Taxes & Fees**

This tour may have taxes and fees that cannot be included in your airline ticket price because you are required to pay them in person onsite. All taxes are subject to change without notice and can be paid in cash (either U.S. or local currency).



## RIGORS, VACCINES & GENERAL HEALTH

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### Is This Adventure Right for You?

**Please review the information below prior to departing on this adventure.** We reserve the right for our Trip Experience Leaders to modify participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their condition would adversely affect the health, safety, or enjoyment of themselves or of other travelers.

#### PACING

- 6 locations in 15 days with one 1-night stay

#### PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Not appropriate for travelers using wheelchairs, walkers, or other mobility aids
- You must be able to walk 3 miles unassisted and participate in 5-7 hours of physical activities each day
- Agility and balance are required for embarking our boat, and barge, and riding *songtaew* trucks
- We reserve the right for Trip Experience Leaders to restrict participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their limitations impact the group's experience

#### CLIMATE

- Daytime temperatures range from 80-90°F
- March-May are hottest during the day, with high levels of humidity. Heavy rains are possible between August and October

#### TERRAIN & TRANSPORTATION

- We'll travel over bumpy, unpaved roads at times, on foot and by bus
- Travel by 24-passenger coach, 30-passenger boat, barge, *tuk-tuks* (three-wheeled vehicles), and *songtaew* truck
- 3 overland drives between 4 and 7 hours long, and 1 internal flight of 1.5 hours

#### FLIGHT INFORMATION

- Travel time will be 20-28 hours and will most likely have two connections of between 2-3 hours
- International flights from Los Angeles to Bangkok depart around midnight, crossing the International Date Line
- 1 internal flight requires an early wake-up

## ACCOMMODATIONS & FACILITIES

- All accommodations feature private baths and Western-style toilet facilities
- Asian squat-style toilets must be used in some locations without other facilities

## Steps to Take Before Your Trip

Before you leave on this adventure, we recommend the following:

- Check with the CDC for their recommendations for the countries you'll be visiting. You can contact them online at **[www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel)** or by phone at **1-800-232-4636**.
- Have a medical checkup with your doctor at least 6 weeks before your trip.
- Pick up any necessary medications, both prescription and over-the-counter.
- Have a dental and/or eye checkup. (Recommended, but less urgent)

## No Vaccines Required

### Recommended Vaccines

At the time of writing there were no required vaccines for this trip. The CDC recommends that all travelers be up to date on their routine vaccinations and on basic travel vaccines like Hepatitis A and Typhoid, but these are suggestions only. However, this could change in future so we encourage you to check with the CDC yourself before meeting with your doctor.

## Medication Suggestions

- An antibiotic medication for gastrointestinal illness
- Prescription pain medication in the unlikely event of an injury in a remote location
- Optional: Anti-malarial medication for the Cambodia extension ONLY. At the time of writing, the CDC reported that the risk of malaria was low in Thailand, but moderate in Cambodia. Anti-malarial medications can have strong side effects so be sure to discuss with your doctor.

## Traveling with Medications

- **Pack medications in your carry-on bag** to avoid loss and to have them handy.
- **Keep medicines in their original, labeled containers** for a quicker security screen at the airport and a better experience if you get stopped by customs while overseas.
- **Bring copies of your prescriptions**, written using the generic drug name rather than a brand name to be prepared for any unforeseen loss of your medications.

We recommend checking with the State Department for medication restrictions by country: **travel.state.gov** (Go to “Find International Travel Information”, select “Country Information”, then enter the country into the search bar; if you don’t see any medications specifically mentioned under the “Health” section, then you can presume major U.S. brands should be OK).

## Bringing Medications to Malaysia

At the time of writing, the State Department suggests bringing a doctor’s note for syringes, strong painkillers (like codeine), psychotropics, or sleeping pills as a reference for local authorities if any questions arise.

## Staying Healthy on Your Trip

### Jet Lag Tips

- Start your trip well-rested.
- Begin a gradual transition to your new time zone before you leave or switch to your destination time zone when you get on the plane.
- Attempt to sleep and eat according to the new schedule.
- Avoid heavy eating and drinking caffeine or alcoholic beverages right before—and during—your flight.
- Drink plenty of water and/or fruit juice while flying
- Stretch your legs, neck, and back periodically while seated on the plane.
- After arrival, avoid the temptation to nap.
- Don’t push yourself to see a lot on your first day.
- Try to stay awake your first day until after dinner.

### Allergies

If you have any serious allergies or dietary restrictions, we advise you to notify us at least 30 days prior to your departure. Please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-0814**, and we will communicate them to our regional office. Every effort will be made to accommodate you.

### Water

- Tap water on this adventure is not safe to drink, so we recommend you use only bottled water for drinking and brushing your teeth.
- Avoid drinks with ice or salads/fruits unless you first confirm that the ice is made with safe water or the salad/fruit has been washed in safe water. (Fruit you peel yourself should be fine.)
- Hot drinks made with water are safe if they have been boiled.

- Bottled water is readily available for purchase; just be sure to check that the cap is sealed properly before buying.

## Food

- We've carefully chosen the restaurants for your group meals. Your Trip Experience Leader can suggest restaurants for meals you take on your own.
- When dining on your own, keep in mind that meats sold by street vendors may not have had proper refrigeration. Note that larger amounts of MSG are put into Thai food than what you may be used to.
- Be cautious with non-pasteurized milk products—they may or may not upset your stomach.

## Air Quality

During the summer months, there is heavy smog in the air from slash and burn in some of the areas that you will visit. Please take that into consideration if you are a traveler who has some difficulty breathing, or a respiratory condition such as asthma. It is our recommendation that traveler's take facial masks with them.

## Electricity Supply

**A constant electricity supply cannot be guaranteed during overnight stays.** Travelers dependent on electricity supply for health reasons (as in the case of those with sleep apnea) may want to consider a different O.A.T. adventure.



# MONEY MATTERS: LOCAL CURRENCY & TIPPING GUIDELINES

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## Top Three Tips

- **Carry a mix of different types of payments**, such as local currency, an ATM card, and a credit card.
- **Traveler's checks are not recommended.** They can be difficult to exchange and are rarely accepted in shops and restaurants.
- **U.S. dollars should be in excellent condition and dated 2006 or later.** Torn, worn, dirty, or taped U.S. bills may not be accepted.

## Local Currency

For current exchange rates, please refer to an online converter tool like **[www.xe.com/currencyconverter](http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter)**, your bank, or the financial section of your newspaper.

**Thailand:** Thai Baht (THB)

**Singapore:** Singapore dollar (SDG)

**Malaysia:** Malaysian Ringgit (RM or MYR)

**The Philippines:** Philippine peso (PHP)

## How to Exchange Money

You can change money when you arrive at banks, most hotels, and money exchange offices. In some countries you do not even need to exchange money at all—you can use U.S. dollars. For information on what type of currency can be used on this trip, see the “Currency” section.

You can also obtain local currency from an ATM. Using a local ATM on an international network will allow you to withdraw money from your U.S. account in local currency; your bank at home will calculate the conversion rate and charge you in U.S. dollars.

Throughout the trip, your Trip Experience Leader can advise you of ATM availability and warn you before you enter areas where there are no ATMs, but will not be able to guarantee which ATM will take your card.

## ATMs

When using the ATM, keep in mind that it may only accept cards from local banks, and may not allow cash advances on credit cards; you might need to try more than one ATM or more than one card. Many banks will charge a set fee or a percentage fee each time you use a foreign ATM. We recommend that you check with your bank before you depart. Don't forget to memorize the actual digits of your card's PIN number (many keypads at foreign ATMs do not include letters on their keys—they only display numbers.)

In most countries, ATMs are widely available in major cities. If you are in a rural location, it will likely be harder to find an ATM. If you are visiting a country that has different expectation for ATMs, they will be listed below.

**The Philippines:** ATMs are fairly common in major cities, but may not be available on the smaller islands.

## Credit & Debit Cards

While traveling, most countries and major cities will accept credit cards. We suggest that you bring one or two, especially if you are planning a large purchase (artwork, jewelry). We also suggest that you bring more than one brand of card (i.e. Visa, MasterCard, American Express) if possible, as not all are accepted around the world. If you are visiting a country that does not commonly accept credit cards, they will be listed below.

## Notify Card Providers of Upcoming Travel

Many credit card companies and banks have fraud alert departments that will freeze your card if they see suspicious charges—such as charges or withdrawals from another country. To avoid an accidental security block, it is a good idea to notify your credit card company and/or bank you will be using your cards abroad. You can do this by calling their customer service number a week or two before your departure. Some banks or credit card companies will also let you do this online.

You should also double-check what phone number you could call if you have a problem with a card while you are abroad. Don't assume you can use the 1-800 number printed on the back of your card—most 1 800 numbers don't work outside of the U.S.!

