

Southeast Asia Directory

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This chapter includes general information about Southeast Asia. Specific information for each country is listed in the individual country directories.

ACCOMMODATION

The accommodation listed in this guidebook occupies the low end of the price and amenities scale. 'Bare bones', 'basic' and 'simple' typically mean that the room has four walls, a bed and a fan (handy for keeping mosquitoes at bay). In the cheapest instances, the bathroom is usually shared. Most places

geared to foreigners have Western-style toilets, but multistorey hotels that cater to locals usually have Asian squat toilets. Air-con, private bathrooms and well-sealed rooms are treated as 'splurges' in this guidebook. Camping is not a widespread option. Accommodation in this book is listed by price and, unless stated otherwise, includes private bathrooms.

Be a smart shopper when looking for a room. Always ask for the price first, then ask to see a room for cleanliness, comfort and quiet. Don't feel obligated to take a room just because the place is mentioned in Lonely Planet. Sometimes the quality of a guesthouse plummets after gaining a mention in Lonely Planet, but this can be corrected by diligent travellers who exercise their own judgment.

If the price is too high, ask if they have anything cheaper. Don't use the price listed in Lonely Planet as a bargaining chip. We list independent businesses that can raise or lower their prices at will without notifying us. Unless it is the low season, most lodgings don't bargain over their rates. Once you've paid for a room there is no chance of a refund, regardless of the size of the rat that scurried across the floor. It is recommended to pay per day rather than in bulk, but be courteous and pay first thing in the morning to keep staff from resorting to pushiness. Settle your bill the night before if you are catching an early bus out of town; most hotels and guesthouses do not staff their desks from midnight to 6am.

Advance reservations (especially with advance deposits) are generally not necessary. If you do make a booking, don't rely on an agent; the price will mysteriously double to pay the extra outstretched hand.

ACTIVITIES

Ocean sports and jungle trips are the major outdoor activities in Southeast Asia. For ocean sports, operators are plentiful and many beach resorts rent out gear. If you're not a beginner, consider bringing required gear from home as equipment here can be substandard.

Diving & Snorkelling

Southeast Asia is a diving and snorkelling paradise. If you've never seen Southeast Asia's jewel-hued waters before, just about anywhere will seem amazing. But there are many diving and snorkelling hot spots in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines.

In Indonesia, Bali is the diving superstar, but there are countless small islands and reefs between Flores, Timor, Komodo, Maluku and Sulawesi. Pulau Weh, off the coast of Sumatra, has a stunning underwater landscape to explore.

There's some diving on the west coast of Malaysia, but it's better on the east coast, where Pulau Tioman, Pulau Redang and Pulau Perhentian are just some of the possibilities. There are also sites in Malaysian Borneo.

In Thailand, well-heelled divers from across the globe travel to Phuket and its nearby islands, including Phang-Nga and the world-famous Similan and Surin Islands. However, some of the inland reefs on Thailand's west coast bear scars from the 2004 tsunami. In the Gulf of Thailand, off the east coast, Ko Samui, Ko Pha-Ngan and Ko Tao all have dive outfits that tend to be in the backpacker price range.

In the Philippines, head to diving hot spot Puerto Galera, or to Palawan for wreck dives.

A few noteworthy spots for snorkelling include Lovina in Bali and the Gili Islands, both in Indonesia; Pulau Tioman and Pulau Perhentian on Malaysia's east coast; and Ko Pha-Ngan and Ko Tao in Thailand.

Before scuba diving or snorkelling, obtain reliable information about physical and environmental concerns at the diving or snorkelling site (eg from a reputable local dive operation). If you're diving, make sure you're healthy and that you're only diving at sites within your realm of experience; if available, engage the services of a competent, professionally trained dive instructor.

Opinions vary about whether Southeast Asia is a reputable spot to gain diving certificates; the island of Ko Tao in Thailand is regarded as one of the cheapest places to do so, but dive operators in other locations complain that Ko Tao is a dive factory, simply passing people through the machine.

Surfing

Indonesia is the biggest surfing destination in Asia. For years surfers have been carting their boards to isolated outposts in search of long, deserted breaks. Kuta in Bali is a famous spot, but there's surf right along the south coast of the inner islands – from Sumatra

RESPONSIBLE DIVING

Please consider the following tips when diving and help preserve Southeast Asia's reefs:

- Never use anchors on the reef and take care not to ground boats on coral.
- Avoid touching or standing on living marine organisms or dragging equipment across the reef. Polyps can be damaged by even the gentlest contact. If you must hold on to the reef, only touch exposed rock or dead coral.
- Be conscious of your fins. Even without contact, the surge from fin strokes near the reef can damage delicate organisms. Take care not to kick up clouds of sand, which can smother organisms.
- Practise and maintain proper buoyancy control. Major damage can be done by divers descending too fast and colliding with the reef.
- Take great care in underwater caves. Spend as little time within them as possible as your air bubbles may be caught within the roof and thereby leave organisms high and dry. Take turns to inspect the interior of a small cave.
- Resist the temptation to collect or buy coral or shells or to loot marine archaeological sites (mainly shipwrecks).
- Ensure that you take home all your rubbish and any litter you may find as well. Plastics in particular are a serious threat to marine life.
- Do not feed fish.
- Minimise your disturbance of marine animals. Never ride on the backs of turtles.

