

TRAVEL SOUTHEAST ASIA

FOR UNDER \$30 A DAY



Written by

MANFRED T

RENEGADETRAVELS.COM

Travel Southeast Asia For Under \$30 A Day

by Manfred T

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Introduction

Thanks for downloading this free version of *Travel Southeast Asia For Under \$30 A Day*. A lot of work has gone into the creation of this book, so we really hope that it will help with your travels around Southeast Asia.

This book has a few affiliate links in it which means that we'll get a small payment if you use the links to make a purchase. But don't worry, as you'll pay the same price whether you go directly to the website or use one of our links. So we'd very much appreciate if you could use these links to book your hotels, hostels, flights, amazon.com purchases, etc. It means we're able to keep providing free information, including more free ebooks. We'll be traveling to Europe next, so plan to also write and give away a book on traveling Europe on a budget. We also have a book about moving to Thailand planned for the new year.

You can find all the links on our website at renegade travels.com/resources/. Bookmark the page now, and don't forget to use it. Feel free to share the link as well. Also, feel free share this book with friends that you think may find it useful. They can get their copy at renegade travels.com/free-southeast-asia-book.

Earlier this year I set off with my girlfriend, Miu, to travel the world, with plans to visit Asia, Europe, North & South America and Australia. The first leg of our journey was around SE Asia and we wanted to do this on a budget of under \$30 per person per day, but without staying at hostels. This book is about our 6-7 months traveling around SE Asia, where we visited Thailand (Bangkok, Ayutthaya, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Chiang Khong) , Laos (Huay Xai, Pakbeng, Luang Prabang), Vietnam (Hanoi, Hue, Hoi An, Ho Chi Minh City), Cambodia (Phnom Penh, Siem Reap), Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur, George Town, Johor Bahru), Singapore, Indonesia (Ubud, Denpasar, Banyuwangi, Surabaya, Jakarta).

So, how did we do? Not only did we manage to stick to our budget but we also stayed at some great places, had tons of fun, and made some money along the way. The money we made while traveling was mostly online income so should continue to grow as we continue to travel. This will mean we can spend a little extra when traveling to more expensive parts of the world , such as Europe and North America.

This book is a mixture of our personal journey, country-specific advice, how to find affordable accommodation, how to travel between countries cheaply, how to get the visas that you may need, and much more. We learnt lots along the way, and would spend even less if we did the same journey again.

We've organized this book into some general advice to begin with, and then some specific advice for each country. My suggestion would be that you read this book all the way through once so that you get a good overview of traveling through SE Asia, and then just dip in and out when you need specific advice. There is lots of advice available on the internet and in other travel books, but my aim here is to show you how we traveled personally, as I think that is much more helpful than just reading general advice from multiple sources.

A few friends are planning to follow our specific route, so you're welcome to do the same. I've included a *Where We Stayed* chapter near the end of the book that includes details of each hotel or guesthouse that we stayed at. You can see longer reviews of these places at

<http://www.renegadetravels.com/category/where-we-stayed/>. You can also book each hotel directly from those pages. It would also be great if you could email us to let us know how this book helped you, and also let us know if anything has changed or if you have any additional tips that our readers may find helpful.

Throughout the book I've included details of how we traveled from place to place. To make referencing this a little easier I've also included a chapter on *How We Traveled*, which lists all the transport options in one place.

I've also included a *Travel Calendar* chapter at the end that shows what dates we traveled, as this may help you with your planning.



Chiang Mai's Silver Temple Lit Up At Night

How Much Did We Spend?

All the information about costs is given in \$US and has been converted from the local currency at the exchange rate that was available at the time. Currencies fluctuate all the time, so these costs could be a different for you, but I think they should be broadly correct. But be sure to check current exchange rates before you set off on your travels. For ease of reading, all amounts are rounded to the nearest dollar, so this may result in some minor rounding issues.

So this is what we spent on our travels around SE Asia.

SE Asia Cost Per Day



Thailand - \$2,510 over 60 days - \$21 per person per day

Laos - \$241 over 5 days - \$24 per person per day

Vietnam - \$1,631 over 29 days - \$28 per person per day

Cambodia - \$2,344 over 41 days - \$29 per person per day

Malaysia - \$1,399 over 28 days - \$25 per person per day

Singapore - \$387 over 3 days - \$65 per person per day

Indonesia - \$1,450 over 28 days - \$26 per person per day

We also spent an additional \$1,331 on visas, flights, and other traveling expenses.

So our total spend was \$11,295 over 194 days, giving a cost per person of \$29 per day.

These costs could be further broken down into the following category averages...

Accommodation - \$11 per person per day

Food & Drink - \$11 per person per day

Transport - \$2 per person per day

Miscellaneous - \$2 per person per day

Visas, flights, tours - \$3 per person per day

Note that we started and ended our travels around SE Asia in Bangkok, so we didn't have the additional cost of flights from Europe or USA, as many of you may have.

Before You Start Traveling

Open Extra Bank And Credit Card Accounts

I'm a bit of a minimalist, and this also extends to my financial affairs. I have just two bank accounts (one in the UK and one in Thailand) and one credit card (UK). This has always been enough for me, but once on the road I wished I'd opened a few more accounts. My initial plan was to use my Thai bank account for cash withdrawals (as the charges are less in SE Asia than using my UK bank card), and my UK card as back-up. I'd also have my credit card for additional backup, and for making any larger purchases.

All was well until I got a couple of \$US checks from Amazon Direct Publishing. I usually get a family member to deposit these into my UK account, but apparently the rules have changed and I now need to sign the back of the checks and also a form that authorizes the bank to deduct charges from my account. Despite talking to the branch manager and head office, there doesn't seem any way around this problem. So it would have been good if I'd opened a back-up account while still in the UK just for depositing \$US checks.

It might also be good to have a couple of back-up cards just in case your main ones get lost or stolen.

So think carefully about how many bank accounts and credit cards you'll need, and set them up in advance. You can always close them at a later date if you don't need them. But not having a suitable account can cause real problems once you're on the road.

If you're a US resident I'd suggest opening a [Charles Schwab](#) high-yield checking account, as this is the only bank I know that refunds all your ATM fees at the end of the month. This includes fees you paid to banks overseas when withdrawing money there. This is a great way to save money while travel, as ATM fees can really eat into your money. When withdrawing money from many Southeast Asian countries I was charged over \$3 by my own bank and another \$2-3 by the bank I was withdrawing the money from. So that's \$5-6 in fees each time I used an ATM.

Get Some \$US

I would suggest you get some \$US before leaving your home country, as you might need them in quite a few places. It's also the easiest currency to exchange in SE Asia, and is worth keep for emergencies, such as finding out that your ATM card doesn't work.

When I got my Laos visa at the border, \$US was the preferred currency. In Cambodia, \$US is the main currency, and even the ATM machines give out \$US. We took \$500 cash with us and this turned out to be about right for us. We'll spend what we have left over when we travel to the US next year.

Get A Few Passport Photos Taken

It's always a good idea to carry a few passport-size photos with you, as you'll need them for some visas and visa renewals. I suggest you bring around six recently taken photos. It can be a real hassle being at a border crossing and not having photos handy.

Travel Insurance

If you're traveling, it's always a good idea to take out comprehensive travel insurance before you leave, and this is especially true of Southeast Asia. You never know what could happen, so it's best to

be prepared. I recently read about a traveler who got sick in Thailand and ended up needing hospital treatment that cost \$7,000. Luckily she was insured and her insurance company covered the cost. Many travelers we have spoken with use [World Nomads](#) for their travel insurance needs, and I've read many great reviews of their service.

Arrange Visas (For US & UK Passport Holders)

SE Asia is a relatively easy place to visit for both US and UK passport holders, as most countries allow either entry without visa, or via visa on arrival. Myanmar and Vietnam are exceptions though, so you'll need to arrange those visas in advance. If you're planning to visit any, or all, of these countries be sure to check for up to date information, as visa rules can sometimes change without notice. While we didn't visit all these countries, I've included them for completeness.

Brunei

US and UK passport holders can enter Brunei without a visa and can stay for up to 90 days.

Cambodia

US and UK passport holders can obtain a visa on arrival for \$20. This will allow you to stay for a maximum of one month, but can be extended for one more month for a fee of around \$45-50. Your hotel can arrange the renewal, and it usually takes a day or two. The maximum you can stay on a tourist visa is two months. If you want to stay longer you should get a business visa. See <http://www.renegadetravels.com/how-to-stay-in-cambodia-long-term-your-visa-options/> for further details.

Indonesia

US and UK passport holders can obtain a visa on arrival for \$25.

Laos

US and UK passport holders can obtain a visa on arrival for \$30-\$40. The exact costs depends on the exchange rate on the day. I paid \$36 for my visa. We crossed into Laos at the Chiang Khong-Huay Xai border, and the visa formalities were very easy.

Malaysia

US and UK passport holders can enter Malaysia without a visa and can stay for up to 90 days. When we arrived in Kuala Lumpur we were stamped into the country in under 30 seconds.

Myanmar

US and UK passport holders need to get visas in advance to visit Myanmar.

Philippines

US and UK passport holders can enter Philippines without a visa and can stay for up to 30 days (from 1 August 2013 – previously 21 days).

Singapore

US and UK passport holders can enter Singapore without a visa and can stay for up to 90 days.

Thailand

US and UK passport holders can enter Thailand without a visa and can stay for up to 30 days. Visas can be extended within Thailand quite easily. See <http://www.renegadetravels.com/thailand-visa-options-for-long-term-stays/> if you plan to stay longer.

Timor-Leste (East Timor)

US and UK passport holders can obtain a visa on arrival for \$30.

Vietnam

US and UK passport holders need to either get a visa in advance for Vietnam, or get a visa on arrival by first getting a visa approval letter.

Wikipedia is a great place to find up to date visa information:

UK Citizens - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visa_requirements_for_British_nationals

US Citizens - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visa_requirements_for_United_States_nationals

Start A Blog

Not everyone who travels will enjoy blogging, but it's a good way of earning some extra cash for your travels, and also a way to get some freebies along the way. It's also a great way for friends and family to follow along with your travels. There are plenty of great books available on setting up blogs, so I won't go into details here. You can follow us at www.renegadetravels.com.

How To Find The Cheapest Flights

If you're traveling around Southeast Asia you probably won't need to take many flights, as you're able to get to most places by bus or train. And traveling by bus or train is usually a lot cheaper. But there will be times when you'll probably want to get the odd flight. We only got four flights during our 6-7 months traveling around Southeast Asia, and for one of those we could have got a bus.

Lots has been written about how to get cheap or free flights, but most of it only applies to US residents. You won't find many of these deals in Southeast Asia, but you will find some low-cost carriers that offer very cheap flights, especially if you book in advance.

My favorite is Air Asia. We've flown with them a few times, always had great service, and the prices have been competitive. What I don't like about them though is all the add-on costs. You have to pay extra for luggage that's checked in and also extra if you want to be guaranteed seats next to the people you're traveling with. But you get these extra costs with most low-cost airlines, so what you really need to check is the overall price that you'll be paying.

If you can plan your travels around Southeast Asia fairly far ahead it's possible to get some real bargains. I suggest you sign up with [Air Asia](#) so that you get any announcements of cheap flights. Also like their facebook page, as you'll see many offers there as well. Finally, sign up to BIG (<http://www.tune2big.com/th/en/>), which is their air miles program. You won't collect enough points to get free flights, but they do sometimes off cheap deals to members. Remember, you'll only see these deals if you sign up.

For traveling in Thailand, I'd also suggest checking out [Nok Air](#), as they also have competitive prices. We've never flown with them but know people that have got good deals.

In Laos we used [Lao Airlines](#) to fly from Luang Prabang to Hanoi.

For cheap flight from Europe or North America to Southeast Asia, I'd suggest checking out a range of websites, and also getting on their mailing lists, as most send out special offers. The more time you have before you're due to travel, and the more flexible your travel dates are, the better deals you're likely to get. The following websites are all worth checking out.

skyscanner.com

kayak.com

airfarewatchdog.com

momondo.com

google.com/flights

If you're a US resident, you can also get large amounts of free air miles by signing up for various credit cards. This can mean cheap or even free flights. I'm not a US resident so have never done this, but check online if this is something that you're interested in. Many people gets lots of free flights using this method.

How To Find Affordable Accommodation

Accommodation will probably be one of your biggest expenses while traveling, so it's a great idea to be able to save as much as possible on those costs.

Hostels

I'm not fan of hostels, but many travelers love them, and you can really cut don't your costs by staying at them. In Chiang Mai for example, we saw hostels that charged as little as 100 baht (\$3.35) per night. If your budget is really tight, then staying at hostels (at least some of the time) is something worth considering. I haven't used any of the following sites to find hostels, but I know people who have, so check them out if you're planning to stay at any.

agoda.com (enter city name, then click on "hostels" on right hand menu in search results)

hotels.com

hotelscombined.com (enter city name, then click on "hostels" on left hand menu in search results)

hostelbookers.com

hostels.com

hostelworld.com

hihostels.com

Hotels

But if you prefer to stay at hotels and guesthouses, don't worry, because it's also possible to keep costs low. Our accommodation costs averaged \$11 per person per night. In Thailand we spent an average of less than \$7 per person per night on our accommodations costs. This was greatly helped by getting a monthly rate at Smith Residence in Chiang Mai, where we stayed for 55 days. Staying longer can dramatically reduce your daily spend. In complete contrast, we spent over \$45 per person per night in Singapore. So where you travel to can also have a huge bearing on your total costs. But every country we visited in Southeast Asia had reasonable accommodation costs, although Singapore was a bit of an exception.

There are numerous hotel booking websites, but we usually stick to Agoda, as they are one of the biggest operators in Southeast Asia, and we've found their prices to be very competitive compared to other booking sites. These things can change though, so I'd suggest checking with a few different sites to see which have the best offers when you're ready to book.