## Tipping Guidelines

Of course, whether you tip, and how much, is always at your own discretion. But for those of you who have asked for tipping suggestions, we offer these guidelines:

- **O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader:** It is customary to express a personal “thank you” to your Trip Experience Leader at the end of your trip. As a guideline, many travelers give \$8–\$12 USD (or equivalent in local currency) per person for each day their Trip Experience Leader is with them. *Please note that these tips can only be in cash. If you are taking any of the optional extensions, your Trip Experience Leader during the extension(s) may not be the same as the one on your main trip.*
- **Housekeeping staff at hotels:** \$1–\$2 per room, per night
- **Waiters:** Tipping waiters is not common practice, but if the service is excellent you may leave about 10% of the bill in appreciation. Your Trip Experience Leader will handle any tips, if appropriate, for included meals.
- **Taxi drivers:** If you are taking a taxi by yourself, keep in mind that tipping is not common practice, but many people simply let the driver keep the change by rounding up the fare to the next whole number.

*Please Note:* Your tour price includes gratuities on the main trip and optional extensions for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters that may assist you during the scheduled activities on your adventure. All tips are quoted in U.S. dollars; tips can be converted and paid in local currency or in U.S. dollars. Please do not use personal or traveler's checks for tips.

## AIR, OPTIONAL TOURS & STAYING IN TOUCH

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### Land Only Travelers & Customized Air

#### Quick Definitions

- **Land Only:** You will be booking your own international flights. Airport transfers are not included.
- **Air-Inclusive:** You booked international air with us. Airport transfers are included as long as you didn't customize your trip's dates (see next bullet).
- **Arrive Early or Stopover (select adventures only):** If you chose one of these Customization options and purchased air through O.A.T, accommodations and airport transfers are included. However, if you chose one of our Customization options, but did not purchase air through O.A.T., accommodations are included, but airport transfers are not. If you chose one of our customization options, and purchase air through O.A.T. but not the accommodations, the airport transfers are not included. We have included transfer options below.
- **Customization on Your Own:** If you have not purchased air through O.A.T. and decided to arrive early, stay longer, or stop in a connecting city on your own, you are responsible for airport transfers and accommodations. For your convenience, a preliminary list of your included hotels is available on your My Planner at [www.oattravel.com/myplanner](http://www.oattravel.com/myplanner) under "My Reservations" to help you with selecting a hotel for your additional time.

### Air Inclusive Travelers

If you have purchased international air with us, there are some points that may be helpful for you to know.

- **Flying with a Travel Companion:** If you're traveling with a companion from a different household, and both of you are beginning and ending your trip at the same airport on the same dates, let us know you'd like to travel together and we'll make every effort to arrange this (please note, however, that this is not always possible). If you request any changes to your flights, please be sure that both you and your companion tell us that you still want to fly together.
- **Selecting Your Seats:** If your airline allows pre-assigned seats, you will be able to select and view them directly from the airline's website after booking. Some airlines will not allow seat confirmation until your reservation is ticketed 45-30 days prior to departure, and/or they may charge a nominal fee. You may locate your itinerary on an airline's website utilizing the Record Locator Number found on the Air Itinerary in your My Planner.



## Optional Tours

Optional tours are additional add-on tours that allow you to personalize your adventure by tailoring it to your tastes and needs. And if you decide not to join an optional tour? Then you'll have free time to relax or explore on your own—it's about options, not obligations.

## What You Need to Know

- All optional tours are subject to change and availability.
- Optional tours that are reserved with your Trip Experience Leader can be paid for using credit/debit cards only. We accept MasterCard, Visa, and Discover credit cards; we can also take MasterCard or Visa debit cards as long as the card allows you to sign for purchases. (You won't be able to enter a PIN.)
- To ensure that you are charged in U.S. dollars, your payment will be processed by our U.S. headquarters in Boston. This process can take up to three months, so we ask that you only use a card that will still be valid three months after your trip is over. The charge may appear on your credit card statement as being from Boston, MA or may be labeled as "OPT Boston".
- Your Trip Experience Leader will give you details on the optional tours while you're on the trip. But if you'd like to look over descriptions of them earlier, you can do so at any time by referring to your Day-to-Day Itinerary (available online by signing into My Planner at [www.oattravel.com/myplanner](http://www.oattravel.com/myplanner)).

## Communicating with Home from Abroad

To ensure you are available during your trip to friends and relatives at home, you will receive two copies of your hotel list, including phone numbers, with your Final Documents. One copy is for you to bring, and one to leave behind with friends or relatives in case they need to contact you during the trip.

## Cell Phones

If you want to use your cell phone on the trip, check with your phone provider to see if your phone and service will work outside of the U.S. It may turn out to be cheaper to rent an international phone or buy a SIM card onsite. If you want to use a local SIM, just make certain your phone can accept one.

## Calling Apps

We recommend you use WhatsApp while abroad to communicate home and with your Trip Experience Leader while onsite. You will need a Wi-Fi connection if you do not have international coverage. Other calling options include smartphone apps such as Skype or FaceTime. You will need a Wi-Fi connection for these apps and the calls may count towards your phone plan's data allowance. Many smartphones—and some tablets or laptops—come with one of these apps pre-installed or you can download them for free from the appropriate apps store.

## Calling Cards and 1-800 Numbers

When calling the U.S. from a foreign country, a prepaid calling card can be useful because it circumvents unexpected charges from the hotel. Calling cards purchased locally are typically the best (less expensive, more likely to work with the local phones, etc.).

One reminder: Do not call U.S. 1-800 numbers outside the continental United States. This can result in costly long distance fees, since 1-800 numbers do not work outside the country.

## Internet

Most hotels in Thailand have Internet services available for free. Most hotels will provide WiFi service in a common area, like the lobby or reception, or in the rooms. However, the WiFi connections in hotels are generally not stable. They are unpredictable; so you may be better off leaving your device at home and relying on places that provide computers, like hotels with a business center or Internet cafes.

## How to Call Overseas

When calling overseas from the U.S., dial 011 for international exchange, then the country code (indicated by a plus sign: +), and then the number. Note that foreign phone numbers may not have the same number of digits as U.S. numbers; even within a country the number of digits can vary depending on the city and if the phone is a land line or cell phone.

**Thailand:** +66

**Malaysia:** +60

**Singapore:** +65

**The Philippines:** +63

## PACKING: WHAT TO BRING & LUGGAGE LIMITS

### Luggage Limits

MAIN TRIP LIMITS	
Pieces per person	One checked bag and one carry-on per person.
Weight restrictions	Checked bag is limited to <b>44 lbs total</b> . Carry-on is limited to <b>15 lbs total</b> .
Size Restrictions	Standard airline size: checked luggage should not exceed 62 linear inches (length+ width + depth) and carry-on should not exceed 45 linear inches
Luggage Type	Duffel bag or soft-sided suitcase. Please do not bring a hard-sided (clamshell) suitcase.
TRIP EXTENSION(S) LIMITS	
Same as the main trip.	
REMARKS/SUGGESTIONS	
<p><b>Luggage rules:</b> Luggage rules and limits are set by governmental and airline policy. Enforcement of the rules may include spot checks or may be inconsistent. However one thing is the same across the board: If you are found to have oversized or overweight luggage, you will be subject to additional fees, to be assessed by—and paid to—the airline in question.</p> <p><b>Please note:</b> The airline's official weight limit for checked luggage during your domestic flight in Thailand is 44 lbs (20 kg) and your carry-on luggage is restricted to 15 lbs (7 kg). If you'd prefer to bring 50 lbs in your checked bag for your international flights, you will have the option to store excess luggage in Bangkok while you travel to Kanchanaburi and retrieve it upon your return at the end of the trip. If you opt to store excess luggage, please bring a small additional bag for this purpose.</p>	

#### Don't Forget:

- **These luggage limits may change.** If the airline(s) notify us of any changes, we will include an update in your Final Documents booklet.
- It's a good idea to reconfirm baggage restrictions and fees directly with the airline a week or so prior to departure. For your convenience, we maintain a list of the toll-free numbers for the most common airlines on our website in the FAQ section.
- **Baggage fees are not included in your trip price;** they are payable directly to the airlines.

- The luggage limits above are based on your regional flights, which may be less than your international flights. Even if your international airline offers a larger weight limit, you will need to pack according to the lower restrictions.

## Your Luggage

### Checked Luggage

One duffel bag or suitcase. Look for one with heavy nylon fabric, wrap-around handles, built-in wheels, and a heavy duty lockable zipper. Please do not bring a rigid (plastic shell) suitcase.

### Carry-on Bag

You are allowed one carry-on bag per person. We suggest a tote or small backpack that can be used as both a carry-on bag for your flight and to carry your daily necessities—water bottle, camera, etc—during your daily activities.