RESPONSIBLE TREKKING

To help preserve the ecology and beauty of Southeast Asia, consider the following tips when trekking.

Rubbish

- Carry out all your rubbish. Don't overlook easily forgotten items, such as silver paper, orange peel, cigarette butts and plastic wrappers. Empty packaging should be stored in a dedicated rubbish bag. Make an effort to carry out rubbish left by others.
- Never bury your rubbish: digging disturbs soil and ground cover, and encourages erosion. Buried rubbish is likely to be dug up by animals, who may be injured or poisoned by it. It may also take years to decompose.
- Minimise waste by taking minimal packaging and no more food than you will need. Take reusable containers or stuff sacks.
- Sanitary napkins, tampons, condoms and toilet paper should be carried out, despite the inconvenience. They burn and decompose poorly.

Human Waste Disposal

- Contamination of water sources by human faeces can lead to the transmission of all sorts of nasties. Where there is a toilet, please use it. Where there is none, bury your waste. Dig a small hole 15cm (6in) deep and at least 100m (320ft) from any watercourse. Cover the waste with soil and a rock.
- Ensure that these guidelines are applied to a portable toilet tent if one is being used by a large trekking party. Encourage all party members, including porters, to use the site.

Washing

- Don't use detergents or toothpaste in or near watercourses, even if they are biodegradable.
- For personal washing, use biodegradable soap and a water container (or even a lightweight, portable basin) at least 50m (160ft) away from the watercourse. Disperse the waste water widely to allow the soil to filter it fully.
- Wash cooking utensils 50m (160ft) from watercourses using a scourer, sand or snow instead of detergent.

Erosion

- Hillsides and mountain slopes, especially at high altitudes, are prone to erosion. Stick to existing tracks and avoid short cuts.
- If a well-used track passes through a mud patch, walk through the mud so as not to increase the size of the patch.
- Avoid removing the plant life that keeps topsoils in place.

Fires & Low-Impact Cooking

- Don't depend on open fires for cooking. The cutting of wood for fires in popular trekking areas can cause rapid deforestation. Cook on a light-weight kerosene, alcohol or Shellite (white gas) stove and avoid those powered by disposable butane gas canisters.
- Fires may be acceptable below the tree line in areas that get very few visitors. If you light a fire, use an existing fireplace. Don't surround fires with rocks. Use only dead, fallen wood. Remember the adage 'the bigger the fool, the bigger the fire'. Use minimal wood, just what you need for cooking. In huts, leave wood for the next person.
- Ensure that you fully extinguish a fire after use. Spread the embers and flood them with water.

through to Sumbawa, and Sumba across to Papua. Pulau Nias, off the coast of Sumatra, is another beloved spot.

Siargao in the Philippines is another surf spot.

Trekking

Trekking in Southeast Asia isn't on the same mountain scale as in Nepal, but the more demure peaks are home to many minority hill-tribe villages, which host overnight trekking parties. The northern Thai cities of Chiang Mai, Mae Hong Son and Chiang Rai are very popular with prospective trekkers, turning Dr Livingstone fantasies into organised-tour realities.

Muang Sing in Laos has developed an award-winning ecotourism project for visits to local ethnic minority villages. The treks to Gunung Rinjani in Indonesia have earned similar praise for preserving the environment and local culture. The mountain village of Sapa in Vietnam is another base for organised hill-tribe journeys.

Malaysia has some excellent national parks, including Taman Negara, Gunung Mulu National Park and Kinabalu National Park, which holds the summit of 4101m-high Mt Kinabalu, one of the region's highest peaks.

Once you've climbed a volcano, sucked in a lungful of sulphur gas and peered into the forbidding caldera, you may never again be satisfied by the rewards of an ordinary mountain trek. In Indonesia, it's easy to organise treks through Sumatra's volcanic peaks in Berastagi. Java's volcanic peaks, such as Gunung Merapi, can be a taxing climb, while spectacular Gunung Bromo is more of a stroll. Gunung Batur and Gunung Agung volcanoes in Bali are popular day trips. But volcanoes aren't the only trekking options in Indonesia: Bukit Lawang has orang-utan-filled jungle, and outer regions such as Papua and Sulawesi, offer more adventurous, deep-immersion trekking.

In the Philippines, the volcanic Mt Mayon, Mt Kanlaon and Mt Isarog are interesting climbs. There are also some stunning trips in the Cordillera region of North Luzon, including treks around the rice terraces of Banaue and Bontoc.

Before embarking on a trek, make sure you are healthy and feel comfortable walking for a sustained period. Ask before you set out about the environmental characteristics that

can affect your walk, and ensure you walk only in tracks within your realm of experience. You should also be aware of local laws, regulations and etiquette about wildlife and the environment.