One of the reasons that we tend to stick with one booking site is that it's easier to accumulate points that you can use towards free or discount stays. If you book ten hotel stays via five different websites you likely won't have enough points with any of them to have a free night's stay. But if all the bookings were via one site, then you might qualify for a free night. But you have to balance this out with any losses you incurred by maybe paying more initially. With Agoda the points are equivalent to 3-7% of your booking, so this can add up quickly.

Another reason that I like to stick with one site is that it saves me time. It can be tedious enough looking for hotels on one site, let alone 3-4. But when I do settle on a possible hotel I often have a

quick check just to make sure another site isn't offering a much better deal. If it was I'd book on the other site. But you need to take a balanced view of these things. There's no point spending an extra two hours searching just to get a hotel for \$29 instead of \$30.

But I'd suggest you sign up with all the main hotel booking sites, as they have special offers and insider deals that you wouldn't see otherwise. The main sites that I use are:

agoda.com

hotels.com

hotelscombined.com

Private Accommodation

If you'd prefer to stay in a private home, then a number of sites catering to this demand have sprung up over the last few years. This can be a good option, although I've never found anything to match the hotels we've stayed at. But I do check from time to time just in case. The main ones that I'm aware of are as follows.

roomorama.com

wimdu.com

airbnb.com

9flats.com

Housesitting

An option for totally free stays is to consider housesitting. Many people that go on vacation like to have someone to look after their house and pets while they are away, and this is how you can get free stays. It's a situation that works perfectly for both parties, as the house owner get someone to look after their property and pets, and the house sitter gets a place to stay for free. House sits can range from a few days to a few months, and are available all over the world. There are many websites that cater to house sitters, with the following being among the most popular.

housecarers.com



trustedhousesitters.com

mindmyhouse.com

There are many others, but these are a good place to start your search.

Couch Surfing

If your budget is so small that you don't even know how you can afford any accommodation at all, then couch surfing could be for you. CouchSurfing.org connects people that are offering free

accommodation with those that are looking for it. It means staying with someone in their own home, and for many travelers this is a great option, not just because it's free, but because you get to meet local people that will show you around the area.

But if you're going to stay for free, it's only fair that you also offer free accommodation for other travelers in your own home. This is a two way thing, and isn't meant for freeloaders. But it's a great way to meet people.

We haven't tried this personally, but know people that have. You'll need to read up on it, and take special notice of the safety advice.

Other Affordable Travel Considerations

Travel During Low Season

This is a major way to save money while traveling around SE Asia. Accommodation is always a major expense when traveling, and prices come down during the low season. You'll also have a wider choice of accommodation and can negotiate some great long-term deals. You're also more likely to be offered free upgrades, as hotels will usually have more free rooms.

Even if the cost was the same I'd still prefer traveling around SE Asia during low season, as there are less tourists around, which means less queues for attractions, etc. As an example, we had read that there were sometimes queues for the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum in Hanoi that were a couple of hours long, but when we arrived in low season it only took a few minutes to buy the tickets and get into the mausoleum. Also, the boats along the Mekong from Huay Xai to Luang are often overfull, but ours had just four passengers - us and a couple from Chile. Traveling during low season can make the whole experience much more pleasant.

The high season in Thailand is from November until February, so we decided to start our travels in March. High and low seasons vary slightly in each country, so when you travel depends on which countries you plan to visit. Southeast Asia is still fairly cheap even in high season, so this doesn't have to be a major consideration.

One thing to be aware of is that some places in Southeast Asia suffer from flooding during the rainy season. The rainy season can vary in all countries, so could start a month early or end a month late. The rainy season could also happen at different times in different parts of a particular country. Here is a general overview of the rainy seasons in the countries we visited.

Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam: The rainy season runs from around May until October, although this can vary slightly from year to year. In Thailand, the wettest month is usually September.

Malaysia: On the west coast there are two rainy seasons - April through May, and October through November.

Singapore: The rainy season is September through February.

Indonesia: The rainy season runs from November to March, but can vary greatly from place to place.

I don't think the rainy season is something to worry about, although it would be wise to check weather conditions before you travel. We visited a few countries during the rainy season but didn't see hardly any rain at all. I would never have guessed that I was in the rainy season unless I knew.

Take Buses And Trains Instead Of Flights

I much prefer traveling by bus and train, and they are usually much cheaper. You also get time to see the countryside, as opposed to seeing the inside of an airport terminal. Our bus from Saigon to Phnom Penh cost us \$13, while the cheapest flight I found was \$160. So that's a saving of \$147 even before you take account of extra charges for luggage and getting to and from the airport.



Mekong Express Bus From Saigon To Phnom Penh

Something to be aware of though, is that roads in many parts of SE Asia can be pretty dangerous, and over the last few years I've heard of numerous bus crashes here that have killed hundreds of people. For this reason I prefer to get a train if possible. But sometimes a bus is the only available option.

There are some occasions when I will opt for a flight over a train. When we traveled from Luang Prabang in Laos to Hanoi in Vietnam, we had the choice of a bus for \$50, or a flight for \$155. The bus journey was 24 hours' long, didn't have any toilets, and was described by many as the *Bus Journey From Hell*. That was enough to convince us to pay the extra and travel in comfort. Traveling on a budget isn't all about saving money, but about spending less where you can so that you can afford a few luxuries along the way.

Use Local Transport

Many tourists have a tendency to get taxis everywhere, but traveling like a local can save you quite a bit of money getting around. Most of SE Asia has some very affordable public transport, so why not use it. In George Town for example, you can pay \$4-5 to travel a short distance by taxi, yet a local bus will only cost \$0.30. George Town even has a free bus that runs from KOMTAR Tower to Weld Quay, where the ferry terminal is. In Bangkok, taxis are incredibly cheap, so are worth using, but there are still cheaper options if money is really tight. Buses and boats are a cheap and more interesting way to get around the city.



Orange Flag Boat On Chao Phraya River In Bangkok

Stay Longer

This is a great way to save lots of money. Instead of dashing about and only spending a few days in each place, slow down and spend weeks or months in one place. This has several major advantages. The most obvious is the saving you can make on accommodation costs. When we first arrived in Chiang Mai we had pre-booked two nights at [Smith Residence](#) at a cost of around \$21 per night. But we decided to stay long-term and paid monthly instead. This brought the cost down to \$14 per night. So that's a saving of \$7 per night or \$210 per month. That's a lot of money when you're traveling on a budget.

Another saving is on transport costs. If you're moving once a week, you're going to be spending four times as much on transport between places, when compared to moving once a month.

Staying longer means that you'll also get to know the places you visit a lot better, and this will mean that you are more likely to find the best places to eat at the best prices. You'll also get to know the markets that the locals shop at. All this adds up to saving a few extra dollars every day.

Eat Where The Locals Eat

The locals always know the best places to eat, and in most of SE Asia these places will be incredibly cheap. So get out of the tourist areas of town, and hang out where the locals do. You'll end up paying a small fraction of the prices you pay in tourist areas.



Noodles For Sale In Chiang Mai

Avoid Alcohol

For quite a few travelers, spending on alcohol seems to be a big part of their budget. We all like to party from time to time, and there's nothing wrong with that. But if you're on a tight budget, cutting out alcohol can be one of the easiest ways to save money. If you don't want to avoid alcohol entirely, then consider cutting back a little. A good place to start is to make a note of all the money you spend on alcohol over a week or two. The result is often enough to shock many people into cutting back, as this is the first time they realize how much they actually spend on it.

Thailand

Days Spent In Thailand: 60

Total Cost: \$2,510 (Food & Drink \$1,339, Transport \$112, Miscellaneous \$233, Accommodation \$825)

Cost Per Day: \$21 per person



Songkran Festival In Chiang Mai

Thailand turned out to be one of the cheapest countries we visited, which was a bit of a surprise, as we were expecting Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam to be cheaper. Over 60 days we spent a total of \$2,510, which works out at \$21 per person per day. As everyone who has visited Thailand will know, they have some of the best food in the world, with prices that even the most budget-conscious traveler can afford. If you're on a very tight budget and can only afford to visit one country in SE Asia, I'd suggest you head to Thailand. You can have a great time there for next to nothing.

After leaving the UK I lived in Bangkok for just under three years before setting off on my travels, so I haven't taken the costs of living there into account when coming up with the spending figures in this book. The reasons for this are because I was a permanent resident there, and also because I didn't keep any records of what I spent. But the general costs of living there are similar to the overall costs of our travels. You'll probably want to spend at least a little time in Bangkok though, so I've included a section on Bangkok below.

Bangkok

Bangkok is one of my favorite cities in the world, and is regularly voted one of the best cities to visit by tourists. But Bangkok isn't for everyone, so whether you decide to visit it or not is your choice, but I suggest you spend at least a few days there.

[Click here for some great Bangkok hotel deals.](#)

Bangkok has accommodation, food and entertainment to suit all budgets, so you can afford to stay here even on a tight budget. It's also a great place from which to take a few side trips. Two that are worth mentioning that we did before leaving on our travels were to Mae Khlong and Kanchanaburi. I've included details of both here, as they are interesting trips that you may like to take.

Mae Khlong Market Train

This is a day trip, as Mae Khlong is only an hour or so from Bangkok. If you haven't heard of the train that runs through Mae Khlong market, then take a look at this video -->

<http://youtu.be/UqUafue6vBE>. There's a market on the railway tracks at Mae Khlong, and a few times a day the market traders have to move out of the way to let the train through. It's an amazing sight to watch the synchronized way that the traders make space for the train and then get back to work seconds later. There is talk of moving the market, so get there soon if you want to see this amazing sight.

To get to Mae Khlong, just take a BTS to Victory Monument and ask the van drivers which van goes to Mae Khlong. The cost is only around 70 baht (\$2.30). It's best to go early morning as there are less tourists there and you'll get some better photo and video opportunities.

The trains are scheduled to arrive at the station at 08:30, 11:10, 14:30 and 17:40, with departures scheduled for 06:20, 09:00, 11:30 and 15:30. The trains are pretty unreliable so you could be waiting around for a while for them to arrive. But it's worth the wait.

There isn't much else to do in Mae Khlong as it's just a very small market town. There are two floating markets nearby though, so you could head there either before or after seeing the train. The more famous of the two is Damnoen Saduak, but this one is also very touristy. The other one is Amphawa Floating Market, and this is a mostly Thai market, so is much more authentic. You can get a van from Mae Khlong to Amphawa for just 20 baht (\$0.70). At this market everyone sits on the steps and orders food from the boats on the river. The food is delivered in a basket at the end of a long pole.

If you prefer to visit Damnoen Saduak, I'd suggest getting a van from Victory Monument to the market first, and then another van to Mae Khlong. If you prefer taking a tour, which will be more expensive, you'll find these offered by most hotels and lots of travel agents around Bangkok.

Kanchanaburi River Kwai Bridge & Death Railway

This is a great trip to take from Bangkok, and while it can be done in a day I'd suggest staying overnight in Kanchanaburi. It's possible to take a van or bus to Kanchanaburi, but taking a train is much more fun.

There are two trains a day that leave Bangkok Thonburi station, and both stop at Kanchanaburi and River Kwai Bridge stations. Which one you get off at depends on where your hotel is, so ask them where you need to get off. But Kanchanaburi town is fairly small, so it's doesn't matter too much which one you get off at. The train that departs from Bangkok at 07:45 arrives at Kanchanaburi at 10:45, River Kwai Bridge at 10:55, and Nam Tok (the end of the line) at 12:20. The second train leaves at 13:55, arriving at the three stops at 16:19, 16:29 and 18:30. It's probably best to get the morning train.

Getting to Thonburi station can be a little complicated, but is also a lot of fun. You can either take the easy option and get a taxi, or take the more interesting route, as we did. First of all get the BTS (skytrain) to Saphan Taksin, and then follow the signs to Tha Sathorn (Central Pier). It's only a 1-2 minute walk and clearly signposted. You then need to get the *Orange Flag* boat to Wang Lang (Pier N10). From there you'll need to get a motorcycle taxi or regular taxi. We paid a total of 120 baht (\$4) for BTS, boat and taxi. That's just \$2 each. The boat takes around 30 minutes, and the taxi takes 2-3 minutes.

The trains to Kanchanaburi are 3rd class and only cost 100 baht (\$3.35). There is plenty of food for sale on the train and it's a very pleasant journey.

How long you stay in Kanchanaburi depends on what exactly you want to see. Most people want to see the train crossing the River Kwai Bridge, so that's what we did on the first day. If you get there early in the day there'll be a lot less people, as most tourists turn up in the afternoon, mostly on coach tours. There are six trains a day that cross the bridge, and there is a timetable next to the bridge. The trains are usually late though, so I'm not sure how much use the timetables really are. You can also walk across the bridge, and even stand on it when the train crosses it.

If you want to see the site of the Death Railway at Hellfire Pass, you'll need to take the train all the way to Nam Tok. This is what we did on our second day there. We took the 06:05 train, as this meant getting there before most tourists arrive later in the day. From Nam Tok you'll need to get a songthaew to Hellfire Pass. These cost 800 baht (\$27), so it's a good idea to share with other people, as you are hiring the whole vehicle. But for that price the driver will take you there, wait for you, and then bring you back. He'll even stop along the way if you want. We stopped at Sai Yok Noi Waterfall on the way back. The morning train is interesting because lots of local people use it, including lots of schoolchildren that get on at various stops along the way.

The main highlight of the train journey to Nam Tok is that the train passes over the famous Wampo Viaduct on the River Kwai. The scenery along this stretch of line is also pretty stunning. Sit near the back of the train and on the right hand side to get the best views. The train ticket is 100 baht (\$3.35), although seats in the last carriage, which has the best views of Wampo Viaduct, cost 300 baht (\$10) each.