### Locks

For flights that originate in the U.S., you can either use a TSA-approved lock or leave your luggage unlocked. Outside of the U.S. we strongly recommend locking your luggage as a theft-prevention measure.

## Clothing Suggestions

### Functional Tips

Most of your clothing can be cotton or cotton-synthetic blends. If you like to hand-wash your clothes, look for fabrics that will dry out overnight. You can buy clothing designed especially for travel, with features like wrinkle-resistant fabric or built-in sun protection.

- **Footwear:** You'll be on your feet and walking a lot, sometimes over rough and slippery surfaces, so choose your footwear carefully. The soles of your shoes should offer good traction. You can find especially supportive shoes designed for walking. Light hiking boots might be useful for the ankle support, but they are optional.
- **Walking sticks:** Many past travelers have recommended bringing a folding walking stick, sold in most camping stores. An alternative is a folding ski pole. This is very useful when exploring ruins and trails that have no handrails.

### Style Hints and Dress Codes

- **Dress on our trip is functional and casual.** The most formal you might need for a city evening would be a sport jacket with no tie for men, a dress and dressy sandals for women—but this is not necessary on this trip—the decision is yours.



- **Wearing shorts is acceptable in most places, except at some religious sites.** Specifically, shorts, knee-baring skirts, sleeveless shirts, and tank tops, are often forbidden in temples, so we suggest that you stick to trousers or a long skirt for temple visits. If you forget and wear shorts on a day that includes a temple visit, all is not lost—temples will generally loan cover-ups to visitors who are perceived as “too bare”—but you must cover up to go inside.
- **It is common practice to remove your shoes inside the temple, so consider a pair that you can get on/off easily and perhaps a couple extra pairs of socks.** (Use these to replace the ones that will get extra dirty in the temples. Or you could designate a couple pairs as your “temple socks” and wear them more than once.)

## Recommended Packing Lists

We have included suggestions from Trip Experience Leaders and former travelers to help you pack. These packing lists are only jumping-off points—they offer recommendations based on experience, but not requirements. Each travelers packing list may be different depending on the climate you are used to. We recommend using [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com) and consulting the “Climate” chapter of this handbook.

And don’t forget a reusable water bottle—you’ll need it to take advantage of any refills we offer as we are working to eliminate single-use plastic bottles on all of our trips.

## Recommended Clothing

- ☐ Shirts: A mixture of short and long-sleeved shirts in a breathable fabric, like cotton or cotton-blend. Polo shirts are more versatile than T-shirts.
- ☐ Trousers and/or jeans: Comfortable and loose fitting; avoid tight-fitting ones which would be seen as disrespectful to local culture.
- ☐ Walking shorts: A longer cut shows the more sensitivity to the local culture, which tends to be modest. Shorts are viewed as inappropriate for visiting a temple, so we suggest you stick to trousers or a long skirt (below the knee or longer) for temple visits. In a pinch you could wear one of the temple’s cover-ups.
- ☐ For female travelers: A long skirt (below the knee or longer) is useful for temples.
- ☐ Shoes and socks: Shoes should be comfortable walking/ running shoes or low-cut hiking shoes, with arch support. A pair of sport sandals with secure ankle strap (such as Tevas) are recommended; flip-flops are not. Because it is common to remove your shoes inside the temples, bring at least one pair of shoes that you can get on/off easily. You might want a couple extra pairs of socks.
- ☐ Light cotton or wool sweater: Because motor coach air conditioning can be cold.
- ☐ Light rain jacket/windbreaker with hood

- ☐ Wide-brim sun hat
- ☐ Underwear and sleepwear
- ☐ Swimsuit

## Essential Items

- ☐ Daily essentials: toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, hairbrush or comb, shaving items, deodorant, etc. Our hotels will provide the basics like soap and shampoo, but if you are sensitive to fragrances or new products, you may wish to bring your preferred brands.
- ☐ Spare eyeglasses/contact lenses
- ☐ Sunglasses, 100% UV block
- ☐ Sunscreen, SPF 30 or stronger
- ☐ Insect repellent with DEET (30–35% strength)
- ☐ Cold-water hand-wash laundry soap such as Woolite, plastic clothespins, sink stopper
- ☐ Light folding umbrella
- ☐ Moisturizer and sun-blocking lip balm
- ☐ Packets of pocket-size tissues or small roll of toilet paper
- ☐ Moist towelettes (not individual packets) and/or anti-bacterial “water-free” hand cleanser
- ☐ Flashlight or headlamp, extra batteries/bulb
- ☐ Electrical converter & plug adapter: see “A Word about Electricity” for details
- ☐ Camera gear with extra batteries or battery charger
- ☐ Hair dryer (most hotels will provide one, but not all)
- ☐ Washcloth, and small thin towel. Hotels will provide towels, but not washcloths. Having your own small towel can be useful on extremely hot/humid days.

## Medicines

- ☐ Your own prescription medicines

- ☐ Travel first aid kit: Band-Aids, headache and pain relief, laxatives and anti-diarrhea tablets, something for upset stomach. Maybe a cold remedy, moleskin foot pads, antibiotic cream, or allergy medication.
- ☐ An antibiotic medication for gastrointestinal illness
- ☐ Optional: A strong prescription pain medication for rare emergency purposes
- ☐ Optional: Motion sickness medicine if you are susceptible
- ☐ Optional: Anti-malarial medication for the Cambodia extension ONLY. At the time of writing, the CDC reported that the risk of malaria was low in Thailand and Vietnam, but moderate in Cambodia. Anti-malarial medications can have strong side effects so be sure to discuss with your doctor.
- ☐ For asthma sufferers (or other breathing complaints) a face mask may be useful, particularly during rice burning season (Feb) and summer months.

## Home-Hosted Visits

Many of our adventures feature a visit with a local family. It is customary, though not necessary, to return your hosts' generosity with a small gift. If you do bring a gift, we recommend that you bring something the whole family can enjoy, or something that represents your region, state, or hometown. Get creative and keep it small—peach jelly from Georgia, maple sugar candy from New England, orange blossom soap from California; something that can be used or used up is best. When choosing a gift, be certain to consider the local culture as well. For example, we do not recommend alcohol in Muslim countries because it is forbidden in Islam, and your hosts may be religious. Not all O.A.T. adventures include a Home-Hosted Visit; please check your final itinerary before you depart.

## Electricity Abroad

When traveling overseas, the voltage is usually different and the plugs might not be the same shape.

### Voltage

Electricity in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines is 220–240 volts. In the U.S. it is 110 volts. Most of the things a traveler will want to plug in—battery chargers, smartphones, tablets or computers—can run off both 110 and 220–240. But you should check the item or the owner's guide first to confirm this before you plug it in. If you have something that needs 110 volts—like a shaver or a hairdryer—you can bring a transformer to change the current. (But transformers tend to burn out, so it might be better to leave whatever it is at home.)

## Plugs

The shape of plugs will vary from country to country, and sometimes even within a country depending on when that building was built. To plug something from the U.S. into a local socket you'll need an adapter that fits between the plug and the socket. Because there are many different types of plugs in this region, it may be easier to purchase an all-in-one, universal adapter/converter combo. Versatile and lightweight, these can usually be found at your local electronics goods or hardware stores. Sometimes you can buy them at large retailers too, like Target or Walmart. If you forget to bring an adapter, you might also find them for sale at the airport when you arrive at your destination.

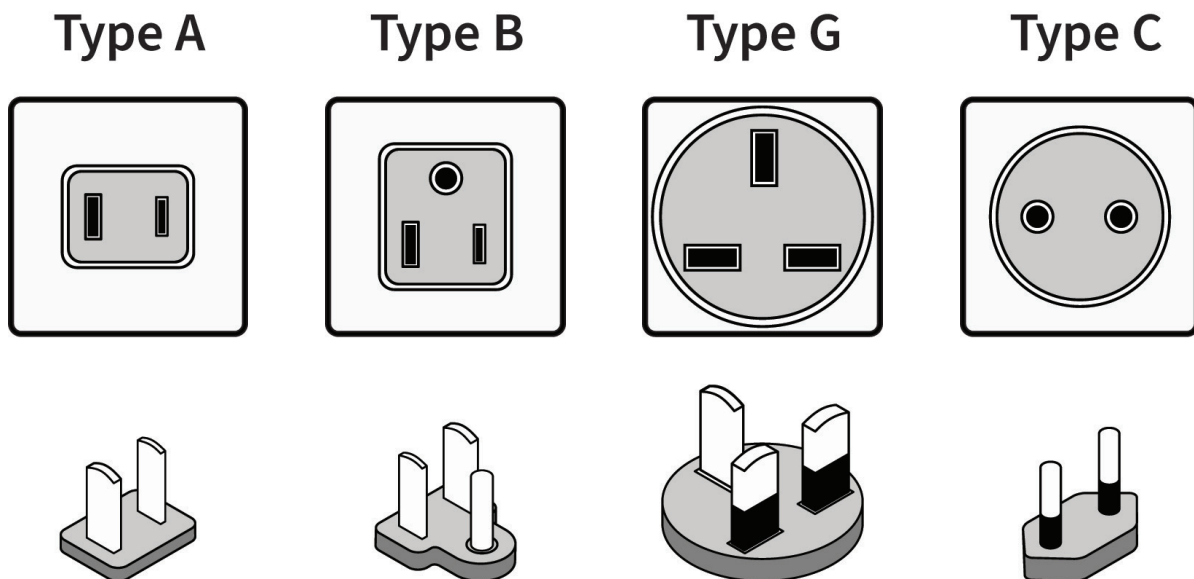
Different plug shapes are named by letters of the alphabet. Standard U.S. plugs are Type A and Type B. Here is the list of plugs for the countries on this trip:

**Thailand:** A and B (same as the U.S.) or C

**Singapore:** G

**Malaysia:** C or G

**The Philippines:** A and B (same as the U.S.) or C



## Availability

**A constant electricity supply cannot be guaranteed during overnight stays.** In some places, the electricity may be supplied by a generator, and lighting may not be as bright as you are used to. Travelers dependent on electricity supply (as in the case of those with sleep apnea) should consider a different adventure or ensure their apparatus has back-up battery power.