BATHING

Most hotels and guesthouses do not have hot-water showers, though places in the larger cities or in colder regions may have hot-water options for an extra charge.

At basic hotels in rural towns the bathrooms usually have a large jar or cement trough filled with water for bathing purposes. A plastic or metal bowl is used to sluice water from the jar or trough over the body – don't jump in the trough!

Many rural people bathe in rivers or streams. If you choose to do the same, be aware that public nudity is not acceptable. Do as the locals do and bathe with some clothing on.

BOOKS

See the country chapters for recommended reading about each country (fiction and non-fiction), and the Snapshots chapter (p29) for books covering the whole region's history and culture.

For more detailed information on a country, region or city, refer to the large range of travel guidebooks produced by Lonely Planet; see the individual country directories for area-specific titles.

If you're looking to indulge a passion for underwater exploration, you might like to check out *Diving & Snorkeling Thailand*. If, on the other hand, you have a passion for simply indulging, you can't do better than *World Food Thailand*, *World Food Indonesia*, *World Food Malaysia & Singapore* or *World Food Vietnam*.

Also of interest to travellers who like to get chatty is Lonely Planet's *Southeast Asia Phrasebook*; country-specific phrasebooks include the *Burmese Phrasebook*, *East Timor Phrasebook*, *Filipino (Tagalog) Phrasebook*, *Hill Tribes Phrasebook*, *Indonesian Phrasebook*, *Lao Phrasebook*, *Malay Phrasebook*, *Thai Phrasebook* and *Vietnamese Phrasebook*.

BUSINESS HOURS

In the Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia businesses are typically open seven days a week. In the Muslim countries some

businesses close during Friday afternoon prayers. Refer to Business Hours in the individual country directories for more details; in each chapter, opening hours will only be listed when they diverge from those in Business Hours.

CLIMATE

With the exception of northern Myanmar (Burma), all of Southeast Asia lies within the tropics. This means that regardless of when you visit, the weather is likely to be warm or even downright hot. High humidity is also common, with few areas far enough inland to enjoy thoroughly dry weather. Of course, temperatures are much cooler in the mountains.

Broadly speaking, there are two main weather patterns in the region: that of mainland Southeast Asia and that of oceanic Southeast Asia. A brief description of these patterns is provided in this section, but be sure to check the country chapters of this book, as there are significant regional variations within these patterns.

Countries located in mainland Southeast Asia generally have a relatively cool dry season from November to February, a hot dry season from March to May, and then a hot rainy season that starts sometime in June and peters out during September or October. In drier parts of the region, it might only rain in the afternoons for an hour or so during the rainy season. However, do note the Malay peninsula (ie Thailand and Malaysia) is much wetter than the rest of the subregion and that the rainy season there can bring storms that last anywhere from an hour to a week. Near the end of the monsoon season, flooding is common.

The climates of countries located in oceanic Southeast Asia are governed by two monsoons: one from the northeast, which usually falls between the months of October and April; and one from the southwest, which usually falls between the months of May and September. What this means is that it basically rains every day throughout the year, even in the so-called dry season, when afternoon showers last for about an hour. Only during the peak of the rainy season can travel be adversely affected.

See p916 for climate charts, and check out individual country directories for further information.

CUSTOMS

Customs regulations vary little around the region. Drugs and arms are strictly prohibited – death or a lengthy stay in prison are common sentences. Pornography is also a no-no. Check the Customs sections in the directories of the country chapters for further details.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Drugs

The risks associated with recreational drug use and distribution have grown to the point where all travellers should exercise extreme caution even in places with illicit reputations; just down the road from Kuta Beach in easy-going Bali is a jail where a number of travellers are enjoying the tropical climate for much longer than they had intended. Indeed, in Indonesia you can actually end up behind bars because your travel companions had dope and you didn't report them. A spell in a Thai prison is true Third World torture; in Malaysia and Singapore, possession of certain quantities of dope can lead to hanging.

The death penalty, prison sentences and huge fines are given as liberally to foreigners as to locals; no-one has evaded punishment because of ignorance of local laws. And don't think that your government can save you – it can't.

With heightened airline security after the 9/11 attacks in the USA, customs officials are zealous in their screening of both luggage and passengers.

Prostitution & Sex Tourism

Prostitution, including child prostitution, is unfortunately common in parts of Southeast Asia. Many are forced into the industry by conditions of poverty; others, including most child prostitutes, are sold into the business by relatives. These sex slaves are either trafficked overseas or forced to cater to domestic demand and local sex-tourism operators.

Fear of contracting HIV/AIDS from mature sex workers has led to increasing exploitation of (supposedly uninfected) children. Those who aren't put off by the stark realities of child prostitution in Southeast Asia should keep in mind that penalties in the region for paedophiles are severe, and other countries around the world – including Australia, New Zealand, the USA and a number of European countries – now prosecute and punish citizens for paedophile offences committed abroad.

For more information about groups working to end this exploitation, visit the website of **End Child Prostitution & Trafficking** (Ecpat; www.ecpat.net). This is a global network that works to stop child prostitution, child pornography and the trafficking of children for sexual purposes.