There is a museum at Hellfire Pass that shows how people suffered while building the railway during World War 2. You can also walk along the pass where the railway used to be. It's a very moving experience.

While in Kanchanaburi, we stayed at [Sabai@Kan Resort](#). You can see a short video of this hotel here --> <http://youtu.be/Ait8SNxqc4U>.

Bangkok To Ayutthaya

The easiest way to get from Bangkok to Ayutthaya is by train. Trains run from Bangkok's Hua Lamphong station almost every hour, and only cost 15 baht (\$0.45) per person. Ayutthaya is around 70 km from Bangkok, and the train takes around an hour and 45 minutes. These trains are 3rd class and only have fans, not aircon. You can buy tickets on the day, so there's no need to book in advance. Food and drink is available on the train from sellers that walk up and down the carriages.

You can get trains with aircon, but these trains are the ones that travel to Chiang Mai, so tickets to Ayutthaya are very restricted and only available to book in advance a day or two before travel. It doesn't seem worth the extra hassle for such a short journey.

If you only want to spend a day in Ayutthaya, then you can get an early train there, and a late train back to Bangkok.

Ayutthaya

We spent two nights in Ayutthaya, and felt that that was enough time. While Ayutthaya is a must-see for most tourists to Thailand, there isn't actually too much to see or do there. The main attractions are the temples and ancient ruins, and you can easily get around them in a day.

We stayed at [Baan Are Gong Riverside Homestay](#), and were very happy with our choice. It's only around 100 meters from the train station, so was a good option for us, as we arrived and departed by train. The rooms here are fairly basic, but the attached restaurant has views over the river, so it was a great place to just hang out. The guesthouse was also able to arrange a 2-3 hour boat tour of the temples, at a cost of only 150 baht (\$5) per person. We thoroughly enjoyed this and thought it was a great way to get to see some of the temples.

The guesthouse also had a good choice of food at reasonable prices, including plenty of vegetarian options. The rooms at this guesthouse start at around \$12 per night.

Things To Do In Ayutthaya

Ayutthaya Historical Park - this park is a *UNESCO World Heritage Site* and is the only reason that most tourists visit Ayutthaya. There are numerous temples and ruins to visit in this park.



Ayutthaya Temple Ruins At Sunset

Cruise On Chao Phraya River - After you've visited the temples and old ruins, you can take a relaxing cruise along the Chao Phraya River. It's also possible to combine a river cruise with a visit to a few temples and ruins, as we did.

Ayutthaya To Chiang Mai

The easiest way to get from Ayutthaya to Chiang Mai is by train. The train takes around 11 hours and costs around \$10 for a 2nd class aircon carriage. You can get a 3rd class train for as little as \$5 or a first class sleeper for as much as \$40. We preferred to travel during the daytime, as there is some beautiful scenery along the way.

When you arrive in Chiang Mai you'll probably need to get a songthaew from the train station to your hotel. If your hotel is near the city center, this shouldn't cost more than about 50 baht per person. Many of the songthaews at the train station will ask for much more than this, so you'll either need to bargain them down or walk out of the station to the main road and flag down a passing songthaew. The songthaews that hang around the train station seem to be very overpriced.

Chiang Mai

Chiang Mai is another of my favorite cities, and is one of the few places in the world that I could imagine living permanently. Accommodation here is extremely cheap, and mostly very good quality. Before arriving in Chiang Mai we booked a couple of nights at [Smith Residence](#), with a plan to check out other accommodation options when we arrived there. But Smith Residence turned out to be exactly what we were looking for, so we stayed there for our entire stay of around 7 weeks.



Rooftop Pool At Smith Residence In Chiang Mai

We stayed in a corner room that cost us 9,000 baht (\$300) per month, which we thought was very reasonable for the quality of accommodation. We had to pay extra for electricity, water and internet, and this added around 3,000 baht (\$100) to the cost. Smith Residence is a mixture of long-stay and short-stay hotel, with many residents that have been there for a few years. It has a small swimming pool and fitness center on the 8th floor.

We also checked out other accommodation options in Chiang Mai, and found many places that were available for as little as \$100 per month. The easiest way to find this cheaper accommodation is to

walk around and check out any condo buildings that you like the look of. There are a couple opposite Smith Residence, and we were told that one of these had rooms at \$100 per month.

The main accommodation areas in Chiang Mai are within the old city (which tends to be fairly expensive), just outside the old city, around the night bazaar area, around Nimmanhaemin Road, and on Huay Kway Road between the old city and Chiang Mai University.

Many people that live outside the center opt to rent a scooter for the duration of their stay, as this is a great way to get around town. A basic scooter can cost as little as \$30 per month to rent, or \$2 if renting daily. So renting a condo a little further out can work out well, even after taking the costs of the scooter into account.



Scooters For Rent In Chiang Mai

If you opt not to hire a scooter, you can easily get around by using a songthaew, which is like a cross between a bus, taxi and truck. There are hundreds of them all over the city, and you'll never have to wait more than a couple of minutes for one. Most of the time there will be a few queued up waiting for passengers. The way these work is that you tell the driver where you want to go, agree the price, and then jump in the back, where there is seating for around ten people. You then pay the driver when you get off. For a short trip the cost should be around 20 baht (\$0.70), and around 30-50 baht (\$1-\$1.70) for longer journeys. The pricing also depends on how many other passengers there are. The songthaews will often wait until they are full, but if you want to get going right away you may be charged extra. Sometimes they'll take slight detours to drop people off or pick them up, so don't worry if it seems to be taking a different route to what you expected. They are a great way to get around the city though, and we used them all the time.

For a great range of food at bargain basement prices, head for the South Gate food market, which is open from 5 pm until midnight. This is the place where you can get great smoothies for 20 baht (\$0.70), and Thai meals starting at 30 baht (\$1). It's always packed in the evenings with a mixture of

local Thai people, expats and tourists. The food is a little more expensive in the old city and in the Nimmanhaemin Road areas, but still very cheap by Western standards.

There are plenty of vegetarian restaurants in Chiang Mai, with one of the most popular being Khun Churn, which is located on Nimmanhaemin Soi 17. It's famous for its daily all-you-can-eat buffet that costs just 129 baht (\$4.50). This was one of our favorite places to eat in Chiang Mai. Even though it's a vegetarian restaurant, many meat eaters flock here as well. Check out our favorite Chiang Mai vegetarian restaurants here --> <http://www.renegadetravels.com/the-best-vegetarian-food-in-chiang-mai/>.

There is plenty to do in Chiang Mai and the surrounding areas. Just check out one of the numerous tour companies that are scattered all over the city. They have enough adventures to keep you busy for weeks. Or if you want to take it easy, there are more relaxing activities such as massage and yoga. Chiang Mai also has a great cafe culture, and you'll find plenty of really good cafes around the city. You can check out our favorite cafes here --> <http://www.renegadetravels.com/best-coffee-shops-in-chiang-mai/>.



Coffee Lovers - One Of Our Favorite Cafes In Chiang Mai

Things To Do In Chiang Mai

Temples - The temples of Chiang Mai are a big draw for visitors to the city. Among the most popular are Wat Phra Tat on Doi Suthep, Wat Chedi Luang, Wat Phra Singh and Wat Suan Dok.

Markets - Chiang Mai has two excellent night markets - the Saturday night market at Wulai Road, and the Sunday night market centered around Rachadamnoen Road in the old city. You can spend hours strolling around these two night markets.



Chiang Mai's Sunday Night Market

Songkran Festival - Chiang Mai is really worth visiting during the annual Songkran Festival that takes place from 13-15 April. This is when there are mass water fights all over Thailand, with Chiang Mai being one of the best places to experience them. See a video of Chiang Mai Songkran Festival here --> <http://youtu.be/JaZGB-zldNA>.

Hilltribe Villages - This is a must-see for many visitors to Chiang Mai. There are many hilltribe villages in the area, and you can easily book a trip with one of the many tour companies in the city.

Craft Villages - Chiang Mai also has many craft villages where you can see products being made the traditional way. Just check with one of the local tour companies for details.

Chiang Mai To Chiang Rai

The easiest way to get from Chiang Mai to Chiang Rai is by bus. We took the Green Bus, which departs from Arcade bus station. This is a little way out of the city center so will cost around 50 baht (\$1.70) per person to get there by songthaew. Unless you're traveling during a busy period, there's no need to book your ticket in advance. We just turned up on the day and bought ours. We took the VIP bus, and this cost 288 baht (\$9.60) each. We tend to travel by VIP bus in Thailand whenever possible, due to the large number of serious accidents involving buses there. It's better to pay a little extra than end up seriously injured just for the sake of saving a couple of dollars. Your safety should always come first.

The bus takes around three hours to get to Chiang Rai, and travels through some beautiful mountain areas. There are two bus stations in Chiang Rai, and if you're going to be staying in the city center you'll need to get off at the old station near the night bazaar. This is the final stop. It also stops at the new bus station which is a few miles out of town, so don't be tempted to get off there. If you get off by mistake you'll have to pay for a tuk tuk into town. Once you arrive in Chiang Rai you'll probably need to take a tuk tuk to your hotel. This shouldn't cost more than 50 baht (\$1.67).

Chiang Rai

Chiang Rai is a great place to spend a few days. Despite being a small town, it has a few sights worth seeing, and has a fairly relaxing vibe.

Accommodation in Chiang Rai is very reasonably priced. We paid around \$18 per night to stay at [B2 Hotel](#), which is about 5 minutes' walk from the city center. It's a brand new hotel, and I would highly recommend it.

Things To Do In Chiang Rai

The White Temple (Wat Rong Khun) - One of the reasons we wanted to visit Chiang Rai was to see Wat Rong Khun, also known as The White Temple. This temple was designed and built by artist Chalermchai Kositpipat using only his own money. It is a magnificent temple, and totally different to all the other temples you'll see in Thailand. Murals on the walls of the temple include demons with the eyes of George Bush and Bin Laden; Chalermchai wishes everyone to know that the world is being destroyed by those that build weapons that kill.



The White Temple, Chiang Rai

The temple is located about 13 km (8 miles) outside the city center, but it's easy to get to by public transport. Just get the bus that departs from platform 8 of the old bus station in the city center, at a cost of 20 baht (\$0.67). Tell the conductor that you're going to the temple, and the bus will drop you off on the opposite side of the dual carriageway. There isn't any pedestrian crossing, so be very careful when crossing the road. To get back into town, just wait for a bus or songthaew on the other side of the road.

Night Bazaar - Another of Chiang Rai's attractions is the night bazaar, which features an outdoor eating area with seating for around 300-400 people. There are around 40-50 food stalls around the seating where you can get all manner of food, including giant deep fried bugs.



Dinner At Chiang Rai Night Bazaar

Clock Tower - The clock tower at night is also a must-see attraction for many. At 7 pm, 8 pm and 9 pm, there is a coordinated light and music show that lasts for 5-10 minutes. Each show attracts well over a hundred people, mostly sitting on the pavements around the clock. You can see a video of the clock tower here --> <http://youtu.be/LLZnbcvH2-l>.

Chiang Rai To Chiang Khong

The bus journey from Chiang Rai to Chiang Khong takes around two hours, and costs 65 baht (\$2.20) per person. Buses leave the old bus station in the city center every hour from 6 am to 5 pm. Our journey was pretty interesting, as many Thai bus journeys tend to be. We were the last on the bus and the only seats available were at the back next to a large washing machine that someone from Chiang Khong had ordered. And what better way to deliver it than by public bus! We then made numerous stops along the way to drop off packages of all sorts to various shops and businesses. It seemed that the bus was also a parcel delivery service. One guy on a motorbike even rode up to the bus and stopped it so that he could give the bus conductor a parcel to deliver to a shop further on. It's these little experiences that help make Thailand such an interesting place.

On arrival in Chiang Khong there will be lots of tuk tuks waiting for the bus. You'll most likely need one to take you to your hotel.

Chiang Khong

There isn't anything of note in Chiang Khong, as it's mostly known for its border crossing to Laos, and this is the only reason that most travelers come. While in Chiang Khong we stayed at the [Portside Hotel](#), as it's only around 100 meters from the Thai Immigration office that we needed to pass through.



Portside Hotel - You Can See Laos Across The River

There isn't much to do in the town, but there are a few cafes, restaurants and bars that you can hang out in.

Chiang Khong To Huay Xai

Crossing the border from Thailand to Laos was the most interesting border crossing I've ever done, and the only one I've done by small boat. It's also very easy. First you need to visit the Thai Immigration office to get your passport stamped to show that you're leaving Thailand. Then walk down the hill and buy a ticket for the boat. This only costs 40 baht (\$1.40). Then hop onto the boat, and a few minutes later you'll be in Laos. Here's a video of us crossing the border by boat --> <http://youtu.be/Zfm5nVHWZgE>.

Once the boat arrives in Laos you'll need to get a visa from the Laos Immigration office that's located on the right hand side at the bottom of the hill. The preferred currency for the visa is \$US. The cost varies depending on your nationality and the current exchange rate. For a UK citizen it was \$36 on the day we arrived. \$US might be a bit difficult to get in Chiang Khong, so I'd suggest you get them in advance, preferably from your home country. The visa process can take from 5-30 minutes, depending on how busy it is when you arrive. It's very straightforward though.

Laos

Days Spent In Laos: 5

Total Cost: \$241 (Food & Drink \$132, Transport \$8, Miscellaneous \$50, Accommodation \$52)

Cost Per Day: \$24 per person



Our Slow Boat On The Mekong River

We only spent a few days in Laos, so I'm not sure if the costs above give a good idea of what it might cost to stay longer term. The daily cost was about the same as we spent in Thailand, but our time there wasn't typical of how we'd stay long-term. The main reason for us visiting Laos was to take a slow boat down the Mekong, which we thoroughly enjoyed. We also wanted to visit Luang Prabang, and had to pass through Laos to get to Vietnam, which we were both looking forward to.