## CLIMATE & AVERAGE TEMPERATURES

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**Thailand:** Thailand's climate is tropical, high both in temperature and humidity, and dominated by monsoons. April and May are the hottest months of the year, when even the locals are moved to complain about the heat. June sees the beginning of the South West Monsoon, and brings with it the rainy season, which continues intermittently until the end of October. During this season, the air is warm and humid and the sky is typically overcast. From November to April, the air is much drier, with only a few days of rainfall per month. During the rainy season, and particularly from June to September, sunshine is limited to about five or six hours per day.

The north and northeast are generally cooler than Bangkok in winter, and hotter in summer. It will be warm during most of the trip. It gets hot in the sun at midday; in the north, it will cool down in the evening. Most of the country has abundant rainfall from May to October.

**Malaysia:** Overall, Malaysia has a tropical rainforest climate—hot, wet, and humid. The temperatures don't vary a lot from season to season, but the rainfall does. Generally speaking the driest months are December–February while the rainiest ones are August–October or November; the rest of the year is a mix. Daytime highs are almost always in the 80s or 90s with high humidity, although temperatures can spike up into the 100s.

### Climate Averages & Online Forecast

The following charts reflect the **average** climate as opposed to exact weather conditions. This means they serve only as general indicators of what can reasonably be expected. An extreme heat wave or cold snap could fall outside these ranges. As your departure approaches, we encourage you to use **[www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com)** for a more accurate forecast of the locations you visit.

## Average Daily High/Low Temperatures (°F), Humidity & Monthly Rainfall

MONTH	BANGKOK, THAILAND			CHIANG MAI, THAILAND		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	89 to 71	88 to 49	0.4	84 to 58	90 to 41	0.3
FEB	90 to 75	89 to 53	1.1	89 to 60	84 to 34	0.2
MAR	98 to 80	88 to 55	1.2	94 to 66	78 to 33	0.6
APR	104 to 95	86 to 56	2.8	97 to 73	78 to 38	1.8
MAY	92 to 80	87 to 62	7.5	93 to 75	83 to 52	6.0
JUN	91 to 80	85 to 64	6.0	90 to 76	86 to 60	5.3
JUL	90 to 78	86 to 64	6.2	89 to 75	88 to 63	6.6
AUG	90 to 78	87 to 66	7.4	88 to 75	90 to 65	8.9
SEP	89 to 77	91 to 68	12.6	88 to 74	91 to 64	9.9
OCT	89 to 77	92 to 67	9.1	88 to 72	90 to 60	5.2
NOV	88 to 74	87 to 58	2.3	85 to 67	90 to 53	1.7
DEC	87 to 70	84 to 49	0.4	82 to 59	90 to 45	0.6

MONTH	KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA			SINGAPORE, SINGAPORE		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	89 to 73	96 to 66	6.4	85 to 75	92 to 74	9.4
FEB	90 to 73	96 to 66	6.7	88 to 76	92 to 69	6.5
MAR	91 to 74	96 to 68	9.1	88 to 77	92 to 72	6.9
APR	90 to 75	96 to 73	10.9	89 to 77	93 to 74	6.5
MAY	90 to 75	96 to 71	7.7	88 to 78	92 to 76	6.7
JUN	90 to 74	95 to 66	4.9	88 to 78	90 to 72	6.4
JUL	89 to 74	95 to 66	5.0	87 to 78	90 to 73	5.9
AUG	89 to 74	95 to 65	5.6	87 to 78	89 to 73	6.7
SEP	89 to 74	95 to 71	7.7	87 to 76	92 to 75	6.4
OCT	89 to 74	96 to 73	10.5	87 to 77	92 to 73	7.5
NOV	88 to 74	97 to 76	11.1	87 to 76	92 to 77	9.8
DEC	88 to 73	96 to 72	9.0	85 to 75	93 to 80	10.6

MONTH	CEBU CITY, THE PHILIPPINES		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Average # of Days with Rainfall
JAN	81 to 79	-	15.73
FEB	82 to 75	-	9.45
MAR	84 to 76	-	10
APR	85 to 77	-	9.45
MAY	87 to 79	-	16.55
JUN	86 to 79	-	15.09
JUL	85 to 78	-	16.18
AUG	86 to 78	-	14.27
SEP	85 to 78	-	15.45
OCT	85 to 77	-	19.09
NOV	84 to 77	-	17.36
DEC	83 to 77	-	17.27

## ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS: CULTURE, ETIQUETTE & MORE

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### O.A.T. Trip Experience Leaders: A World of Difference

During your adventure, you'll be accompanied by one of our local, Trip Experience Leaders. All are fluent in English and possess the skills, certification, and experience necessary to ensure an enriching adventure. As locals of the regions you'll explore with them, our Trip Experience Leaders provide the kind of firsthand knowledge and insight that make local history, culture, and wildlife come alive. Coupled with their unbridled enthusiasm, caring personalities, and ability to bring diverse groups of travelers together, our Trip Experience Leaders ensure that your experience with O.A.T. is one you'll remember for a lifetime.

### The Culture of Thailand

As the only nation in Southeast Asia not to have colonized by a European country, Thailand places a much greater emphasis on issues relating to patriotism and national pride.

If there is one cultural element that is shared by all countries in Southeast Asia, it may be the concept of “face.” One's reputation and honor are keystones of Southeast Asian society and is far removed from many in Western society who value people who are “brutally honest.” Causing someone to “lose face” —even unintentionally—can lead to awkward interactions. Face-saving often perplexes foreign visitors—especially when people tell you yes when they mean no. Or if you ask someone for directions, you discover they have pointed you somewhere wrong because, for them, this is preferable to admitting they don't know, which would be “losing face.” Or if you see the thoughtfully-chosen gift you brought appear to be brushed aside—what's really happening is the recipient wishes to open it in private in case it is not useful, too expensive, or any number of reasons that may cause him or her to lose face.

But generally, the people of Southeast Asia are very tolerant and understanding of foreign visitors who aren't aware of local cultural norms—unless it is something serious like disrespecting the monarchy in Thailand. As a traveler in any country, however, one should always be aware of the potential impact one's actions might have on how others feel. Just an awareness of such a simple notion can lead to deeper and more enjoyable insights into local culture.

For the adventurous soul, the challenges of traveling in Thailand—in addition to the country's natural beauty, spirituality, and renowned hospitality—make it a uniquely rewarding destination. You should be prepared for dust, pollution, traffic and large crowds in cities. In addition, poverty can be distressing for some travelers.

### Meals

Most breakfasts offer American-style food. We usually have eggs, cereals, breads, and fruit juice. For our lunches and dinners, we usually enjoy Thai cuisine. Many of our meals are served family-style, with five or more main courses, so vegetarians are easily accommodated. Look forward to a wide variety of fresh foods, including meat, seafood, poultry, vegetables, and noodles (a Thai specialty).

Many Thai dishes are vegetarian, but please note that no special accommodations can be guaranteed for dietary restrictions. Your Trip Experience Leader can suggest restaurants for meals that are not included on your adventure.

## **Our Vehicles**

We use a variety of transportation, making our travel between destinations part of the fun. We get around in a comfortable, air-conditioned mini-bus, and experience traditional transportation as well. By land, we join commuters and board a songtaew taxi truck to visit hill tribes. By water, we ride in a longtail speedboat on the River Kwai and a rice barge in Uthaithani. We take one short flight within this trip between Chiang Rai and Bangkok.

## **Images of the King of Thailand**

In Thailand the king is held in high regard, to the point where even images of him are treated respectfully. The King's image is featured on the currency, so it is even important to avoid stepping on any coins that may have fallen.