Scams

Every year we get hundreds of letters and emails from hapless travellers reporting that they've been scammed in Southeast Asia. In almost all cases there are two culprits: a shrewd scam artist and the traveller's own greed.

Almost all scams revolve around the unlikely scenario of a local presenting you with an opportunity to save or make lots of money. The perennial favourites include card games and gemstones. If someone asks you to join a card game be extremely wary. If the game involves money, walk away – it's rigged.

As for gemstones, if there really were vast amounts of money to be made by selling gems back home, savvy businesspeople would have a monopoly on the market already. Don't believe the people who say that they support their global wanderings by reselling gemstones; in reality they support themselves by tricking unsuspecting backpackers.

See Dangers & Annoyances in the country chapters for local scams.

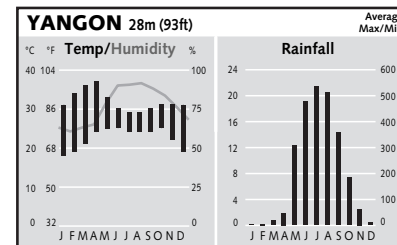
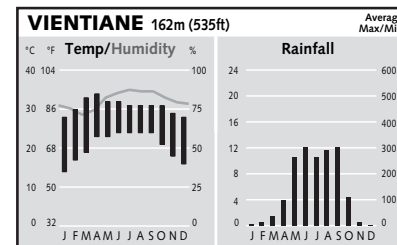
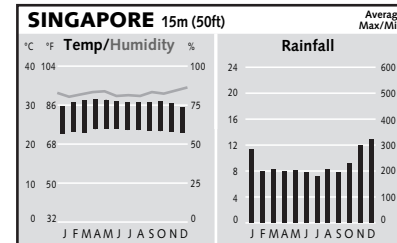
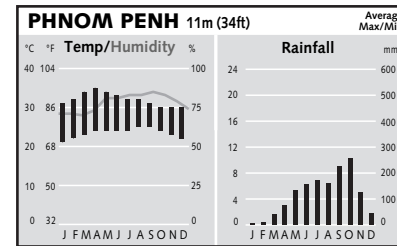
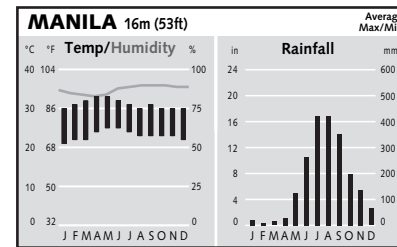
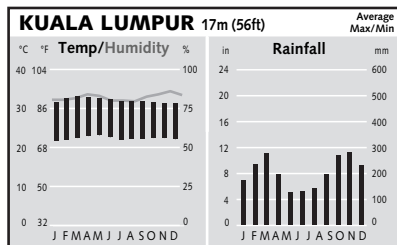
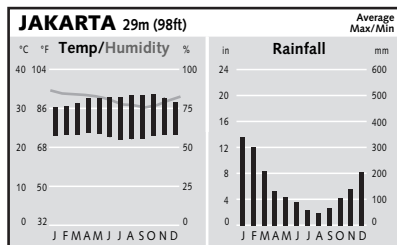
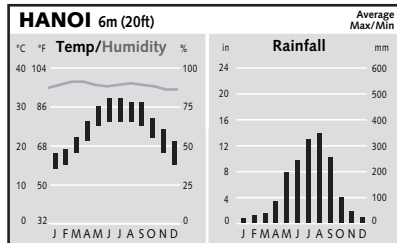
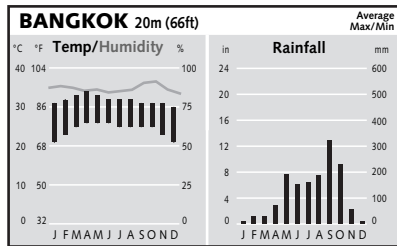
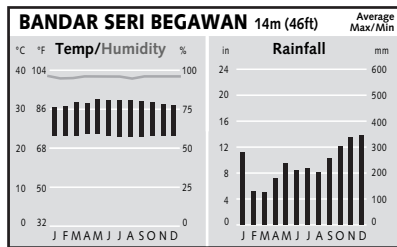
Theft

Theft in Southeast Asia is usually by stealth rather than by force. Keep your money and valuables in a money belt worn underneath your clothes. Be alert to the possible presence of snatch thieves, who will whisk a camera or a bag off your shoulder. Don't store valuables in easily accessible places such as backpack pockets or packs that are stored in the luggage compartment of buses. Be especially careful about belongings when sleeping in dorm rooms.

Violent theft is very rare but occurs from time to time – usually late at night and after the victim has been drinking. Be careful walking alone at night and don't fall asleep in taxis.

Always be diplomatically suspicious of overfriendly locals.

However, don't let paranoia ruin your trip. With just a few sensible precautions, most travellers make their way across the region without incident.