Laos was recently named *World's Best Tourism Destination For 2013* by the European Council on Tourism and Trade.

Huay Xai

Huay Xai is much like Chiang Khong - a border crossing town full of hotels, restaurants and bars. We hadn't booked a hotel in advance for our one night in Huay Xai, so we checked out a few once we got there. Once you've got through immigration, just walk to the top of the short hill, and you'll be on the main street. You will find lots of hotels and guesthouses on this street. We stayed at the [Friendship Guest House](#), which wasn't great. But it only cost \$10 and was only for one night, so not a real problem. There is a cafe opposite the hotel called Dream Bakery that has a great selection of cakes and pastries. It's well worth a visit.

Huay Xai To Luang Prabang Via Pakbeng

Our next destination in Laos was Luang Prabang, and one of the best ways to get there is by slow boat. The journey takes two days, with the boats stopping overnight in Pakbeng. This particular journey is one of the highlights of traveling SE Asia for many people, and it was for us as well.

For this journey you have a choice of using a public or private boat. We did a lot of research on this, and many report that the public boats are often overcrowded and uncomfortable. Numerous people

also report that they had to sit on the floor for the two-day trip because there wasn't enough seating. As we wanted our slow boat trip to be a relaxing affair we decided to check out some private companies and were lucky enough to be offered a complimentary trip by [Nagi of Mekong](#). This is one of the advantages of setting up a blog before you leave.

The Nagi of Mekong boats only have 24 seats so don't get overcrowded, and everyone is guaranteed a seat. The cost of the two-day trip is around \$160, which seems expensive compared to the public boats that cost around \$30. But you also need to factor in the fact that the Nagi boat trip includes a hot lunch on both days, free tea, coffee and fruit all day, and the hotel stay in Pakbeng. Vegetarian food is also available, so be sure to mention this when booking if it's something that you want. If you're on a tight budget the public boat may be your only option, but I think that for this particular part of traveling SE Asia it's worth spending a little extra if you can afford it.

The boat trip down the Mekong River was something I'll remember for the rest of my life. The scenery was truly stunning, with hundreds of miles of beautiful, unspoiled countryside. As we traveled in low season, we pretty much had the boat to ourselves. There was just us two, a couple from Chile, the captain, his wife (the cook) and their son, our guide, Kae, and one other person. This highlights why traveling during low season is such a good idea. We had one guide for four passengers, whereas during high season we may have had one guide for 24 passengers. We were also able to move around and sit in different seats. All this made the journey more pleasurable than it might otherwise have been.

The boat trip is broken up with visits to hill tribe villages along the way, and these are a very interesting part of the journey. Some villages that we stopped at didn't have electricity or money, but just lived by hunting for and growing their food. The children in the villages all seemed very happy though, with many playing in the river, and even catching fish.



A Hilltribe Boy Shows Off The Fish He Caught

As well as the hill tribe villages we also stopped at Pak Ou Caves on the second day, and also saw other interesting sights along the way, such as elephants and buffalo.

The first day of the trip is from Huay Xai to Pakbeng, with the boat leaving at 9 am and arriving at 4 pm. The second day from Pakbeng to Luang Prabang took around eight hours, with the boat leaving at 7 am, and arriving at around 3 pm. The pier is 7 km outside Luang Prabang, so we needed to get a tuk tuk into town, which cost \$2.70 each.

Pakbeng

Pakbeng is a very small town that only seems to exist as a place for boat travelers to spend the night. We stayed at the beautiful [Mekong Riverside Lodge](#), which was part of the Nagi boat package. Pakbeng is a one street town that is mainly full of restaurants, hotels and guesthouses. But it does have a very interesting market that sells things such as snake meat, frogs, and buffalo skin. The snakes and frogs are caught in the nearby hills. There isn't much else to do in Pakbeng apart from eat, drink and sleep. The restaurants are pretty good quality though, with lots of fresh, local produce.



Python For Sale At Pakbeng Market

Luang Prabang

Luang Prabang is a beautiful town with lots of French architecture, and is well worth visiting. It has plenty to keep you entertained for a few days.

For our three days in Luang Prabang, we stayed at [Philaylack Villa](#), which cost \$15 per night. Some of the rooms there were quite small, but we got upgraded on our third night to a much bigger room. So if you're planning to stay there, try asking for a bigger room. The location is pretty good, as it's less than a minutes' walk to the river, and 2-3 minutes to the main area of Luang Prabang.

Things To Do In Luang Prabang

Monks Alms Giving Procession - One of the highlights of Luang Prabang is the monks alms giving procession that starts at 05:30 every morning. This is where people line the street to give food to the monks from the nearby temples. Luang Prabang is one of the few places where such a procession takes place. You can see a video of the alms giving procession here -->

http://youtu.be/Ueu_GzICWUc.



Monks Alms Giving Procession In Luang Prabang

Night Market - The Luang Prabang night market is a great place to pick up all sort of local crafts at rock-bottom prices. All the products we saw here were very good quality. Many people visit Luang Prabang just to shop at the night market.

Mekong River Trips - You can get many trips along the Mekong River from Luang Prabang, including trips to Pak Ou Caves. As we'd already spent two days traveling to Luang Prabang by boat, we gave these a miss.

Luang Prabang To Hanoi

For most people traveling on a budget, the only option of getting from Luang Prabang to Hanoi is by bus. This costs around \$50, and tickets can be booked at your hotel or via a travel agency in town. The bus leaves Luang Prabang at 6 pm every day, except Thursday, and the total journey time is around 24 hours. I had read many reports of this trip being described as the *Journey From Hell*, but what really put us off was the fact that the bus doesn't have any toilets. I read reports online of passengers being desperate to use the toilet, but the bus not stopping for hours on end or sometimes stopping at the side of the road, with passengers having to wander into the bushes to relieve themselves.

That was enough for us to consider getting a flight instead. Agencies in town were quoting \$165 for a Lao Airlines flight, but we got the same flight online from the [Lao Airlines](#) website for \$155. I think it was totally worth paying the extra money to travel in comfort.



Our Plane Ready For Take-Off From Luang Prabang

Vietnam

Days Spent In Vietnam: 29

Total Cost: \$1,631 (Food & Drink \$610, Transport \$253, Miscellaneous \$75, Accommodation \$693)

Cost Per Day: \$28 per person



Hoi An

We were both looking forward to visiting Vietnam and thought it would be one of our favorite countries, but while we did enjoy ourselves it's not somewhere we'll probably go back to. We had already decided that we wanted to stay longer than 30 days, so both applied for a 3-month visa from the Vietnam Embassy in Bangkok. We both got one, but when we arrived in Hanoi we were told that even though our passports showed a 3-month visa, the computer system only showed a 1-month visa. That meant paying around \$100 each extra to get the visas extended. As Miu is Thai, she could have got a 30-day stay without a visa, so her visa was a total waste of money. We felt ripped off, and this gave us a negative view of Vietnam as soon as we arrived.

While in Hanoi a couple of people tried to scam us, and we heard similar stories from others. And when we arrived in Ho Chi Minh City, most of the taxis refused to take us to the hotel unless we agreed to pay more than double the metered fare. We eventually found a taxi that agreed to use the meter, but even he took us on detour. So this is not something we want to go back to. We've since read that the number of tourists that return to Vietnam for a second visit is quite low, and this doesn't surprise me at all. Most Vietnamese people are very friendly and helpful, so it's a bit of a shame that more isn't done to sort out these scams.

I still think Vietnam is worth visiting though. We've met many people that loved it and plan to return, so it's not all bad by any means.

Hanoi

The first thing you notice about Hanoi is the crazy traffic. Most of the traffic is scooters and motorbikes, and they just don't stop for anyone. Even if you're at a crossing, the traffic won't stop. The key to crossing the road in Hanoi is to walk at a steady pace across the road, and let the traffic drive around you. Don't slow down, speed up or stop, or you're likely to get hit. We saw four

accidents during our 29 days in Vietnam. We hadn't seen any accidents before that and haven't seen any since.



Crazy Traffic In Hanoi

For our stay in Hanoi we booked the [Landmark Hanoi Hotel](#). It's a newly renovated hotel and is in a great location in Hoan Kiem district, which is the main tourist area. We could walk to all of the area's main attractions from here, including Hoan Kiem Lake, St Joseph's Cathedral, Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, the weekend night market, and Hanoi's Old Quarter, where you'll find lots of restaurants, art and quirky shops.

We spent ten days in Hanoi, but felt that 4-5 days would have been sufficient.

Things To Do In Hanoi

Hoan Kiem Lake - This beautiful lake in the heart of Hanoi is a popular place to stroll around, especially in the evenings, when it's a little cooler.



Hoan Kiem, Hanoi

St Joseph's Cathedral - This 19th century gothic cathedral serves Hanoi's Catholic population. Sunday mass at 6 pm draws the biggest crowds.

Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum - This is where you can see the embalmed body of Ho Chi Minh. There can be very long queues in high season, but as we were there in low season the queues were very short indeed.

Hoan Kiem Night Market - This market is open Friday to Sunday. It's not as good as the night markets in Chiang Mai or Luang Prabang, but is worth a visit.

Halong Bay - Many visitors to Hanoi take one or two trips out of the city, with the most popular being to Halong Bay. Halong Bay has around 1,600 islands and some spectacular scenery.

Sapa - This is another popular destination for trips out of Hanoi. It's home to many ethnic minority groups, and well worth a visit.

Hanoi To Hue

You can get from Hanoi to Hue by bus, train or plane. We love traveling by train, so opted for that. It's a 13-hour journey, and there are day and night trains, both with sleeper compartments. As we wanted to see the countryside on the way, we opted for the 06:15 train, which was due to arrive in Hue at 19:10. We opted for soft seats, with tickets costing 493,000 VND (\$24) each. That's a bargain basement price compared to train prices in the UK. You need to book your ticket in advance, as these trains are often fully booked. The train is actually the Hanoi to Saigon Express.

There is plenty of food available on the train, and the waiters also have an English language menu that you can order food from, although you'll probably have to ask for it. At the start of the journey, some very loud traditional Vietnamese music was played, along with an announcement of what wasn't allowed on the train. So something to be aware of is that corpses and body parts are not allowed on this train. Yes, they really did say that. I can only assume that they've had issues with this in the past.

Once you get to Hue you'll probably need to get a taxi to your hotel. Arriving at night in a new town can feel very disorientating, so I'm usually happy to pay a little extra for a taxi if I have to. We paid \$5 to get to our hotel, which was at the far end of town. On the way back to the station when we left Hue we got a metered taxi for \$2. So to anywhere in the town center from the train station shouldn't be more than around \$2. Try to get a metered taxi if you want the best price.

Hue

In Hue we stayed at [Than Thien Friendly Hotel](#) which we had booked in advance via Agoda. This cost less than \$12 per night, and despite the low price it turned out to be one of the best hotels we stayed at. The staff were super friendly and helpful, and spoke excellent English. The hotel owner has spent time in England and really makes an effort to make this a great hotel.

The food in Hue was among the cheapest we found anywhere in SE Asia. In one vegetarian restaurant, Quan Chay Thanh Lieu, we had lunch for \$0.50. The quality was very good, as was the portion size. The restaurant is at 50 Nguyen Cong Tru, a 2-3 minute walk from our hotel.

There are many cyclo drivers in Hue, most of whom are probably very honest and reputable, but we got offered illegal drugs quite a few times by some of them, so I'd advise being very careful when you're around them. It's the only time in SE Asia that we were offered illegal drugs.

Things To Do In Hue

Historic Monuments - Hue is perhaps best known for its many historic monuments within its *UNESCO World Heritage Site*. This is the main reason that so many tourists visit this town. You'll need a taxi to get around, so it's best to book one via your hotel.

Trang Tien Bridge & Market - This bridge is lit up beautifully at night, so attracts many visitors. There is also a small evening market next to the bridge that is worth visiting. You can see a short video of the bridge changing color here --> <http://youtu.be/bLLyV0yZSU>.



Trang Tien Bridge At Night

Bach Ma National Park - For a trip out of Hue, you could consider visiting the amazing Bach Ma National Park. A taxi there and back should cost around \$15-20. If you get your taxi driver to drive as far up the mountain as possible, you can walk to the top for some fantastic views.

Hue To Hoi An

You can get a bus from Hue to Hoi An, but getting the train means you have some fantastic views of the sea along the way. For the best views you'll need a seat on the left hand side of the train, so be sure to book long enough in advance to get these seats. We booked late, so all of these seats were already taken.

Hoi An doesn't have a train station, so you'll need to go to Danang and then get a taxi from there. There are only a few trains per day, and times vary depending on season. The journey is only around 2.5 hours and costs 77,000 VND (\$3.70). When you get to Danang there'll be lots of metered taxis outside the station. It cost us around \$20 for the trip to Hoi An, which took around 30 minutes.

Hoi An

Hoi An is a *UNESCO World Heritage Town*, and is a must-see stop for most travelers to Vietnam. If you love taking photos, then this will be a great place for you, as it really is a beautiful town. During the afternoon the old town is closed to traffic, so it's an easy place to walk or cycle around. You can hire bicycles for \$1 a day, and this is a good way to get around.



Japanese Bridge, Hoi An

Hoi An has a very large fresh market that's worth a visit. It's also known for its many tailors' shops, so if you need new clothes this is the place to get them.

You can see a couple of videos of Hoi An here --> <http://youtu.be/3Rbu-MExIQs> (part 1); <http://youtu.be/sI3pNhAFHR8> (part 2).

For our stay in Hoi An, we booked a few nights at [Hoi An Lantern Hotel](#), which was a few minutes' walk from the old town. It's opposite one of the best vegetarian restaurants that we ate at in SE Asia - [Karma Waters](#). This restaurant also has vegetarian cookery classes, and does many authentic tours of the area.

Hoi An also has a beach, and you can easily get there by motorbike or taxi.