## **Taking Photographs**

When taking photos of people in most countries, be polite and ask permission to take a close-up. In many countries, you should not be taking photos of children or older women without permission. Do not take photographs of military personnel, military compounds, or other official institutions/personnel (such as police). This may result in the confiscation of your camera.

Please obey any signs regarding photos at museum or sites; the no-flash rule protects the fragile artifacts and artwork from damage by repeated exposure to light. Occasionally, there may also be a small fee levied by the museum or site for the privilege of taking photos.

## **Safety & Security**

As you travel, exercise the same caution and awareness that you would in a large American city. Carry a one-day supply of cash, and your passport, in a travel pouch. Don't leave valuables unattended in your hotel room – use a room safe as needed. In any sort of puzzling street situation, try to keep one hand on your wallet or money belt.

## **Thai Cuisine**

The variety of Thai food is truly amazing. It is a cuisine based on combining five main flavors: salty, sweet, sour, bitter, and spicy. Look forward to sampling meat, seafood, poultry, vegetable, noodle dishes (a Thai specialty), and often soup. Although certain regions of Thailand are known for their extremely fiery cuisine, not all of it is spicy—in fact, much of it is very sweet or quite subtly flavored. Meals in Thailand are often served family-style, with five or more main courses, so vegetarians are easily accommodated. However, please note that any and all special accommodations for dietary restrictions (like vegetarian) cannot be guaranteed. As in other Southeast Asian countries, rice is a key component of Thai cuisine and great care is taken in preparing it properly. Typical dishes include:



- **Guay Teow:** Translated to “noodle soup,” guay teow describes any type of noodle soup and can be made with chicken, pork, or beef using either rice or egg noodles. Wontons or meatballs may also be added to the broth along with condiments such as dried chili peppers, lime juice, and fish sauce.
- **Som Tam:** Spicy green papaya salad is a very popular Thai dish made from shredded green papaya, tomatoes, carrots, peanuts, dried shrimp, chilies, lime juice, and other ingredients mixed with a mortar and pestle to amplify the flavors.
- **Pad Thai:** One of Thailand’s national dishes, many Westerners are already familiar with this fried noodle favorite which can be made with shrimp, chicken, or tofu.
- **Pad Krapow:** Fire up your taste buds for this popular dish made with either minced pork or chicken (or tofu) and stir fried with Thai basil and lots of chilies.
- **Panang:** This Thai curry dish is a bit on the mild side (*Gaeng Keow Wan*, or green curry, is on the other end of the heat scale) and is typically served with shrimp or vegetables.

## Etiquette

Don’t let the fine points of local customs worry you; locals know that visitors can’t be expected to know every detail. Much of what is considered polite in this region is similar to what’s polite in the U.S. But as a matter of interest, here are a few “finer points” that might surprise you:

- Body posture is important. Sprawling, resting your feet on furniture or chairs, or pointing your feet at someone are seen as impolite.
- In temples you may notice locals sitting on the floor with their feet tucked under them or in a cross-legged position. This is to avoid pointing their feet at the Buddha, which is rude.
- A woman may speak to a Buddhist monk, and a man may speak with a Buddhist nun, but generally the correct thing is to let them approach you.
- You may see people greeting one another with a bow of the head, and in some countries this will be accompanied with hands pressed together as in prayer. Traditionally, the deeper the bow, the more respect one is showing, with the greatest respect being towards elders and clergy. For you, a gentle western-style handshake is an acceptable greeting, but if you wish to try the more traditional head bow, that’s OK too.
- Avoid wearing clothing imprinted with a Buddha logo or image as this may offend some of the locals.

## Language Barrier

You can have some great ‘conversations’ with local people who do not speak English, even if you don’t speak a word of the local language. Indeed, this non-verbal communication can be a highly rewarding part of travel. To break the ice, bring along some family photographs, or a few postcards of your hometown. If you want to meet kids, bring a puppet or other interactive toy. Your Trip Experience Leader can help get the ball rolling.

## Shopping: What to Buy, Customs, Shipping & More

There may be scheduled visits to local shops during your adventure. There is no requirement to make a purchase during these stops, and any purchase made is a direct transaction with the shop in question, subject to the vendor's terms of purchase. O.A.T. is not responsible for purchases you make on your trip or for the shipment of your purchases.

### Returns

If you discover an issue with an item, you should contact the vendor directly and expect that any resolution will take longer than it would in the U.S. We recommend that you keep a copy of all your receipts, invoices, or contracts, along with the shop's contact information. Keep in mind, local practice may vary from U.S. standards, so don't assume that you have a certain number of days after the purchase to speak up or that you are guaranteed a refund.

### Crafts & Souvenirs

#### Thailand

Thailand offers a variety of fine craft items at good prices. Traditional souvenirs include hill tribe handicrafts, including elaborate jewelry, colorful textiles, bronzeware cutlery, celadon pottery, and Thai lacquerware. Bangkok is famous the world over for its street markets—Pratunam, Chatuchak Park, Khlong Toey, Sampheng (Chinatown), Banglamphu, and many more. Local products include hand-woven cottons, decorative items made of silver, teakwood carvings, and gems. The best bargains in gems are jade, rubies, and sapphires, but buy from reputable dealers only. Thai silk, renowned for its lush colors and pleasantly rough texture, is considered some of the best in the world and can be purchased in the fabric shops of Chiang Mai.

Note that larger department stores in Bangkok have fixed prices. Almost everywhere else bargaining is expected, especially at outdoor stalls.

#### Malaysia

Malaysia is known for textile crafts such as beaded slippers, items woven out of palm-like pandan leaves, songket weavings, and batik fabrics—where the design is created by using wax to block off sections of cloth during the dyeing process. Other staples include pewter goods, wood carvings, cucuk sanggul hairpins, and kites. Edible souvenirs like tea, coffee, and Dodol (a toffee-like candy) are also popular. Just beware the durian fruit, which is so stinky that some hotels won't allow it in their rooms—a durian flavored candy or cake (lempok durian) might be a better choice.

### U.S. Customs Regulations & Shipping Charges

For all things related to U.S. Customs, the ultimate authority is the U.S. Bureau of Customs & Border Protection. Their website, [www.cbp.gov](http://www.cbp.gov) has the answers to the most frequently asked questions. Or you can call them at **1-877-227-5511**.

The top three points to know are:

- At time of writing, your personal duty-free allowance is \$800 for items brought with you. Items totaling more than \$800 are subject to duty fees.
- **Items shipped home are always subject to duty when received in the U.S.** Even when the shop has offered to include shipping and duties in the price, this typically means shipping to the nearest customs facility and payment of the export duties—not door-to-door shipping or payment of the import duties. All additional duties or shipping charges would be your responsibility. Unless an item is small enough to send by parcel service (like FedEx), chances are you will need to arrange shipping or pick-up once the item is in the U.S. and will need to pay customs duties.
- It is illegal to import products made from endangered animal species. U.S. Customs & Border Protection will seize these items, as well as most furs, coral, tortoise shell, reptile skins, feathers, plants, and items made from animal skins.

## DEMOGRAPHICS & HISTORY

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### Thailand

#### Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 198,115 square miles
- **Capital:** Bangkok
- **Languages:** Thai, English (secondary language of the elite), and ethnic and regional dialects are spoken.
- **Ethnicities:** Thai 95.9%, Burmese 2%, other 2.2%
- **Location:** Thailand is bordered by Burma, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia
- **Geography:** Thailand is roughly the size of France or the state of Texas. The country has been described as a huge rice paddy interrupted by the sprawling metropolis of Bangkok. However, that assessment isn't entirely fair. In fact, the country's geography is actually quite varied, with a rich central plain, heavily forested mountains in the north, and a tropical rain forest along the southern peninsula.
- **Population:** 69,522,740 (estimate)
- **Religions:** Buddhist 93.6%, Muslim 4.9%, Christian 1.2%, other 0.2%, none 0.1% (2014 estimate)
- **Time zone:** Thailand is twelve hours ahead of U.S. EST. So when it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 6pm in Bangkok.

## National Holidays: Thailand

In addition to the holidays listed below, Thailand celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit [www.timeanddate.com/holidays](http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays).