Trouble Spots

Civilian terrorism is a threat in Southeast Asia, although high-profile incidents such as the 2002 and 2005 Bali bombings have not been repeated in recent years. Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines have fairly isolated areas where separatist groups are active. Though the violence is usually self-contained, there is always the concern that more densely populated areas or international communities will be targeted to draw attention to an insurgency's cause. Make sure you get the most up-to-date information on local conditions before setting off (and even while you're on the road). The governments of most countries issue travel warnings for their citizens, and the local English-language newspapers available in most parts of Southeast Asia are also good sources of information. At the time of writing, the following areas were considered trouble spots.

EAST TIMOR

Despite warnings and media reports, East Timor is usually fairly safe; the reported violence has been mostly political and has not been aimed at visitors. Dili is fairly safe by day but the streets are deserted at night – more due to perceived threats than actual ones. The best way to avoid trouble is to simply avoid it; if you encounter a political rally, it's best to give it a wide berth.

INDONESIA

Indonesia has several active cells of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), a militant Islamic group with links to Al-Qaeda. This group is believed to have orchestrated the 2002 Bali nightclub bombings, in which 202 people, mainly foreign tourists, were killed. Other attacks with possible links to JI include the 2004 bombing of the Australian embassy, the 2003 bombing of the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta and the 2005 Bali bombing. However, at the time of writing, there had been a lengthy hiatus in attacks on high-profile Western targets.

Previously the site of an armed independence struggle, Sumatra's northern province of Aceh is a rare success story. After the 2004 tsunami, the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) reached a so-far lasting peace deal with Jakarta that opened up the province to international aid organisations in an effort to rebuild tsunami-destroyed communities. More recently, independent travellers have been visiting the province without incident.

Central Sulawesi is still experiencing sectarian violence, and travellers should pay careful attention to current events before visiting the region. Kota Ambon in Maluku has experienced sectarian violence in the past but there have not been any recent outbreaks.

PHILIPPINES

Insurgency groups active in the Philippines include the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), both of which are Islamic separatist groups operating in Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago. Having orchestrated bombings and kidnappings throughout the region, ASG is the more militant and dangerous of the two. It allegedly has ties to other global Islamic terror networks and espouses a goal of a pan-Islamic state. With help from the US government, the Philippine army has weakened ASG by killing the group's reported leader, Khadaffy Janjalani, in 2006. An independence movement in the Moro (Islamic) southern region, MILF broke with its parent organisation, the Moro National Liberation Front, in the 1990s after rejecting an offer from Manila for semiautonomy. Several cease fires have been brokered and broken in the past.

Avoid travel in the Sulu archipelago and Mindanao, except for the city of Davao and the areas of northern Mindanao covered in this book. Travellers to the region should also monitor events and watch for flare-ups in violence.

The New People's Army (NPA) is the military arm of the outlawed communist party and is active throughout the country, but it is not considered a major threat to tourists.

THAILAND

The predominately Muslim southern provinces of Narathiwat, Yala, Pattani and Songkhla have long experienced periods of unrest between Islamic separatist groups and the central Thai government. Since 2002 violence has re-emerged in the region, and what was a low-wattage war on government targets has steadily escalated into the civilian sector. There are now concerns that the insurgency will morph into a purging of non-Muslim residents from the region.

In 2006, coordinated bombings on 22 commercial banks in Yala Province signalled a maturation point for terrorist activities. After the 2006 coup, observers hoped that

the military junta, led by a Muslim Thai who was former military chief of operations in southern Thailand, would be able to broker a peace deal that had been out of reach of the unpopular Thaksin administration. But violence has increased markedly: public schools in the area have been shut down because of arson attacks and threats, a rubber-producing plant was bombed, and the rail line through the regions continues to be attacked. Southern insurgents were also blamed for the 2006 New Year's Eve bombings in Bangkok, but most observers suspect supporters of the recently deposed government rather than expanding insurgency activities.

Because the situation is volatile, it is advised to avoid travel through the Muslim-majority provinces of Thailand and on the rail line that connects to Malaysia through Sungai Kolok.

The entire Thai-Myanmar border experiences periodic clashes between the Burmese army, Thai border patrols and the minority rebel armies. When conflicts arise the borders are closed and travel into affected areas is restricted, although the border has been quiet for the past five years.

DISCOUNT CARDS

The International Student Identity Card (ISIC) is moderately useful in Southeast Asia, with limited success in gaining the holder discounts. Some domestic and international airlines provide discounts to ISIC cardholders, but the cards carry little bargaining power because knock-offs are so readily available.

DISCRIMINATION

By and large most Southeast Asian countries are homogeneous (or at least the majority thinks so), creating fairly rigid attitudes towards ethnicities, which are based solely on skin colour. White foreigners stand out in a crowd. Children will point, prices will double and a handful of presumptions will precede your arrival. In general, these will seem either minor nuisances or exotic elements of travel. If you are a Westerner of Asian descent, most Southeast Asians will assume that you are a local until the language barrier proves otherwise. With the colour barrier removed, many Western Asians are treated like family and sometimes get charged local prices. Many Asians might mistake people of African heritage with fairly light complexions for locals or at least distant cousins. People with darker

complexions will be regarded as foreign as white visitors, but will also be saddled with the extra baggage of Africa's inferior status in the global hierarchy. Mixed Asian and foreign couples will attract some disapproval, especially in Thailand where the existence of a large sex-tourism industry suggests that the Asian partner is a prostitute. See also right for information for gay and lesbian travellers, and p923 for tips for female travellers.