Things To Do In Hoi An

Ancient Town - Hoi An Ancient town is a *UNESCO World Heritage Center*, and is an exceptional example of a SE Asian trading port from the 15th to 19th century. Walking around the old town is an enjoyable way to spend a couple of days. You will find many things to see and do, and there are lots of cafes and restaurants that you got spend some relaxing time at.

Tailored Clothes - Many people that visit Hoi An do so because of the proliferation of tailors there. You can get high-quality clothing made for very reasonable prices.

Hoi An To Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon)

As already mentioned, Hoi An doesn't have a train station, so to get to our next destination (Ho Chi Minh City), we needed to get to Danang, and then get the train from there. If you're going to be taking the train, be sure to buy your onward train ticket when you first arrive in Danang, as you're unlikely to be able to buy a ticket on the day of travel.

The train from Danang to Ho Chi Minh City takes around 18 hours, so we opted for a soft sleeper. This cost us 1,149,000 VND (\$55) each. The soft sleeper compartments have four beds, so you'll need to share with other travelers. During our journey, we shared with a few different people, as some were only traveling a short distance. All were very friendly. There is hot and cold water available at the end of each carriage, so you can make your own tea and coffee if needed.

Music was played at various points during the journey, including the following song that was played as we arrived in Ho Chi Minh City --> <http://youtu.be/A3B3wRgLk4k>. The songs help make this a very interesting journey.

When we arrived in Hoi Chi Minh City there were lots of taxis outside the station, but none of them wanted to take us to our hotel because they said it was too close (about 1 mile). Many suggested that we take a motorbike taxi, even though we both had large suitcases. The motorbike riders said we could hold onto them on the back of the bike. We waited around until the crowds had gone, and then found a taxi that was both willing to take us and willing to use his meter. We later realized that he'd taken a major detour to get to the hotel.

Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon)

For our first few nights in Ho Chi Minh City, we stayed at [Aries Hotel](#), which we had pre-booked via Agoda. It's a newly renovated hotel that's hidden down a small lane off the big roundabout near Vietnam's only Starbucks. This means that the hotel is very quiet, and you can get a good night's sleep. It was only after we had moved to another hotel that we appreciated how quiet this hotel was. Ho Chi Minh City is amazingly noisy, and if you have a hotel near a main road it can be difficult to get to sleep. This is something to bear in mind when booking a hotel there.



We Loved The Food In Saigon

After a few days we moved to [Lucy Hotel](#), which is a great location with fantastic quality rooms, especially the ones at the front that overlook the park. Unfortunately, it was quite difficult for us to get a good night's sleep there because there was lots of noise from the street and from the aerobics

in the park that starts at around 5 am most days. It's worth checking out though if noise doesn't bother you so much. You can get some great deals there for long stays.



Our Beautiful (But Noisy) Room At Lucy Hotel

The easiest way to get around Ho Chi Minh City is by taxi, as the metered taxis are mostly reliable and cheap. Apart from the problems we had with taxis at the train station, the taxis we used were all ok.

Many tourists hang out around the backpacker area, and this has some really cheap accommodation and food, and it's a place you'll find plenty of other tourists and travelers to hang out with if that's your thing.

There are a growing number of expats that have decided to make Ho Chi Minh City their home, and many of these work in online ventures. They tend to live in large, shared houses away from the backpacker area. If you check out craigslist.org you'll find that many of these expats are offering rooms for rent. This is a great way to meet like-minded people and keep your accommodation costs down. A room in a shared house near the center of the city can be rented for \$200-\$300 per month.

Things To Do In Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon)

War Remnants Museum - This is an interesting museum that shows the horrors of the Vietnam War. It contains graphic images and is somewhat controversial. It's quite shocking for some people, but well worth a visit.

FITO Museum - A museum set in a small old house that gives you the history of traditional medicine in Vietnam.

Saigon Opera House - This is a wonderful example of French Colonial architecture. It's one of the few buildings in Saigon that really impresses.

Reunification Palace - This is a Saigon landmark, and is where a North Vietnamese Army tank crashed through the gates during the fall of Saigon in April 1975.

Ben Tanh Market - This is a large market in central Saigon, and well worth a visit. But for some people it's just too crowded, and some of the sellers can be a little aggressive. You'll need to use your bargaining skills here, as prices tend to be set at tourist, not local, levels.

Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) To Phnom Penh

It's possible to get from Ho Chi Minh City to Phnom Penh by boat, but for our journey we decided to travel by bus. We took the Mekong Express, which cost us \$13 for a journey that took around six hours. The bus had toilets and we were provided with free water and snacks.

The bus passes through the border town of Bavet, and this is where I got my visa for Cambodia. The cost was \$20, although the bus company charges \$5 extra for what they claim is express service. Miu didn't need a visa, but only got a 14-day stay. We both extended our visas for one month while we were in Phnom Penh, and this cost us \$49 each.

Once you arrive in Phnom Penh you'll most likely need to get a tuk-tuk to your hotel. To most of the central areas of the city this should cost around \$2-4.

You can see a video of our bus journey here --> <http://youtu.be/J3fPNNWP7qw>.

Cambodia

Days Spent In Cambodia: 41

Total Cost: \$2,344 (Food & Drink \$1,102, Transport \$73, Miscellaneous \$110, Accommodation \$1,060)

Cost Per Day: \$29 per person



Ta Prohm Temple, Siem Reap

Out of all the countries that we visited in SE Asia, Cambodia turned out to be one of our favorites, although it's quite difficult to pick favorites when most countries in this area are so great. We'll definitely be going back there soon. We arrived on tourist visas and had already extended them once, so we had to leave. But if we'd known how great it was going to be, we'd have got business visas and stayed a little longer.

We only visited Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, but would like to explore the country a little more next time.

Phnom Penh

There aren't many places in the world that I can imagine living permanently, but Phnom Penh is one of them. We stayed on Street 278, which I think is one of the best areas of the city. The street itself and the surrounding area is a great place to spend some time walking around. The streets are mostly filled with trees and beautiful villas, although there are some large condos starting to appear.

During our time in Phnom Penh we stayed at four different hotels. The first one we stayed at was [Amber House](#). As well as the main building, this hotel also has a second building across the street, and that is where we stayed. We had one of the two balcony rooms, and these are probably the best ones in the building. We would have stayed here a little longer but it was fully booked.

We then spent a few days at [Goldie Boutique Guesthouse](#), which is just around the corner on Street 57. This was only \$25 per night for a balcony room. We had a look at some of the other rooms, but

they looked a bit depressing. The balcony rooms have lots of light though and some great views of the surrounding area.

The third hotel we stayed at was our favorite hotel in our travels around SE Asia, and we'll definitely be staying there again when we go back to Phnom Penh. [HomeFeel CS Hotel](#) was just about perfect for us. This hotel only opened about a week before we stayed there, and is renovated to a very high standard. We booked two nights to begin with, but ended staying for 30. The hotel had a small swimming pool, fitness center, free tea, coffee and water, kettle and safety deposit box in the room, and a very nice balcony.

For our last three days in Phnom Penh we decided to try [J Villa](#) hotel, which was just across the road. This hotel has an outdoor swimming pool and cafe area, and looks very upmarket. But it turned out to be a little disappointing after staying at the previous hotel. Our room didn't have a wardrobe or cupboard, so the only place to hang our clothes was on a coat stand at the entrance. Also, the bathroom area wasn't very well lit, so shaving was a bit of an effort. There wasn't a kettle in the room either. It's these little things that can make the difference between a good stay and a great stay. It really made us appreciate the previous hotel even more and we wished we had stayed there. But J Villa has larger rooms and a better outdoor area, so it wasn't a bad hotel by any means.

If you're a foodie, then you'll love Phnom Penh, as there are some really good restaurants there, especially around the [Street 278](#) area. Phnom Penh also has lots of things to do.

Things To Do In Phnom Penh

Killing Fields at Choeung Ek & Toul Sleng Genocide Museum - These are must-see attractions for most visitors to Phnom Penh. Toul Sleng, also known as S-21, is a former school that was converted to a torture center by the Khmer Rouge regime. The Killing Fields are where many men, women and children were tortured and executed. Visiting both places is a very moving experience.



Killing Fields At Choeung Ek

Independence Monument - This is a major city landmark that was built to celebrate independence from French rule. Celebrations take place here every year on 9 November, which is Independence Day.



Independence Monument At Night

Royal Palace - This is a major tourist attraction in the city center. Although the royal family doesn't live there these days, there is still plenty to see, including many buildings with beautiful architecture.

Wat Phnom - This is a temple located on a hill surrounded by a large park. Phnom is Cambodian for hill. Penh is the name of the woman that founded the temple, and it is thought that this is how Phnom Penh got its name.



Wat Phnom

Central Market - This is worth a visit just to see the huge art-deco building that was built in 1937 during the French colonial period. The market sells all sorts of goods, but they tend to be more expensive than similar goods at the Russian Market.

Russian Market - This is the place to visit to get a real bargain. It got its name during the 1980s, when most foreigners in Cambodia were Russian. The market sells clothes, DVDs, jewelry, silk, souvenirs, and all sorts of other goods. It's incredibly cheap. But don't forget to bargain.

Street 278 - this area is known as the foreigner area of the city and has some beautiful architecture. This is where we stayed during our time in Phnom Penh. It's much better than the more touristy riverside area. You'll find lots of expats and long-term travelers in this area.

Riverside - This area is great to stroll around in the evenings, as the pedestrianized area runs alongside the river. There are many bars and restaurants in this area and it's where most tourists stay.

Phnom Penh To Siem Reap

It's possible to get a boat from Phnom Penh to Siem Reap, but we chose to go by bus. We used the Mekong Express, which was the same bus company that we used to get to Phnom Penh from Ho Chi Minh City. We booked the bus via our hotel at a cost of \$12 each. This included free pick-up from our hotel. Journey time to Siem Reap was around six hours.

Siem Reap

During our three days in Siem Reap we stayed at two hotels, [Friendly Villa](#) and [Cheathata Angkor Hotel](#). We had originally planned to spend all three nights at Friendly Villa, and had booked two nights in a standard room, and then a third night in a deluxe room. The reason for the separate bookings was because these were the only rooms available for the nights we were there. The first two nights were fine, but the next morning we were asked to check out at 12 noon and then come back at 2 pm to check in to the deluxe room. However, when we got back we were told that the guests in the deluxe room had decided to stay longer so we couldn't have the room. They offered us a room at another hotel that had the same owner, but this was quite a way out of the center of town so we didn't accept it. We asked to be booked into a room closer to the center of town but they refused point blank. After much debate we ended up having to trek around looking for another hotel. This wasn't an ideal situation to be in on our last day in Cambodia.

Luckily, we found a great hotel and reported the incident to Agoda, as we had booked the hotel through them. They investigated quickly and refunded our money in full. They also gave us some extra Agoda points to make up for the extra money we had to spend, and a discount off our next booking.

Because of this incident I wouldn't recommend staying at Friendly Villa. I think the least they could have done was offer us a room at a hotel nearer to the center, but they just didn't seem to care. They also provide a free tuk-tuk to the airport for hotel guests, but refused to honor this as well.

Apart from the hotel fiasco, we enjoyed our stay in Siem Reap. It's an interesting place to spend 2-3 days, but I don't think we'd have wanted to stay any longer. Most people visit Siem Reap because they want to see Angkor Wat, and the whole town seems to revolve around these visitors.

We found all the tuk-tuk drivers in town to be very polite and honest, and most spoke very good English.

Things To Do In Siem Reap

Angkor Wat - To see Angkor Wat is the only reason that most visitors come to Siem Reap, and for many it's one of the highlights of their travels around SE Asia. Tickets cost \$20 per day, or \$40 for 3 days. Weekly tickets are also available. One day is enough to get around all the main temples in the complex and that is enough for most people, including us. You'll need a tuk-tuk or motorbike to take you around, as the area is vast. A tuk-tuk will cost \$15-20 per day, and a motorbike about half that price.



Angkor Wat

Siem Reap Market Area - The market area is spread over a few streets and is a real focus point for tourists. The main street is called Pub Street, and this is where you'll find most of the bars and restaurants. It's very lively at night. See a video of Pub Street here --> <http://youtu.be/yocrnxp96us>.

Siem Reap To Kuala Lumpur

To get from Siem Reap to Kuala Lumpur we got an Air Asia flight. We would have preferred to fly to Penang and then get a train south to Kuala Lumpur and then onto to Singapore, but the flights from Siem Reap are very limited so we headed to Kuala Lumpur for our next stop.

Our flight cost \$143 each and took around two hours. The price also included tickets for the Skybus from Kuala Lumpur LCCT into the city center, a journey that takes about an hour. LCCT is the Low Cost Carrier Terminal that companies such as Air Asia use.

The bus drops you off at KL Sentral, and you can get trains, monorail or taxis from there to your hotel.

There's a video here of how to get from KL LCCT to KL Sentral --> <http://youtu.be/eV4yfXhrFeM>.

See here for a short video of Siem Reap International Airport --> <http://youtu.be/KEy-lThMuOk>.

Malaysia

Days Spent In Malaysia: 28

Total Cost: \$1,399 (Food & Drink \$549, Transport \$100, Miscellaneous \$59, Accommodation \$692)

Cost Per Day: \$25 per person



Street Art In George Town, Penang

This was only my second visit to Malaysia, after a two-day visit to Kuala Lumpur a few years ago. I wasn't overly impressed at the time, and wasn't expecting too much this time. However, I was pleasantly surprised by George Town in Penang, and this has made me want to explore a few other parts of the country. So this is another country we'll be coming back to soon.

This is also another country that we would have stayed a little longer if possible. But this was another case of our permission to stay expiring before we were ready to leave. I wish governments around the world would make it a little easier for us long-term travelers. We are willing to spend money in their countries, but it sometimes feels like they don't want it.