01/01 New Year's Day

February Magapuja Day (moves each year; see note above)

04/06 Chakri Day

04/13–4/17 Songkran

05/01 Labor Day

05/03 Coronation Day

May Visakha Puja (moves each year)

7/28 King Vajiralongkorn's Birthday

08/12 The Queen's Birthday/ Mother's Day

10/13 Passing of King Bhumibol

10/23 Chulalongkorn Day

12/05 Father's Day

12/10 Constitution Day

12/31 New Year's Eve

## Thailand: A Brief History

Little is known about its earliest inhabitants, but a succession of tribal groups including the Mon and Khmer established powerful kingdoms in the region we now know as Thailand. In 1238 a Tai chieftain broke from the Khmer and established a kingdom at Sukhothai in the heart of modern-day Thailand. The Sukhothai was succeeded by the kingdom of Ayutthaya in the 14th century. Over the centuries, conflicts with Burma and other invaders eventually led to the reunification of Thailand under Chakri, who established his new capital in Bangkok in 1782.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, rather than its traditional enemies like the Khmers, Burma, and Vietnam, it was the European powers that threatened Thailand —especially the French and British, who were vying for colonies in Southeast Asia. But Thailand was rather fortunate, in that it ended up being the only country in the region to escape colonial rule entirely. This was due to an agreement between the French and British to keep it as a neutral territory between them. The Siamese Revolution in 1932 spelled the end of the absolute monarchy of the Ayutthaya Kingdom and established a constitutional monarchy largely overseen by the military—and a period of instability lasting some sixty years. At the time of World War II, military leaders chose to ally Thailand with Japan to avoid the fate of their Southeast Asian neighbors. And after the war, Thailand was able to maintain close ties with the United States by avoiding the communistic influences embraced by other neighbors.

With some 14 new constitutions written between 1932 and 1987, Thailand's progress in establishing a stable, democratic government in recent times has been erratic at best—with power shifting back and forth between civilian politicians and military governments. Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn was elevated to the throne after the death of his father, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the 9th King of the Chakri Dynasty, to become Thailand's newest monarch in 2016.



# Singapore

## Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 269 square miles
- **Capital:** Singapore
- **Languages:** Mandarin Chinese, English, Malay, and Tamil are all official languages.
- **Ethnicities:** Chinese 74.2%, Malay 13.3%, Indian 9.2%, other 3.3%
- **Location:** On islands at the southernmost tip of the Malay Peninsula in Southeast Asia, south of Malaysia and north of Indonesia.
- **Geography:** Although Singapore is technically spread across a collection of 63 islands, most of the city lies on the main island, Pulau Ujong. The city-state is relatively small (about the same as Washington D.C.), so most of the land has been developed, with very little natural geography remaining.
- **Population:** 5,781,728
- **Religions:** Buddhist 33.9%, Muslim 14.3%, Taoist 11.3%, Catholic 7.1%, Hindu 5.2%, other Christian 11%, other 0.7%, none 16.4%
- **Time zone:** Singapore is thirteen hours ahead of U.S. EST. So when it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 7pm in Singapore.

## National Holidays: Singapore

In addition to the holidays listed below, Singapore celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Lunar New Year and Easter. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit [www.timeanddate.com/holidays](http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays).

01/01 New Year's Day  
05/01 Labor Day  
08/09 National Day  
12/25 Christmas Day

# Malaysia

## Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 126,895 square miles
- **Capital:** Kuala Lumpur
- **Languages:** Bahasa Malaysia is the official language, although English, Chinese, and Tamil are also spoken.
- **Ethnicities:** Malay 50.1%, Chinese 22.6%, indigenous 11.8%, Indian 6.7%, other 0.7%, non-citizens 8.2%

- Location: In Southeastern Asia, bordering Thailand, Vietnam, and the South China Sea; shares the island of Borneo with Brunei and Indonesia.
- Geography: Mainland Malaysia is on a peninsula that juts out from Thailand towards the Indonesian islands; it also includes part of the island of Borneo. The country is roughly the same size as New Mexico. The terrain is mostly coastal plains, rising into hills and tropical rain forests, with some mountains. The highest peaks are in the Crocker Range on Borneo Island.
- Population: 30,949,962
- Religions: Muslim (official) 61.3%, Buddhist 19.8%, Christian 9.2%, Hindu 6.3%, Chinese religions (Confucianism, Taoism, etc.) 1.3%, other or none 2.2%.
- Time zone: Malaysia is twelve hours ahead of U.S. EST. So when it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 6pm in Kuala Lumpur.

## National Holidays: Malaysia

In addition to the holidays listed below, Malaysia celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit **[www.timeanddate.com/holidays](http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays)**.

01/01 New Year's Day  
02/01 Federal Territory Day  
05/01 Labor Day  
08/31 Malaysia's National Day  
12/25 Christmas Day

## Historical Overview of Malaysia

### Early History

The earliest inhabitants of Malaysia were hunter-gathers, who in time, settled down into small communities that fished and farmed. By the 2nd and 3rd centuries BC, these communities had banded together as small kingdoms—there were perhaps as many as 30 kingdoms total on the Malay Peninsula. Because they were small, many of these kingdoms were strongly influenced by neighboring countries such as India, Cambodia, and China.

In the end, it was a neighboring country—specifically, Indonesia—that began to unite the smaller Malaysian kingdoms under the Srivijaya Empire, which first rose to prominence in the 7th century. This empire was based on the Indonesian island of Sumatra, but through naval prowess spread to other islands (Java, Borneo) and mainland Malaysia. Although not originally from Malaysia, the Srivijaya Empire are often cited by historians as the first centralized government on the peninsula, and are credited with spreading Buddhism and establishing trade routes across the Indian Ocean and China Sea.

Eventually, their power drew the attention of the Chola Empire in India, who is believed to have conquered parts of Western Malaysia in 1025 and 1026. Legend says the Chola founded a Hindu kingdom there known as Gangga Negara. Today very little is known about Gangga Negara, causing some researchers to describe it as a “lost kingdom”. In any case, the 11th century seems to have been a turning point for the Srivijaya Empire, which went into decline afterwards.

### **Arrival of Islam & Rise of Malacca**

Another factor in the decline of the Srivijaya Empire may have been the arrival of Islam starting in the 13th century. At first, the religion spread through contact with Arab and Indian traders, but soon it became popular with the local elite, who converted from Buddhism or Hinduism. But Islam’s biggest boost in Malaysia was probably the conversion of King Paramenswra, who may have converted when he married an Islamic princess sometime in the late 1300s or early 1400s.

The king went on to found the port city of Malacca, where he declared Islam to be the state religion and took the title of sultan. He also set up formal diplomatic relations with the Ming emperor in China and re-opened trade routes that had declined under the last Srivijayas. Malacca flourished and grew to be such an important port that its fame spread to Asia, northern Africa, and Europe, causing the Portuguese writer Tome Pires to quip that “Whoever is lord of Malacca shall have his hands on the throat of Venice.” Today Malacca is seen as the originator of Malay culture—mixing local traditions with Indian, Chinese, and Islamic influences—and as setting the standards for literature, music, and language.

### **Colonia Era**

In some ways Malacca could be described as the “Camelot of Malaysia”—a golden era that was all too short. Founded in about 1400, the city was taken by the Portuguese on August 24, 1511. But instead of gaining control of Malacca’s wealth (as they had expected) the Portuguese found that by seizing the port they inadvertently disrupted the flow of trade, effectively diverting it into smaller ports along the Malay coast. Meanwhile, the last sultan of Malacca fled south and founded a new state which became the Sultanate of Johor.

For the next hundred years, Johor would challenge the Portuguese stronghold in Malacca, both on economic grounds and on religious ones (the Portuguese were actively converting locals to the Catholic Church while Johor remained Muslim). This changed with the arrival of the Dutch in the 1600s. As rivals to the Portuguese, they allied themselves with Johor, and in 1641 the combined Johor-Dutch forces took Malacca back from the Portuguese. In exchange for control of Malacca’s trade (which they mainly diverted to their own colony on Java), the Dutch helped the Johor sultan gain control over most of Malaysia.

This control was short-lived. After the assassination of Sultan Mahud in 1699, two different men—both claiming to be the sultan’s son—vied for power. In the resulting uncertainty, a group of immigrants from Indonesia called the Bugis seized power, installing a puppet ruler in Johor. During this time, Malaysia’s economy continued to boom from trade in tin, pepper, and gold. But in Europe, the Dutch were slowly being overtaken by the British as the main naval power—and that change eventually came to Malaysia too. By 1826 the British controlled Malacca, Penang,

and Singapore which combined to form the Colony of the Straits. The British used this colony as a power base to extend their influence over the rest of the Malay Peninsula, although some regions like Johor retained a measure of independence.

## **The Modern Era**

The British influence remained the status quo for nearly 100 years. It wasn't until the outbreak of World War II that another country challenged their power—Japan, who seized Malaysia in February 1942. Although the British did retake the country in 1945, many in the country favored independence over a return to colonial rule.

Initially the plan was to create an independent state with equal citizenship for all no matter their ethnicity (by this time Malaysia was a mix of locals, known as Malays, plus Indians and Chinese who had immigrated during the British Empire days). But many of the Malays wanted the government to be in their hands alone, causing a political split that largely ran along race lines. The situation was further complicated by the rise of a Communist insurrection in 1948. From 1948 to 1960, Malaysia was in a state of emergency as different groups fought for control, with the British/Malay faction ultimately winning.