DRIVING LICENCE

Parts of Southeast Asia, including Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, are good spots for exploring by car and motorcycle. If you are planning to do any driving, get an International Driving Permit (IDP) from your local automobile association before you leave your home country; IDPs are inexpensive and valid for one year. In some countries (eg Malaysia) your home driving licence is sufficient, but elsewhere (eg Indonesia and Thailand) an IDP is required.

ELECTRICITY

Most countries work on a voltage of 220V to 240V at 50Hz (cycles); note that 240V appliances will happily run on 220V. You should be able to pick up adaptors in electrical shops in most Southeast Asian cities.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

It's important to realise what your own embassy – the embassy of the country of which you are a citizen – can and can't do to help you if you get into trouble.

Generally speaking, it won't be much help in emergencies if the trouble you're in is remotely your own fault. Remember that you are bound by the laws of the country you are in. Your embassy will not be sympathetic if you end up in jail after committing a crime locally, even if such actions are legal in your own country.

In genuine emergencies you might get some assistance, but only if other channels have been exhausted. For example, if you need to get home urgently, a free ticket home is exceedingly unlikely – the embassy would expect you to have insurance. If you have all your money and documents stolen, it might assist with getting a new passport, but a loan for onward travel is out of the question.

Most travellers should have no need to contact their embassy while in Southeast

Asia, although if you're travelling in unstable regions or really going off the beaten track, it may be worth letting your embassy know – be sure to let them know when you return. In this way valuable time, effort and money won't be wasted looking for you while you're relaxing on the beach somewhere in a different country.

For details of embassies in Southeast Asia – and of Southeast Asian embassies in other countries – see Embassies & Consulates in the individual country directories.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Most Southeast Asian holidays revolve around religious events and provide an excellent display of the country's culture, food and music. Businesses are usually closed and travelling is difficult, so plan ahead. See also Festivals & Events in country chapters for country-specific festivals.

February

Vietnamese Tet & Chinese New Year Probably one of the loudest festivals on the planet, this is celebrated countrywide in Vietnam and in Chinese communities throughout the region with fireworks, temple visits and all-night drumming. It occurs in February.

March/April

Easter Week In March or April, the Christian holiday of Easter is observed in the Philippines, Indonesia and East Timor.

Thai, Lao & Cambodian New Year The lunar New Year begins in mid-April and, in addition to displaying religious devotion, the citizens take to the streets to dowse one another with water.

June/July

Buddhist Lent At the start of the monsoonal rains in June or July, the Buddhist monks retreat into monasteries in Myanmar, Laos and Thailand. This is the traditional time for young men to visit the monasteries.

October/November/December

Ramadan Observed in Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and southern Thailand during August or September, the Muslim fasting month requires that Muslims abstain from food, drink, cigarettes and sex between sunrise and sunset.

Christmas In December, various local celebrations occur in the Philippines, East Timor and Indonesia.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

The Philippines, Thailand and Laos have the most progressive attitudes in the region

towards homosexuality; the Philippines even has legislation against gay discrimination. Singapore has a thriving gay scene, despite its antiquated antisodomy laws. Even in countries such as Malaysia, where religious law forbids homosexuality, and Vietnam, where the country's institutional attitudes are discriminatory, police arrests have been either on the decline (in the case of Vietnam), or only enforced on Muslims (in the case of Malaysia). Most urban centres have gay communities and are fairly relaxed in their attitude towards gay men and lesbians, while the countryside is more conservative.

While same-sex displays of affection are part of most Asian cultures, be discreet and respectful of the local culture. **Utopia Asian Gay & Lesbian Resources** (www.utopia-asia.com) has an excellent profile of each country's record on acceptance, as well as short reviews on gay nightspots.

INSURANCE

A travel insurance policy to cover theft, loss and medical problems is a necessity. There's a wide variety of policies available, so check the small print. For more information about the ins and outs of travel insurance, contact a travel agent or travel insurer.

Some policies specifically exclude 'dangerous activities', which can include scuba diving, motorcycling and even trekking. A locally acquired motorcycle licence is also not valid under some policies. Check that the policy covers ambulance rides, emergency flights home and, in the case of death, repatriation of a body.

Also see p934 for further information on health insurance. For info on car and motorcycle insurance, see p933.

INTERNET ACCESS

You can access email and internet services in all countries of the region, and you'll find high-speed connections in major urban areas. Good internet connections are usually commensurate with a destination's road system: well-sealed highways usually mean speedy travel through the information highway as well. Access points in Southeast Asia vary from internet cafés to post offices to guesthouses, and the cost is generally low (see Internet Access in the country directories for further details). Wireless connections are available in the bigger cities but, in general,

wi-fi is still priced to suit business travellers' expense accounts.