Kuala Lumpur

We only spent three days in Kuala Lumpur, as decent hotels there were pretty expensive compared to everywhere else we'd stay in SE Asia up until then. A few days is probably long enough for most visitors to Kuala Lumpur though. For our three days there we stayed at [Cube Hotel](#) in the Bukit Bintang district. This was probably one of the worst hotels we stayed at during our travels around SE Asia. The good thing about it was that the location was excellent, being just a few minutes' walk to Imbi monorail station and the shopping areas of Bukit Bintang.

But apart from the great location we didn't have a great stay. The room we stayed in was tiny, the smallest we've ever stayed in, and didn't have a window. The mattress was very worn and very uncomfortable. But the worst thing was the horrendous vibrating noise that was almost continuous. You could actually feel the walls vibrating. One member of staff at the hotel said it was due to a trash machine outside the hotel but it sounded more like some very heavy-duty machinery to me.

But even though it was pretty bad, we still stayed an extra night, as other hotels were more expensive and we didn't want the hassle of moving just for one night.

Things To Do In Kuala Lumpur

Petronas Towers - Most visitors to Kuala Lumpur want to see the Petronas Towers. This building looks great from a distance, but close up it looks stunning. It costs about \$25 each to take a trip up to the observation deck, but we gave this a miss as it seems a bit excessive just for a view of the city. It's easily accessible by public transport - see <http://www.renegadetravels.com/petronas-twin-towers-kuala-lumpur/>. Be very careful with your cell phone in this area. I was approach by three people trying to sell me a cell phone. It seemed like they had stolen them from other visitors. Everyone has their phones out taking photos, so it's easy for pickpockets to spot where they keep their phone.



Petronas Towers

Kuala Lumpur Tower - You'll be able to see Petronas Towers from the observation deck, but it will still cost you \$15.

Batu Caves - These caves are around 8 miles from the city center, and are easily accessible by public transport. The caves, along with a cave temple, are set in a limestone hill. The temple cave houses one of the most popular Hindu shrines outside India. You will also see lots of monkeys running around this area.

Bukit Bintang Shopping District - This is the main shopping district of Kuala Lumpur, but don't get carried away if you're on a budget. It has quite a few shopping malls, including an IT mall, which is a great place to get any electronics that you haven't been able to find elsewhere in SE Asia.



Bukit Bintang At Night

Kuala Lumpur To George Town, Penang

The easiest way to get from Kuala Lumpur to Penang is by train. There are two trains a day, one leaving at 15:15 and arriving at 22:00, and the other leaving at 21:35 and arriving at 05:30 the next day. We got the overnight train, but if we did this journey again we'd get the earlier train. Getting the overnight train meant checking out of our hotel at noon and having to hang around Kuala Lumpur until the evening, and then arriving early at our hotel the next day and not being able to check-in. It saved on an extra night in a hotel, but wasn't worth it. The overnight train has sleeper carriages but these were all full when we booked our tickets, so we had to make do with 2nd class seats.

You can buy the tickets at KL Sentral station, but make sure you buy them in advance, as these trains are often sold out in advance. A 2nd class ticket costs around \$11.

You can also get a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Penang, and the cost was around \$56 each, including luggage, when we checked. You also have the added expense of getting to and from the airports, so the train offers a big saving. And it's probably just as fast when you take into account the time spent traveling to and from the airports, as well as hanging around the airport waiting for your flight.

Once you get to Butterworth station, which is the stop for Penang, you'll need to get the ferry across to the island. The ferry operates from around 05:30 to 00:30 every day. The crossing takes 10-15 minutes and costs around \$0.40. The ferry back from George Town to Butterworth is free.



Ferry Arriving In George Town, Penang

George Town, Penang

We loved George Town, and it's a great place to spend a few weeks. We were there for 24 days and would have stayed a little longer if we could. UK & US passport holders can stay in Malaysia for 90 days without a visa, but Thailand passport holders can only stay for 30 days.

We had pre-booked the [New Asia Heritage Hotel](#) for a couple of nights and it was such a great hotel that we ended up staying there for the whole time. We checked quite a few other hotels while we were there but couldn't find anything better for the price we paid.

George Town is a *UNESCO World Heritage Site* that's split into a main zone, and a buffer zone that surrounds the main zone. The New Asia Heritage Hotel is located in the buffer zone, on Lebuhraya Kimberley, right in the area where all the street food stalls set up every evening. Once the sun goes down, this part of the street is very lively, with both locals and visitors coming to eat.



Street Food Outside New Asia Heritage Hotel

If you stay at this hotel more than a few days it's possible to get an upgrade or a discount. Even though we only booked a standard room, we spend nearly the whole time in either deluxe or family rooms, and paid slightly less than the cost of a standard room. Staying longer in places means you can usually get better deals, and this can really help with your costs. It can also often mean staying in better rooms, as was the case with this hotel.

Things To In George Town, Penang

UNESCO World Heritage Site - To see the old town is why most visitors come to George Town, and it's a great place to walk around and explore. There are some amazing old buildings there, with lots of mosques, temples and churches.



St George's Church

Street Art - George Town is known for its quirky street art, and you can get maps that show you where it's all located. You can see further info here, including a walkable street map and street art brochure --> <http://www.renegadetravels.com/street-art-in-george-town-penang-malaysia/>.



More George Town Street Art

KOMTAR Tower - this is a major landmark in George Town, and is the highest building in Penang. It has an observation deck on the 60th floor, but it's pretty shabby, and only half of it is currently open, although we still managed to access the closed half via an open door opposite the toilets. Tickets for the observation deck are around \$1.50. It has great views of the town and surrounding hills.



KOMTAR Tower

Penang Hill Funicular Railway - The funicular railway to Penang Hill is the longest in Asia, at 1.99km. There isn't too much to see at the top, and the attractions that are there are aimed mainly at children. The cost is just under \$10 for a return trip. To get there you can take the 204 bus from the town center. This takes around 40 minutes and costs around \$0.65. The bus also passes Kek Lok Si Temple.



Penang Hill Funicular Railway

Kek Lok Si Temple - This temple is the largest Buddhist temple in SE Asia, and is also one of the most commercialized. It felt like a tourist trap to me. But it's near Penang Hill so you can stop off on the way back.

George Town, Penang To Singapore via Johor Bahru

For our journey from Penang to Singapore we decided to travel by train. There's only one train a day on this route, leaving Butterworth at 08:00 and arriving in Singapore at 22:00. We had read that this train was often late, so didn't want to risk arriving in Singapore too late, otherwise getting to our hotel might have been a problem. So we got the train as far as Johor Bahru, stayed there the night, and then took a train into Singapore the next day at a more reasonable time.

We booked the train tickets in advance at the ticket office near the ferry terminal in George Town. 2nd class tickets to Johor Bahru cost around \$18 each.

To get from George Town to Butterworth train station you'll need to take the free ferry and then follow the signs. It's only a few minutes' walk.

The train journey was long but pretty uneventful. Food and drinks are available on the train.

Johor Bahru

I don't have much to say about this town, as we arrived late and left early. We stayed at [Citrus Hotel](#), which was a great location about 100 meters from the train station. It also had a shopping mall next door.

Johor Bahru To Singapore

This was the shortest of journeys, as the train only takes about two minutes to cross from Malaysia to Singapore. But buying a ticket and getting on the train was very confusing indeed. There was a notice at the ticket office counter saying that there were only four trains a day and that tickets were only available 30 minutes before departure. Meanwhile, the departure board showed trains at completely different times. So we asked the woman at the ticket office when the next train was. She said she didn't know, so had to phone someone to check.

The outcome was that the next train was apparently leaving NOW, so we'd better rush to get it. So we bought our tickets and noticed that the train time printed on the tickets was different to the train times on both the notice and on the departure board. So we rushed to catch the train but were sent back by an immigration officer who told us to go back upstairs and wait to be called. Then a minute or two later another immigration officer came to get us. We passed through immigration and the train left at a completely different time, and 20 minutes earlier than the time on the ticket. So the only advice I can give about buying a ticket is to just turn up, buy a ticket for the next train, and hope it's soon.

Singapore Immigration was fairly quiet and we passed through in a few minutes, although they did spend a while flicking through our passports and asking why we'd been to so many countries recently.

Singapore

Days Spent In Singapore: 3

Total Cost: \$387 (Food & Drink \$92, Transport \$23, Miscellaneous \$2, Accommodation \$271)

Cost Per Day: \$65 per person



Marina Bay Sands

Singapore

If you're on a tight budget then this is one place you may have to miss out on. Accommodation here is pretty expensive - we paid almost \$100 per night for a room that would have cost under \$30 in most other places we stayed. We only stayed for three nights, and spent those at the [Hotel 81 Dickson](#) in Little India. They had some cheaper rooms without windows, but we preferred to pay a little extra, as we hate being cooped up in windowless hotel rooms.

Overall we found Singapore to be a fairly sterile place, with lots of wide roads, shopping malls and thousands and thousands of almost identical condos. It was one of the cleanest places I've ever been to though. I feel that maybe we needed to stay a little longer to find the more interesting places around town. But it was such an expensive place that we decided to move on. We did have a good time there though and saw some interesting things.

Singapore Woodlands To Central Singapore

The train from Malaysia stops at Woodlands station, and you'll most likely need to get from there to Central Singapore, as that's where the main part of the city is. We opted to get a bus, MRT and taxi to our hotel. The buses stop right outside the station. Leave the station, turn right and you'll see the bus stops. Many of the buses go to Woodlands MRT station which is around 3km away. Just ask the driver if the bus stops there. When getting a bus you need the exact change, so make sure you change some money before getting the bus. Opposite the bus stops there is a supermarket and some other shops, so just buy something small so that you can get some coins. The bus cost S\$1.10(\$0.80).

Once you get to the MRT station you'll need to get a travel card and add your journey to it. This is done at the self-service machines. Note that some machines don't give new tickets, so you need to use one of the machines that do. Just ask a local if you can't figure it out.

The MRT should cost around S\$2.30 (\$1.80) to Central Singapore area. Depending on where your hotel is you may also need to get a taxi from the MRT station.

Things To Do In Singapore

Marina Bay Sands - This is one of the most recognizable buildings in Singapore, and you can't really visit Singapore without seeing it. It looks like three separate buildings with a boat on top of them. It houses a 2,561 room hotel, a convention center, a museum, two theatres, an ice rink, and the world's largest atrium casino.

Supertree Grove at Gardens by the Bay - This is another must-see attraction. The supertrees are solar-powered artificial trees that stand up to 50 meters tall. They look pretty impressive at daytime, but look spectacular at night. You can gain access from the Marina Bay Sands.



Supertrees

Merlion Park - Merlion is a mythical creature that has come to symbolize Singapore. It has the head of a lion and the body of a fish. There are five Merlions in Singapore with the tallest, at 8.6 meters, being in Merlion Park, opposite Marina Bay Sands. The park is also the best place to get a good view of Marina Bay Sands.



Merlion - Symbol Of Singapore

Orchard Road - If shopping is your thing, then this is the place to head for. There are numerous shopping malls along this road, and it's a major tourist destination.

Singapore To Ubud, Bali

After our short visit to Singapore, our next destination was Bali in Indonesia. We took an Air Asia flight that cost around \$128 each. It's very easy to get to the airport in Singapore, as it's connected to the MRT system.

Indonesia

Days Spent In Indonesia: 28

Total Cost: \$1,450 (Food & Drink \$588, Transport \$120, Miscellaneous \$26, Accommodation \$717)

Cost Per Day: \$26 per person



Cafe Overlooking Rice Fields In Bali

We weren't sure what to expect of Indonesia, as it's such a vast country, but we were in for a real treat. We started off in Bali where we didn't do much at all except have a very relaxing time. Then we headed to East Java to climb a volcano, and onto to the capital Jakarta, via Surabaya. We did this journey by taxi, bus, ferry and train. In a month we barely scratched the surface of what's available in Indonesia, and I think you'd need many visits there to get to know the whole country, or even parts of it. But we only had 28 days to spend there.

Taxis In Indonesia

There are many taxi companies in Indonesia that will try to overcharge, so I'd suggest using Bluebird Taxis whenever you can. There weren't any in Ubud or Banyuwangi, but we used them in Denpasar, Surabaya and Jakarta. The service was always excellent. This is the taxi company that local people mentioned to us the most, and is what many of them use. You'll sometimes see long queues of people waiting for Bluebird Taxis even though there are other taxi waiting nearby.



Bluebird Taxi

Getting From Denpasar Airport To Ubud

Ubud is about an hour's drive from the airport, and we got a taxi from the official taxi office. We paid 300,000 IDR (\$27), which seem a little steep. I'd suggest asking your hotel to arrange airport pickup, as this could be a lot cheaper. If you get money from an ATM at the airport you'll only get 100,000 IDR (\$9) notes, so if you plan to tip the taxi driver make sure you get some change at an airport shop first.

Ubud, Bali

We spent two weeks in Bali and stayed at [Arjuna House](#), which is a small family run place. In Ubud, the majority of accommodation is in small villages which usually consist of a number of small cottages. Some villages have been totally converted to holiday stays, but many, such as Arjuna House, are a mixture of local and tourist accommodation. This makes you feel a little more connected to the community. And the family that ran Arjuna House couldn't have been any more friendly and helpful. Miu even got to attend a traditional Balinese wedding, as one of the owner's friends was getting married while we were there.



Breakfast Outside Our Room At Arjuna House In Ubud, Bali

Personally, I found Ubud to be far too touristy. It seemed like the whole town was overrun by tourists, with most shops selling the same things. And some of the markets in the most touristy parts of town had very overpriced goods, and were a real tourist trap. We saw small paintings on sale there that were quadruple the price of what we paid for a similar painting from a local artist. But despite this we still enjoyed ourselves, as we mostly relaxed the whole two weeks that we were there.