However, the racial divisions continued to be an issue for decades. Often policies favored the Malay majority over the Chinese and Indian populations, a trend known as “positive discrimination”. Today many of these policies are written into the Malaysian constitution (and questioning them is technically illegal) causing many to see race relations as the defining issue of modern Malaysia.

## **The Philippines**

### **Facts, Figures & National Holidays**

- **Area:** 115,831 square miles
- **Capital:** Manila
- **Languages:** Filipino and English
- **Ethnicities:** Tagalog 26%, Bisaya 14.3%, Ilocano 8%, Cebuano 8% Ilonggo 7.9%, Bikol 6.5%, Waray 3.8%, Kapampangan 3%, Maguindanao 1.9%, Pangasinan 1.9%
- **Location:** The Philippines are in Southeast Asia with the South China sea to the West and the Pacific Ocean to the East.
- **Geography:** The Philippines is an archipelago consisting of over 7,100 islands. The Islands consist of coastline and some mountainous regions.
- **Population:** 114,755,000 (estimate)
- **Religions:** Christian 78.8%, Islam 6.4%, other religions 14.8%
- **Time zone:** The Philippines are 11 hours ahead of U.S. EST. So when it is 6am in Washington D.C. it is 5pm in The Philippines.

## National Holidays: The Philippines

In addition to the holidays listed below, the Philippines celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit **[www.timeanddate.com/holidays](http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays)**.

01/01 New Year's Day

04/10 Day of Valor

05/01 Labor Day

06/12 Philippines Independence Day

08/21 Ninoy Aquino Day

08/28 National Heroes' Day

11/27 Bonifacio Day

12/25 Christmas Day

12/30 Rizal Day

## The Philippines: A Brief History

The Philippines, named after King Philip II, is made up of over 7,000 islands. The island groups of Luzon and Mindanao make up over two-thirds of the total land area with only one-third of the islands being inhabited. Prior to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, little is known about the islands other than serving as outposts for the nearby South Asian Kingdoms.

When Portuguese navigator and explorer Ferdinand Magellan first landed in the Philippines in 1521, he claimed the islands for Spain. Chiefs of the remote islands were not on board with the idea of this regime, however, resulting in the battle of Mactan—and the death of Magellan. The colonization of the Philippines by Spain would take four more decades, when an expedition led by Miguel Lopez de Legazpi established a base on the island of Cebu in 1565. Five years later, Spanish conquistadors conquered Luzon, and for the next 300 years the Philippines would be under Spanish rule.

Although there were several attempts at independence, it wasn't until the late 1890s that things began to change for the Philippines. One of the most famous figures of this period of surging nationalism was Jose Rizal, who stirred up the populace with his novels portraying the abuses of Spanish rule. His execution in 1896 provided the spark for a revolution.

Then in 1898, America entered the picture. At the same time Filipinos were fighting for independence, U.S.-backed Cuba, another Spanish colony, was trying to liberate itself from Spanish rule. Shortly after an American battleship, the *USS Maine*, mysteriously sank in Havana's harbor, the United States declared war on Spain. The ensuing Spanish-American War officially ended with the Treaty of Paris, which decreed that Spain renounce all claim to Cuba, Guam and Puerto Rico be ceded to the U.S., and sovereignty of the Philippines be transferred to the United States. Not even consulted in the matter, Filipinos now turned their guns on their new occupiers. The Philippine-American War began in 1899 and would last until 1902. The Jones Law was enacted in 1916, which promised independence to the Philippines—but only after Filipinos were able to prove that they could govern themselves.

WWII began in the Philippines when the Japanese stormed the island of Luzon and attacked Manila, shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Japan's brutal occupation of the Philippines would last for three years. Finally, the Philippines achieved true independence on July 4, 1946—and all was calm for the next few decades.

By President Ferdinand Marcos's third term in 1986, his reputation began to sour due to the country's economic collapse and his authoritarian rule. The discovery that he had stolen billions of dollars to fund his family's lavish lifestyle led to political turmoil and outrage. A "people power" movement in Manila then forced him into exile and installed Corazon Aquino as president.

With all the foreign rule throughout hundreds of years, the Philippines shares many cultural similarities with the West, and English is one of its two official languages (along with Filipino, based on Tagalog). The world's second largest archipelago, the Philippines can boast a combination of history, culture, pristine beaches, and volcanic vistas that few nations can rival.



## RESOURCES

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### Suggested Reading

#### General Southeast Asia

*A Traveller's History of Southeast Asia* by J.M. Barwise and Nicholas J. White (History) As compact history of a diverse region, this book packs a wealth of information into its well-written and well-organized pages. (And yes, the title has two “L”s; the series is British).

*The River's Tale, A Year on the Mekong* by Edward Gargan (Travel Narrative) Describes in beautiful detail a year spend on the Mekong River during a 3,000-mile journey from its source in China through Tibet, Burma, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

*What the Buddha Taught* by Walpola Sri Rahula (Religion) A useful overview of Buddhism as it is practiced in Southeast Asia by an internationally recognized authority who just happens to also be a Buddhist monk.

#### Thailand

*Patpong Sisters: An American Woman's View of the Bangkok Sex World* by Cleo Odzer (2014, Sociology) An American anthropologist spent three years observing and getting to know the pimps, prostitutes, bar girls and bar boys—and their customers—of the Thailand's thriving \$4 billion sex industry.

*The King Never Smiles: A Biography of Thailand's Bhumibol Adulyadej* (2006, Biography). Banned in Thailand (and cannot be brought into the country), this extensively researched biography of the Thai king who ascended the throne in 1946 and was the world's longest serving monarch until his death in 2016 reveals the king's decisions during the entirety of his reign. While any critique of someone seen by his people as a living Buddha is bound to be controversial, the book is considered by many to be essential to an understanding of the political climate in present-day Thailand.

*Bangkok 8* by John Burdett (2003, Detective Novel) Reminiscent of a film noir—gritty, suspenseful, and sometimes darkly funny—this book explores the underside of Thailand's capital through a series of mysterious deaths by snakebite. The detective, Sonchai Jitpleecheep, who is a member of the Royal Thai police, also stars in sequels like: *Bangkok Tattoo* and *Bangkok Haunts*.

*The Beach* by Alex Garland (1998, Fiction) The bestselling novel taps into a common legend of young backpackers who come to Southeast Asia for the first time—discovering that unspoiled hidden beach paradise. But they soon find out that even in Thailand, Utopia is hard to find.

*Anna and the King of Siam* by Margaret Landon (1944, Biographical Novel) Some say the tale is more fanciful than true, but it certainly has endured. This is the classic account of a governess in mid-19th century Siam that inspired both the play and the film, *The King and I*.

## Singapore

The ***Auntie Lee*** series by Ovidia Yu (2013, Mysteries). Meet Aunty Lee, Singapore's answer to Miss Marple or Jessica Fletcher.

***King Rat*** by James Clavell (1962, Historical Fiction). An English POW and a ruthless American corporeal struggle to survive in a World War II prison camp. The dramatic story is made even more harrowing and vivid by the author's real-life experiences—he was held at this same camp in real life.

## Malaysia

***The Garden of Evening Mists*** by Tan Twan Eng (2012, Fiction). A slow-paced story about Yun Ling and her relationship with a master gardener who agrees to help her create a memorial to her sister. Only one problem—the gardener is Japanese and Yun Ling's sister died in a Japanese camp.

***Evening is the Whole Day*** by Preeta Samarasan (2008, Fiction). This debut novel follows six-year-old Aasha as she navigates the loss of people around her—including the mysterious dismissal of a family servant.

***The Harmony Silk Factory*** by Tash Aw (2005, Fiction). Set in World War II Malaysia the plot centers around the reputation of Johnny Lim, who neighbors think is a hero but whose son thinks he's a crook.

***My Life as a Fake*** by Peter Carey (2003, Fiction). What happens if you make up a fake identity only to find that someone believes they are that person? This novel explores the idea in the context of a literary hoax gone sideways.

***The Rice Mother*** by Rani Manicka (2002, Fiction). This story is the sometimes-tragic, sometimes-hopeful saga of Lakshmi, who leaves Sri Lanka at 14 to marry an unknown man and becomes the matriarch of a sprawling family in 1930s and 1940s Malaysia.

## Suggested Films & Videos

### Thailand

***The Impossible*** (2012, Drama) A family expecting to find a tropical paradise while vacationing in Thailand instead are in the fight for their lives when a huge wall of black water sweeps across the grounds of their hotel. Based on a true story of a family caught up in the devastating tsunami of December 26, 2004, the film stars Naomi Watts (who received a nomination for Best Actress) and Ewan McGregor.

***The Beach*** (2000, Drama) Leonardo DiCaprio stars in this seductive thriller from director Danny Boyle. Based on the book of the same name, it's the story of an American backpacker in Thailand searching for an idyllic secret beach community described by a fellow traveler. But if and when he finds it, will it be a paradise or a purgatory?