Censorship of some sites is in effect to varying degrees across the region. In Myanmar, the government tries to restrict access to web-based email and other direct communication applications.

LEGAL MATTERS

Be sure to know the national laws so you don't unwittingly commit a crime. In all of the Southeast Asian countries, using or trafficking drugs carries stiff punishments that are enforced even if you're a foreigner.

If you are a victim of a crime, contact the tourist police, if available; they are usually better trained to deal with foreigners and foreign languages than the regular police force.

MAPS

Country-specific maps are usually sold in English bookstores in capital cities. Local tourist offices and guesthouses can also provide maps of smaller cities and towns.

MONEY

Most experienced travellers will carry their money in a combination of travellers cheques, cash, credit cards and bank cards. You'll always find situations in which one of these cannot be used, so it pays to carry them all.

ATMs

In fairly large cities ATMs are widespread and most networks talk to overseas banks, so you can withdraw cash (in the local currency) directly from your home account. But before banking on this option review the Money section in the country directories for specifics: Cambodia and Laos are virtually ATM-free.

Use your bank card only when you are dealing with cash machines, not for point-of-sale purchases. Having your card number stolen is a concern, and you will have more consumer protection with a credit card (which is paid after the purchase) than an ATM card (which deducts the cost at the time of purchase). Talk to your bank before heading off about compatibility with foreign ATMs and surcharges.

Bargaining & Tipping

Most Southeast Asian countries practise the art of bargaining. Remember that it is an art, not a test of wills, and the trick is to find a price that makes everyone happy. Bargaining

is acceptable in markets and in souvenir shops where fixed prices aren't displayed. As a beginner, tread lightly by asking the price and then asking if the seller can offer a discount. The price may creep lower if you take your time and survey the object. If the discounted price isn't acceptable give a counter offer but be willing to accept something in the middle. Once you counter you can't name a lower price. Don't start haggling unless you're interested in actually buying it. If you become angry or visibly frustrated then you've lost the game.

Tipping is not standard practice but is greatly appreciated. In some international restaurants in big cities, a service charge or gratuity will be added automatically to the bill.

Cash

Having some cash (preferably US dollars) is handy, but is risky too; if you lose it, it's gone.

Credit Cards

For a splurge at a nice hotel or a crazed shopping spree in Singapore, a credit card is your best friend; however, keep careful tabs on purchases as fraud is a concern.

Exchanging Money

Currency exchange is generally straightforward throughout the region. Most banks have exchange counters that usually offer the market rate; guesthouses and businesses that deal with tourists will exchange currencies, often as a courtesy rather than an advertised endeavour, but the rates tend to be lower than businesses dealing in greater volumes of exchanges. See the individual country chapters for more details.

Other major currencies, such as the euro and the Australian dollar, are easy to change in the main centres; it's when you start getting away from regularly visited areas that your currency options become more limited.

Travellers Cheques

Travelling with a stash of travellers cheques can help if you hit an ATM desert. Get your cheques in US dollars and in large denominations, say US\$100 or US\$50, to avoid heavy per-cheque commission fees. Keep careful records of which cheques you've cashed, and keep this information separate from your money so you can file a claim if any cheques are lost or stolen.

PASSPORT

To enter most countries your passport must be valid for at least six months from your date of entry, even if you're only staying for a few days. It's probably best to have at least a year left on your passport if you are heading off on a trip around Southeast Asia.

Testy border guards may refuse entry if your passport doesn't have enough blank pages available. Before leaving get more pages added to a valid passport (if this is a service offered by your home country). Once on the road, you can apply for a new passport in most major Southeast Asian cities.

PHOTOGRAPHY Airport Security

X-ray machines that claim to be film safe generally are, but you are advised to have very sensitive film (1000 ISO and above) checked by hand. *Never* put your film in your checked baggage – the X-ray machines used to check this luggage will fog your film.

Film & Equipment

For those travelling with a digital camera, most internet cafés in well-developed countries allow customers to transfer their images to an online email account or storage site and, in some cases, burn a CD. Before leaving home, find out if your battery charger will require a power adapter by visiting the website of the **World Electric Guide** (www.kropla.com/electric.htm).

Print film is readily available in cities and larger towns across Southeast Asia.

The best places to buy camera equipment or have repairs done are Singapore, Bangkok or Kuala Lumpur. Be aware that the more equipment you travel with, the more vulnerable you are to theft.

If you're after some tips, check out Lonely Planet's *Travel Photography: A Guide to Taking Better Pictures*, written by internationally renowned travel photographer, Richard I'Anson. Other books in the Lonely Planet Travel Photography series include *Landscape Travel Photography*, *People Travel Photography*, *Urban Travel Photography* and *Wildlife Travel Photography*.

Photographing People

You should always ask permission before taking a person's photograph. Many hill-tribe villagers seriously object to being photographed,

or they may ask for money in exchange; if you want the photo, you should honour the price.

POST

Postal services are generally reliable across the region. Of course, it's always better to leave important mail and parcels for the big Asian centres such as Bangkok, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta.