While Indonesia is a Muslim country, Bali is almost totally Hindu, so this is a real contrast that you'll notice if you travel to different parts of Indonesia. We found the people of Bali to be the most friendly of the people we met in Indonesia.

Things To Do In Ubud, Bali

Ubud Monkey Forest - This is one of the main attractions in Ubud, and is basically a forest where you can see lots of monkeys. But beware, as the monkeys are very cheeky and might steal your food, sunglasses, camera, backpack or whatever else is available.

Rice Terraces - You can see some really beautiful rice terraces within a few minutes' walk of the center of Ubud. Above is one next to a cafe that we stopped at in the center of town.

Yoga - Ubud is a major yoga center, so if this is something that you're interested in, Ubud will be a great place for you.

Traditional Dance Show - There are a few traditional dance shows in Ubud that might be worth a visit.

Ubud To Denpasar

There are around four buses a day that run between Ubud and Denpasar (including to the airport), and these cost 60,000 IDR (\$5.30) per person. The owner at Arjuna House offered to take us in his car for 150,000 IDR, so we took that option, as it meant getting dropped off at our hotel rather than

at a bus station from where we would have needed to get a taxi. It's a straightforward journey, and your only options are bus or taxi.

Denpasar

The only reason we stayed in Denpasar for a couple of nights was because I needed to get a visa for Thailand. So we stayed at the [Cityzen Renon Hotel](#), as it is on the same road as the Thailand Consulate. It turned out that I couldn't get the visa I need from there though. But if you only need a tourist visa for Thailand, then you can get one there. The hotel is located in Renon, which is the most beautiful part of Denpasar.

Things To Do In Denpasar

Bajra Sandhi Monument - This was a few minutes' walk from our hotel and is well worth a visit. It's a monument dedicated to the struggle of the Balinese people over the years, and also has a viewing platform that gives great views of Denpasar. It's located in a huge park that's very popular with locals.



Bajra Sandhi Monument

Denpasar To Banyuwangi, East Java

Getting from Denpasar in Bali to Banyuwangi in East Java was a bit of an adventure. First we got a taxi from our hotel to Ubung Bus Station, which is the main departure point for buses out of Denpasar. You may read elsewhere that there is a new bus station a little further out of town called Mengwi that you should use, but this isn't correct. A new station was built, but it seems that all buses still depart from Ubung station. Our bus stopped at Mengwi, but it was pretty deserted.

When we arrived at Ubung Bus Station we had a not so fun time trying to find a bus to take us to Banyuwangi. The station is full of people selling bus tickets and trying to get you to use their bus. They will also lie to you and tell you that certain buses aren't going to Banyuwangi, when in fact they are. All I can suggest is that you take 5-10 minutes to ask around. Don't take the first bus that you are offered a ticket for, as this will likely be vastly overpriced. We were quoted prices from 50,000

IDR (\$4.50) to 180,000 IDR (\$16). We settled on a bus that cost 75,000 IDR (\$6.70), as the bus seemed reasonable and it was leaving soon.

It was a 4.5 hour journey to Gilimanuk, which is on the northwest corner of Bali. This was mainly along winding and hilly roads, with the bus constantly overtaking other traffic on what seemed like quite dangerous stretches of road. Also, the bus didn't have a toilet, although we were told that it did. What seemed like a toilet area at the back of the bus was in fact a small storage area. The bus stopped once for a toilet stop - at a derelict building that had a squat toilet without a door. Not ideal! I was glad when the journey was over. After arriving in Gilimanuk the bus drove onto the ferry that crosses to Banyuwangi. This is a major crossing and the ferries operate 24/7. The crossing takes around 45-60 minutes.

As the ferry arrives in Banyuwangi you get a great view of Ijen volcano, which we were here to see. You can either get off the bus at the ferry port or at the bus station. Which is best depends on where your hotel is located. We got a bemo (small van) from the ferry terminal to our hotel.



View Of Ijen Volcano As Ferry Arrives In Banyuwangi

Banyuwangi, East Java

For our stay in Banyuwangi, we stayed at [Ketapang Indah Hotel](#), which is a beautiful resort hotel, and was a real step up from most places we had stayed. Banyuwangi is a very small place and the main reason the visitors go there is to see the volcanoes. There isn't much else to do there.



The Beautiful Grounds Of Ketapang Indah Hotel

Things To Do In Banyuwangi

Ijen Crater - For us, this was one of the highlights of our seven months of traveling around SE Asia. Ijen is an active volcano, and it's possible, though dangerous, to trek down into the heart of the crater. So this is what we did. One of the attractions of Ijen Crater is to see the sulfur gas burning, and this can only be seen at night. That meant leaving our hotel at 1am and driving to Ijen, which took around 90 minutes.



Climbing Into The Heart Of Ijen Crater

After that, it took us about 80 minutes to hike the 3km to the top of the volcano. It's very steep in parts, and is pretty tiring, so you need to have a certain level of fitness to do this. After reaching the

top we then walked down into the heart of the volcano where there is a huge acid lake and also the burning sulfur gases. It's a steep and awkward climb down, and back up again, and should only be attempted if you are pretty fit and able. There are no steps and no real path down.

The fumes are pretty toxic so you'll need to wear a mask if attempting this walk. It was pretty smoky when we were there so we couldn't stay as long as we wanted. We then hiked back to the top and walked around the edge of the volcano. On a clear day there is a beautiful view of the acid lake, which is one of the largest in the world. But the smoke was so bad when we were there that the view wasn't so go. On a clear day you can see Bali from the top, but we couldn't see that either.

There are many miners that work here carrying sulfur from the crater back to the bottom of the volcano. They usually carry around 80kg on their shoulders twice a day. They must be incredibly strong to be able to carry those weights up from the bottom of the crater.

It took us around 6 hours to complete our walk around the volcano, and we covered around 12km in total.

Mount Bromo - This is another major attraction that many people visit after Ijen. It's about a 5-hour drive to get there.

Banyuwangi to Surabaya

Next we were heading for Jakarta, but wanted to break up the train journey, so decided to stop at Surabaya for a couple of nights. There are only two trains a day from Banyuwangi to Surabaya, one at 8:30 (arrives 14:56) and one at 22:00 (arrives 04:20). We got the 8:30 train. Be aware that to buy a train ticket at Banyuwangi you need to show your passport. We got a taxi to the station to buy our tickets, but had to get the taxi back to the hotel to get our passports before they'd sell us the tickets. Our passports were also checked when we arrived at the station to get the train.

We opted for *Bisnis* class (2nd class) tickets that cost 100,000 IDR (\$9) each. *Eksekutif* class (1st class) tickets were 140,000 IDR (\$12.50). The only reason we got the 2nd class tickets was to compare 1st and 2nd class travel - we got 1st class tickets from Surabaya to Jakarta.



Traveling 2nd Class To Surabaya

The train was very clean, and there were even power sockets next to the seats. The station also has porters to help carry your luggage onto the train and show you to your seats. You need to tip them for this service. Food and drink was also served, with the food sellers coming around at least once an hour.

Surabaya

When arriving at Surabaya Gubeng station you'll be met by lots of taxi drivers. We made a mistake of using one of these, and he charged us more than double what the fare should have been. We had wanted to use a Bluebird Taxi but couldn't find one. We later found out that all the Bluebird Taxis are parked just outside the station entrance. So my advice is to walk out to the Bluebird Taxis instead of getting one of the station Taxis. Don't get a Nurimas Taxi, as they are the ones that ripped us off.

For our two days in Surabaya we stayed at [Family Guest House](#), which is about 2km from Surabaya Gubeng train station. The hotel is in a mainly residential area. The staff here were very friendly and helpful, and I highly recommend this hotel.

There didn't seem to be much to do in Surabaya, so we took the opportunity to get some much needed rest.

Surabaya To Jakarta

After our very short stay in Surabaya we were back on the train, this time traveling *Eksekutif* class (1st class) to Jakarta. You should know that there are two train stations in Surabaya - Gubeng and Pasarturi. We had arrived at Gubeng but departed from Pasarturi. Trains to Jakarta leave from both stations, so make sure you know which station your train is leaving from. The trains from Pasarturi take less time to get to Jakarta, as the route is slightly shorter.

The cost of an *Eksekutif* class ticket was 450,000 IDR (\$40). At the station we had to fill out a ticket reservation form before buying the tickets, although we weren't asked for our passports. But we did have to show our passports when we arrived at the station to board the train. The morning train leaves Surabaya Pasarturi station at 08:15, and is due to arrive in Jakarta at 17:56, so that's a journey time of a little under 10 hours. Our train was about an hour late arriving in Jakarta.



Traveling 1st Class To Jakarta

The *Eksekutif* class coaches were comparable to European trains and were very high quality. The arms of the seats had fold-out trays, similar to the ones they sometimes have in airplane seats, so you're able to eat your food in comfort. There were also power sockets next to the seats, and a menu from which you could order food. Food sellers also came around with a range of food, with the main dishes being served on proper plates.

The train arrives at Jakarta Gambir station, from where you'll probably need to get a taxi to your hotel. Leave the station via the north exit, turn left, and you'll see the Bluebird Taxis rank. I suggest you use this taxi company, as we found them to be very reliable and very honest. You'll need to pay 5,000 IDR (\$0.45) to book the taxi, and you'll then be given a ticket with a number on it. You'll then need to wait your turn in the queue. Even though there were plenty of other taxis outside the station, most local people preferred to wait for a Bluebird Taxi.

Jakarta

And so we arrived at our final destination before heading back to Bangkok, which was the starting point of our travels. We stayed at two hotels in Jakarta, the [Balista Hotel](#) and the [Amaris Hotel Juanda](#). Both were pretty good locations, with restaurants, markets and local attractions nearby. The Amaris was a great hotel, but I wouldn't stay at Balista Hotel again.

We had booked two nights at Balista Hotel and when we checked in they asked what time we wanted breakfast. We wanted a bit of a lie-in, so said 9am. The next morning we were woken at

6.30, as breakfast is served in the rooms, and they were delivering ours. We weren't impressed at all, especially as most of the food was cold.

On the second night we woke up very early because we heard a noise in the waste bin in our room. It turned out to be a rat that had come up from the drain in the bathroom. The drain had a cover, but it was so loose that the rat had just pushed it off. The hotel staff told us that this was only a problem on the ground floor. I don't understand why they didn't just secure the drain cover properly if they knew that rats came up. We were glad to leave.

Amaris Hotel Juanda was almost brand new, super-clean, had friendly staff, and a great buffet breakfast, including good choices for vegetarians. We were really impressed and would highly recommend this hotel. It was a little more expensive, but well worth the extra money.



Buffet Breakfast At Amaris Hotel Juanda

We spent a total of six days in Jakarta, but it wasn't a city that we'd like to go back to. While we enjoyed ourselves, there wasn't anything that really stuck out that would make us recommend it.

Things To Do In Jakarta

Most of the main tourist attractions are situated near the center around Gambir train station area.

Jakarta Cathedral - This is a beautiful building both outside and inside, and is open to the public. Entry is free.



Jakarta Cathedral

Istiqlal Mosque - This is the largest mosque in Southeast Asia. I'm not sure if you're allowed inside though, as we didn't visit it. We could see this mosque from our room at the Amaris Hotel.



Istiqlal Mosque

Jalan Pasar Baru Market - This is a local market that sells a range of goods, and also some street food.



Jalan Pasar Baru Market

Jakarta To Bangkok

And so our travels around SE Asia had come to an end, and it was time to head back home to Bangkok. We got an Air Asia flight, and this cost us \$88 each. What we weren't aware of was that Indonesia has a departure tax for international flights, and this has to be paid in cash in the local currency. The tax is 150,000 IDR (\$13.50) per person. We didn't have enough cash on us so we had to leave the check-in area and go to find an ATM to withdraw the money. So make sure you have enough cash to pay for this.

Where We Stayed

Quite a few people have told us that they'd like to travel around SE Asia following the same or a similar route as us, so I've included a complete list of the places we stayed in this section so that it's easier for you to book the same places if you want to. Just click the link to be taken to a full review of each place on our website. You can also find the complete list at <http://www.renegadetravels.com/category/where-we-stayed/>. You can book from that page on the website, or you can book by clicking the hotel links below.

Thailand

Kanchanaburi

[Sabai@Kan Resort](#) - booked via Agoda.

Ayutthaya

[Baan Are Gong Riverside Homestay](#) - booked via Agoda.

Chiang Mai

[Smith Residence](#) - long stay hotel that we booked direct, but it can also be booked via Agoda.

Chiang Rai

[B2 Hotel](#) - booked via Agoda.

Chiang Kong

[Portside Hotel](#) - booked via Agoda.

Laos

Huay Xai

[Friendship Guest House](#) - we found this after arriving in Huay Xai.

Pakbeng

[Mekong Riverside Lodge](#) - this was part of our [Nagi of Mekong](#) cruise, but can also be booked via Agoda.

Luang Prabang

[Philaylack Villa](#) - booked via Agoda.

Vietnam

Hanoi

[Landmark Hanoi Hotel](#) - booked via Agoda.

Hue

[Than Thien Friendly Hotel](#) - booked via Agoda.

Hoi An

[Hoi An Lantern Hotel](#) - booked via Agoda.

Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon)

[Aries Hotel](#) - booked via Agoda.

[Lucy Hotel](#) - booked direct.

Cambodia

Phnom Penh

[Amber House Hotel](#) - booked via Agoda.

[Goldie Boutique Guesthouse](#) - booked direct while we were in Phnom Penh.

[HomeFeel CS Hotel](#) - booked via Agoda.

[J Villa](#) - booked via Agoda.

Siem Reap

[Friendly Villa](#) - booked via Agoda.

[Cheathata Angkor Hotel](#) - booked direct, although available via Agoda.

Malaysia

Kuala Lumpur

[Cube Hotel Bukit Bintang](#) - booked via Agoda.

Penang

[New Asia Heritage Hotel](#) - booked via Agoda.