***The Bridge on the River Kwai*** (1957, Classic) The dramatic story of the dangerous construction of a railway bridge by British POWs under the control of the Japanese army during WWII.

***The King and I*** (1956, Musical) A colorful and fun production of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical that is loosely based on the life of Anna Leonowens, the British governess to the King of Siam (modern-day Thailand). The same story also inspired two other (non-musical) movies: ***Anna and the King of Siam*** starring Irene Dunne and Rex Harrison (1946) and ***Anna and the King*** starring Jodie Foster and Chow Yun-Fat (1999).

## Useful Websites

### Overseas Adventure Travel Frequently Asked Questions

[www.oattravel.com/faq](http://www.oattravel.com/faq)

### International Health Information/CDC (Centers for Disease Control)

[www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel)

### Electricity & Plugs

[www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plugs-and-sockets](http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plugs-and-sockets)

### Foreign Exchange Rates

[www.xe.com/currencyconverter](http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter)  
[www.oanda.com/converter/classic](http://www.oanda.com/converter/classic)

### ATM Locators

[www.mastercard.com/atm](http://www.mastercard.com/atm)  
[www.visa.com/atmlocator](http://www.visa.com/atmlocator)

### World Weather

[www.intellicast.com](http://www.intellicast.com)  
[www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com)  
[www.wunderground.com](http://www.wunderground.com)

### Basic Travel Phrases (80 languages)

[www.travlang.com/languages](http://www.travlang.com/languages)

### Packing Tips

[www.travelite.org](http://www.travelite.org)

### U.S. Customs & Border Protection

[www.cbp.gov/travel](http://www.cbp.gov/travel)

### Transportation Security Administration (TSA)

[www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov)

### National Passport Information Center

[www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)

### Holidays Worldwide

[www.timeanddate.com/holidays](http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays)

## Useful Apps

### **Flight Stats**

Track departures, arrivals, and flight status

### **LoungeBuddy**

Get access to premium airport lounges around the world

### **Timeshifter**

Personalized tips for avoiding jetlag, based on neuroscience and your own data

### **GoogleMaps or Maps.me**

Maps and directions anywhere in the world

### **Triposo**

City guides, walking maps, and more – and it works offline

### **Rome2rio**

Where to go, what to see, and what to do in more than 160 countries

### **Flush or Sit or Squat**

Find a clean toilet anywhere

### **Uber or Bolt or Grab**

Ride sharing around the world

### **Visa Plus and Mastercard Cirrus**

#### **ATM locations**

Shows the location of the nearest ATM in your network

### **TunnelBear**

Provides a secure VPN (virtual private network) that will encrypt your browsing data when you use a public WiFi network

### **What's App or Skype or Signal**

WiFi calling anywhere in the world

### **Duolingo or FLuentU or Babbel**

Learn dozens of foreign languages

### **Google Translate**

Fast and simple translations

### **XE**

Currency conversions

### **SizeGuide**

Clothing and shoe sizes in all countries

### **Best Units Converter**

Converts currency, mileage, weights, and many other units of measurement

### **Tourlina**

For women only, it connects you with other female travelers

### **Happy Cow**

Locate vegan and vegetarian eateries in 195 countries

### **Eatwith**

Dine with locals all over the world

### **Meetup**

Connects you with locals who share your interests

### **Skyview**

Identifies constellations and heavenly bodies

### **Travello**

Find travel friends on the road

### **ALIX for One**

Created by and for women, it identifies solo-friendly dining spots in major international cities

### **TripWhistle**

Maps your location and provides emergency numbers for police, medics, and more

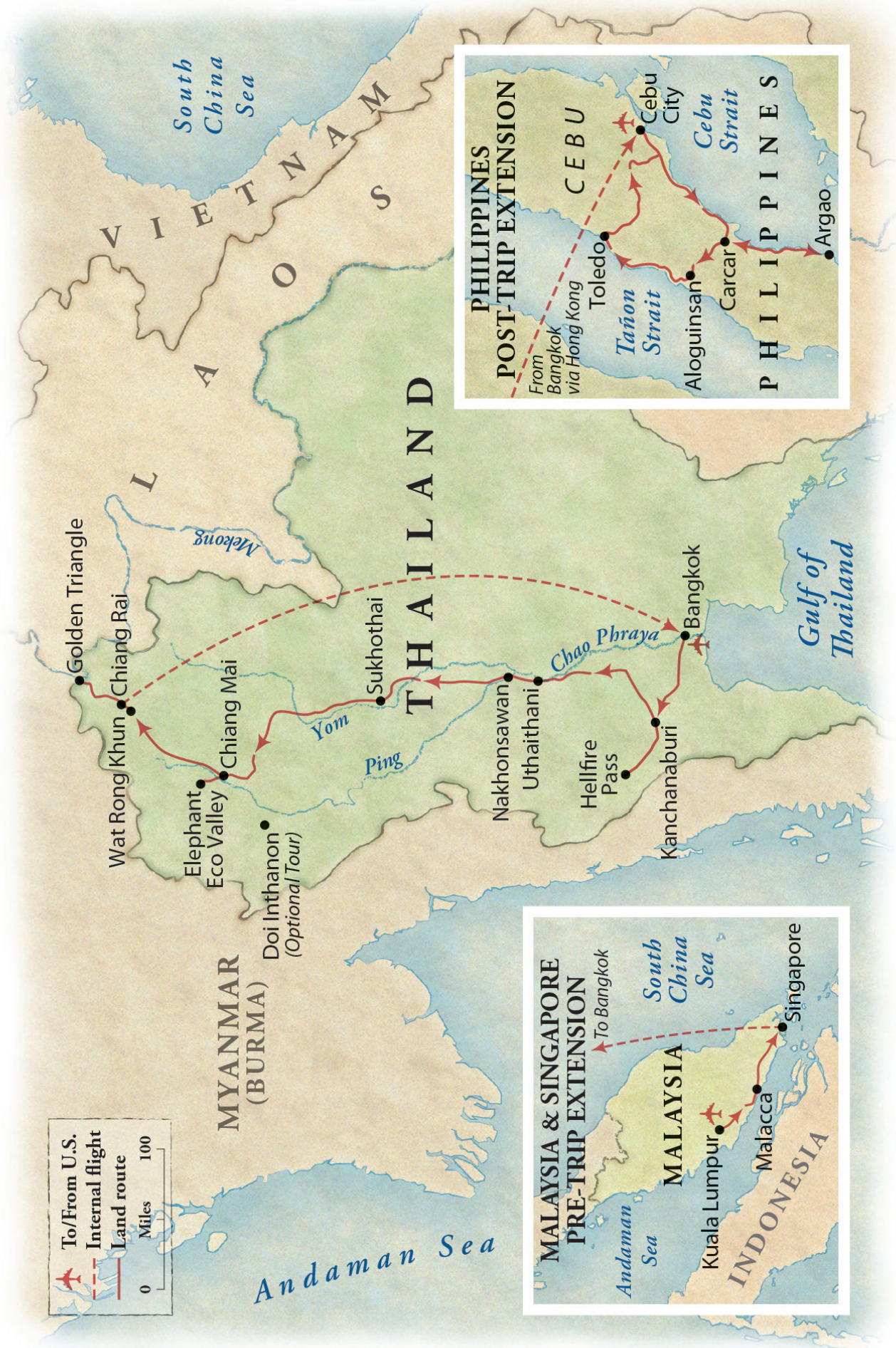
### **GeoSure**

Safely navigate neighborhoods around the world

### **Chirpey**

For women only, connect with other women, find out what's safe, meet up, and more







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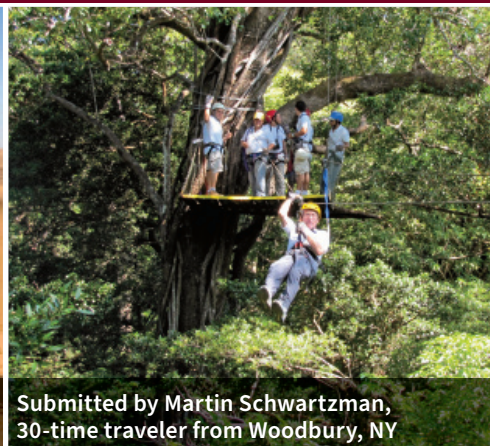
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8-time travelers from Stevensville, MI



Submitted by Julia Schneider,  
5-time traveler from Pinellas Park, FL



Submitted by Martin Schwartzman,  
30-time traveler from Woodbury, NY



Submitted by Paul Stark, 17-time traveler  
from Edina, MN



Submitted by David Fong, 16-time traveler  
from Foster City, CA



Submitted by Steven dos Remedios,  
23-time traveler from Oakland, CA



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