Johor Bahru

[Citrus Hotel](#) - booked via Agoda.

Singapore

Singapore

[Hotel 81 Dickson](#) - booked via Agoda.

Indonesia

Ubud, Bali

[Arjuna House](#) - booked via Agoda.

Denpasar, Bali

[Cityzen Renon Hotel](#) - booked via Agoda

Banyuwangi, East Java

[Ketapang Indah Hotel](#) - booked via Agoda

Surabaya

[Family Guest House](#) - booked via Agoda

Jakarta

[Balista Hotel](#) - booked via Agoda

[Amaris Hotel Juanda](#) - booked via Agoda

How We Traveled

In this chapter I've included details of all the transport we used to get from place to place. This was already mentioned in detail above, so this is just a quick reference guide.

Thailand

Bangkok To Ayutthaya

3rd class train from Bangkok's Hua Lamphong station. Cost 15 baht (\$0.45) per person. 1.5 hours travel time. Bought ticket on the day.

Ayutthaya To Chiang Mai

2nd class aircon ticket that was bought on day of travel. Cost around \$10 each. Journey time around 11 hours. 3rd class tickets available for around \$5.

Chiang Mai To Chiang Rai

Green Bus from Chiang Mai's Arcade bus station. Songthaew from city center to bus station was 50 baht (\$1.70) each. VIP bus was 288 baht (\$9.60) each. Cheaper buses are available. We just turned up and bought tickets for the next bus. Journey time was around three hours.

Chiang Rai To Chiang Kong

Local bus from central bus station. Bought on the day for 65 baht (\$2.20) each. Journey time around two hours. Buses leave 6 am to 5 pm.

Chiang Kong To Huay Xai

Boat across the river for 40 baht (\$1.40). Easy.

Laos

Huay Xai To Luang Prabang (via Pakbeng)

We traveled with [Nagi of Mekong](#) private boat tour. Cost is around \$160 including hotel at Pakbeng and lunch each day. Public boats cost around \$30. Hotel would be extra - around \$10-\$20.

Luang Prabang To Hanoi

Lao Airlines flight for \$155 each. Booked online from airline website, saving \$10 on price at tour companies in town.

Vietnam

Hanoi To Hue

Train (soft seats option) costing 493,000 VND (\$24) each. This train needs to be booked in advance. We bought our tickets at Hanoi train station. Journey time was around 13 hours. Train left at 06:15.

Hue To Hoi An

Train to Danang for 77,000 VND (\$3.70), then metered taxi to Hoi An for around \$20. Train tickets need to be booked in advance, so book them when you first arrive in Hue if possible. Train journey is around 2.5 hours and taxi around 45 minutes.

Hoi An To Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon)

Taxi to Danang (\$20), then soft sleeper train to Ho Chi Minh City. Tickets cost 1,149,000 VND (\$55) each and need to be booked in advance. So make sure you book them when you arrive in Danang. This journey takes around 18 hours.

Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) To Phnom Penh

Mekong Express bus for \$13. We booked this at their office in Ho Chi Minh City. You can also book via your hotel or tour company. It took around six hours to Phnom Penh, including stopping at border town of Bavet.

Cambodia

Phnom Penh To Siem Reap

Mekong Express bus for \$12. We booked via our hotel. Journey time of six hours,

Siem Reap To Kuala Lumpur

Two-hour Air Asia flight costing \$143 each, including checked-in luggage. Cost included bus from airport to Kuala Lumpur city center.

Malaysia

Kuala Lumpur To George Town

2nd class train for \$11 each. We bought the tickets at KL Sentral station the day before we traveled. There is one daytime train and one overnight train. Journey time is around eight hours.

George Town To Johor Bahru

2nd class train for around \$18 each. We bought them at the ticket office at George Town ferry terminal. One train a day that leaves Butterworth at 8 am. Journey time is around 14 hours.

Johor Bahru To Singapore

2-minute train journey. Bought ticket on day of travel. Then took bus, MRT and taxi to hotel in central Singapore.

Singapore

Singapore To Ubud, Bali

Air Asia flight to Denpasar for \$128 each, then taxi for \$27.

Indonesia

Ubud To Denpasar

Arranged for our hotel to take us at a cost around \$14.

Denpasar To Banyuwangi

Bus from Ubung station to Banyuwangi for 75,000 IDR (\$6.70) each. Cost includes the ferry crossing. 4-5 hours to Gilimanuk and another 45 minutes on ferry to Banyuwangi.

Banyuwangi To Surabaya

2nd class train for 100,000 IDR (\$9) each. Booked in advance at Banyuwangi station. Needed to show passports when buying the tickets. Journey takes 6-7 hours. Then Bluebird Taxi to hotel - the Bluebird taxis are parked outside the station entrance. Don't use the taxis inside the station.

Surabaya To Jakarta

1st class train for 450,000 IDR (\$40). We arrived at Surabaya Gubeng station, but departed from Surabaya Pasarturi station. Had to fill in ticket reservation form, but didn't have to show passports. You can buy the tickets at either station.

Jakarta To Bangkok

Air Asia flight for \$88 each. We also each had to pay 150,000 IDR (\$13.50) departure tax in cash at the airport.

Travel Calendar

A few people who reviewed the book asked if I could include a calendar showing our travel dates, so here it is. This might help with your planning. All dates are 2013.

Thailand - March to May

Laos - May

Vietnam - May to June

Cambodia - June to July

Malaysia - July to August

Singapore - August

Indonesia - August to September

Making Money On The Road

If you can earn some extra money while traveling you can have a much better time. We didn't earn a great amount, but every little helps. Hopefully the amount we earn will keep growing as we keep traveling. The main way we made money was from our travel blog, which I mentioned earlier, and from doing hotel reviews. Other long-term travelers often earn money on the road as well, so I've given you a few ideas on how to get started below.

Get \$25 For Reviewing Hotels

If you have a smartphone or camera you can easily earn \$25 for each hotel you review while you're traveling. All you have to do to earn your \$25 is write a short review of the hotel you're staying at, and also shoot four short videos (under 90 seconds each). You need to get each hotel approved first, but that's an easy process. We made some good money doing this, and it enabled us to stay at a few better hotels, and also have a few free nights. See hotelconfidential.com for more details. This offer was still valid when this book was published but could change at some point in the future.

Teach English

I've never tried this, but I know plenty of people that do this in SE Asia. Many countries in SE Asia are looking for English teachers, and this can be a great way to not only earn some money, but also get a long-term stay in the country your teaching.

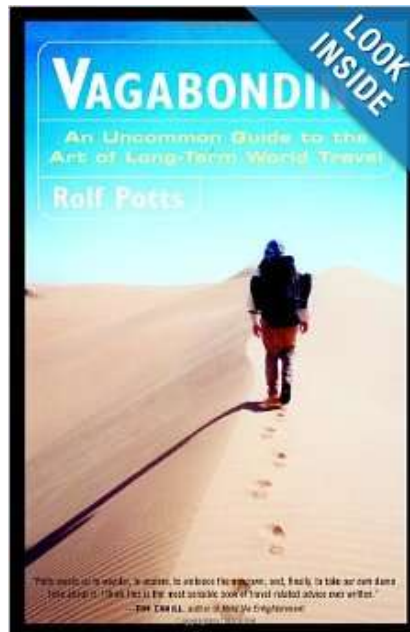
Work As A Digital Nomad

This usually involves running a blog or doing other digital work such as writing, designing logos, building websites, etc. If you have the required skills you can easily fit this work around your travels, although you do need to be disciplined about your work time.

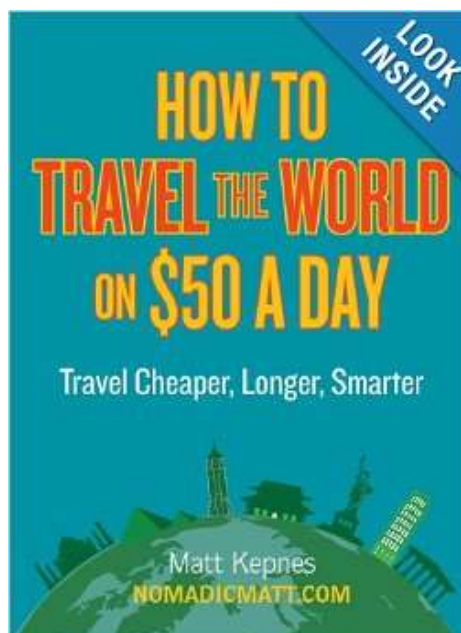
Recommended Reading

Here's my recommended reading list for anyone planning to travel to Southeast Asia.

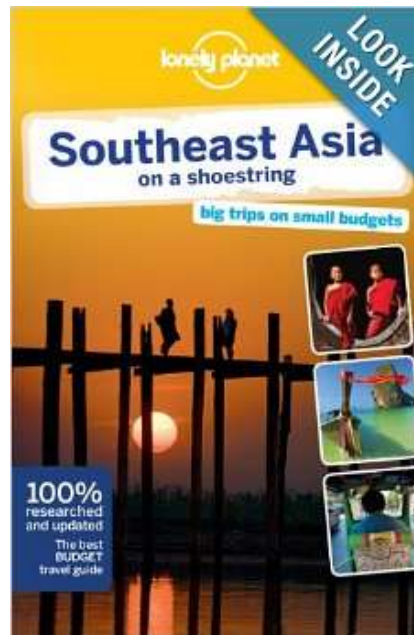
[Vagabonding: An Uncommon Guide to the Art of Long-Term World Travel by Ralf Potts](#) - I love this book and have read it a few times. It's great for getting the inspiration to travel. Ralf Potts shows how you can make your dreams of traveling come true, even on a shoestring budget.



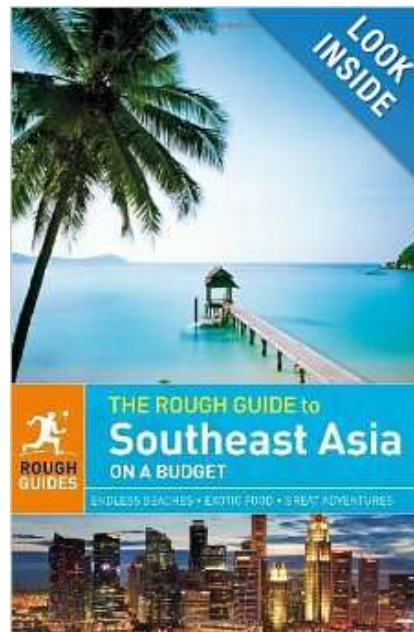
[How to Travel the World on \\$50 a Day: Travel Cheaper, Longer, Smarter by Matt Kepnes](#) - Matt has been traveling for many years and knows all the ins and out of saving money. Especially useful for US residents is his advice on how to get free flights. This book will pay for itself with what you save on your travels.



[Lonely Planet Southeast Asia \(Shoestring\)](#) - Lonely Planet is a favorite travel guide among travelers and always offer tons of great advice.



[The Rough Guide to Southeast Asia On A Budget](#) - The Rough Guide series is another that's popular with travelers all over the world.



Useful Travel Products

This is a list of the essential items that we travel with. All available from Amazon.com.

Notebook Security Cable



If you take your laptop with you when traveling, then a security cable is highly recommended. The [Sendt Black Security Cable](#) looks good and keeps your laptop safe.

Travel Adapter



The [elago Tripshell World Travel Adapter](#) shown above works in 150 countries and comes with two USB ports.

Extension Lead



We didn't take one around SE Asia, but we wish we had. Even some of the more modern hotels only had one or two sockets in the room, so this would really have come in handy. It also means you only need one adapter to be able to plug in all your electronics. See [Innovera Power Strip](#).

Luggage



This is much debate among travelers about whether to travel with a backpack or suitcase. Most seem to prefer a backpack, but we prefer suitcases, specifically the type that has four wheels, such as the [Samsonite](#) cases above. They are extremely easy to move around, especially in hot countries.



We also carry a smaller backpack for general use. The [Osprey Daylite Backpack](#) above is a great option.

Camera



Many travelers are happy to use the cameras that come with their smart phones, so a separate camera may not be needed. But I always travel with my Panasonic Lumix GF5, which has now been superseded by the [Lumix GF6](#).

Smart Phone



We both travel with our [Samsung](#) smart phones.

Kindle



One thing that I couldn't travel without is my [Kindle](#). I love chilling in a cafe with a cup of coffee and a good book. I have the old style Kindle, but I'd get a new one if I was buying for the first time.

A Few Final Things

If you think your friends or family will find this book useful, please feel free to let them know how they can get their own copy by directing them to renegadetravels.com/free-sea-book.

If you could also share the link on [twitter](#), [facebook](#) and other social networks, it would be much appreciated.

You can follow us at renegadetravels.com.

If you found this book useful, we'd appreciate if you could use the affiliate links in the book to book your hotels, hostels, air travel, amazon.com purchases, etc. This will help us to travel and provide more free information and free books to our readers. You can find a complete list of the links on our website at renegadetravels.com/resources/. Bookmark this page, and make your bookings and purchases from one of the links. It won't cost you anything extra, but will help us a little.

You can also make a donation for this book to our [PayPal](#) email address of manfred@renegadetravels.com.

Happy travels,

Manfred (manfred@renegadetravels.com)



up to **75%** off
over **140,000** hotels
new deals **every day**

[book now!](#) agoda.com

The Agoda.com banner features a white background with a grey border. The text is centered and uses a mix of black and red colors. A purple button with white text is positioned at the bottom left, and the Agoda logo (a row of five colored dots) is at the bottom right.



Hotels.com®

Worldwide
hotel sale

Save
up to
40%

[Book now!](#)

The Hotels.com banner has a red top bar with the logo. The main background is yellow. It features a red badge with white text in the top right corner. At the bottom, there is a red button with white text and three small images: a castle, a beach with a palm tree, and the Statue of Liberty.