There's always an element of risk in sending parcels home by sea, though as a rule they eventually reach their destination. If it's something of value, you're better off mailing home your dirty clothes to make room in your luggage for precious keepsakes. Don't send cash or valuables through government-run postal systems.

Poste restante is widely available throughout the region and is the best way of receiving mail. When getting people to write to you, ask them to leave plenty of time for mail to arrive and to print your name very clearly. Underlining the surname also helps.

SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The disparity between rich and poor is one of Southeast Asia's most pressing social concerns. Few of the region's countries have established social nets to catch people left homeless or jobless by debt mismanagement or larger problems associated with rapid industrialisation. Most destitute people migrate to the cities, doing menial labour for barely subsistence wages, or selling their bodies for more handsome profits. The attendant problems of displaced citizens include drug abuse, HIV/AIDS, and unsanitary and dangerous living conditions. Because of the Buddhist belief in reincarnation, the prevailing political wisdom is that the poor are fated to suffer because of wrongdoings committed in previous lives.

STUDYING

There is a variety of courses available throughout the region, from language, meditation and massage to *muay thai* (Thai boxing) and cooking, and from formal programmes sponsored by international agencies to informal classrooms run in homes.

Council on International Educational Exchange (www.ciee.org/study) arranges study-abroad programmes in language, art and culture in Thailand and Vietnam, hosted in local universities. The University of Texas at Austin

maintains a useful website, **Study Abroad Asia** (<http://asnic.utexas.edu/asnic/stdyabrd/StdyabrdAsia.html>), which lists universities that sponsor overseas study programmes in Southeast Asia. Also visit Lonely Planet's **Travel Links** (www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_links), and see Studying the individual country directories for more information.

TELEPHONE

Phone systems vary widely across Southeast Asia. For international calls, most countries have calling centres (usually in post offices) or public phone booths that accept international phonocards. Each country's system is different, so it's a good idea to check under Telephone in the country directories before making a call.

You can take your mobile phone on the road with you and get respectable coverage in major population centres. However, not all mobile phones are outfitted for international use; this is especially the case for mobile phones from the USA. Check with your service provider for global-roaming fees and other particulars.

Fax services are available in most countries across the region.

TOILETS

Across the region, squat toilets are the norm, except in hotels and guesthouses geared towards tourists and international business travellers.

Next to the typical squat toilet is a bucket or cement reservoir filled with water. A plastic bowl usually floats on the water's surface or sits nearby. This water supply has a two-fold function: toiletgoers scoop water from the reservoir with the plastic bowl and use it to clean their nether regions while still squatting over the toilet; and a bowl full of water poured down the toilet takes the place of the automatic flush. More rustic toilets in rural areas may simply consist of a few planks over a hole in the ground.

Even in places where sit-down toilets are installed, the plumbing may not be designed to take toilet paper. In such cases, the usual washing bucket will be standing nearby and there will be a waste basket in which you place used toilet paper.

Public toilets are common in department stores, bus and railway stations, and large hotels. Elsewhere you'll have to make do. Of course, in land-mine-affected countries such

as Laos and Cambodia, stay on the roadside and do the deed, or grin and bear it until the next town.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Most of the Southeast Asian countries have government-funded tourist offices with varying capacities of usefulness. Better information is sometimes available through guesthouses and fellow travellers. See Tourist Information in the individual country chapters for contact information.

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

Travellers with serious disabilities will likely find Southeast Asia to be a challenging place to travel. Even the more modern cities are very difficult to navigate for mobility- or vision-impaired people. In general, care of a person with a disability is left to close family members throughout the region, and it's unrealistic to expect much in the way of public amenities.

International organisations that can provide information on mobility-impaired travel include the following:

Mobility International USA (☎ 541-343-1284; www.miusa.org; 132 E Broadway, Suite 343; Eugene, Oregon 97401, USA)

Royal Association for Disability & Rehabilitation (Radar; ☎ 020-7250 3222; www.radar.org.uk; 12 City Forum, 250 City Rd, London EC1V 8AF, UK)

Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality (SATH; ☎ 212-447-7284; www.sath.org; 347 Fifth Ave, Suite 610, New York, NY 10016, USA)

VISAS

Visas are available to people of most nationalities on arrival in most Southeast Asian countries, but rules vary depending on the point of entry. See Visas in the individual country directories.

Get your visas as you go rather than getting them all before you leave home; they are often easier and cheaper to get in neighbouring countries. Visas are also only valid within a certain period, which could interfere with an extended trip.

Procedures for extending a visa vary from country to country. In some cases, extensions are nearly impossible, in others they're a mere formality. And remember: look smart when you're visiting embassies, consulates and borders.

In some Southeast Asian countries you are required to have an onward ticket out

of the country before you can obtain a visa to enter.

VOLUNTEERING

For long-term commitments in health, agriculture or education, contact **Voluntary Service Overseas** (VSO; www.vso.org.uk), **Australian Volunteers International** (AVI; ☎ in Australia 03-9279 1788; www.australianvolunteers.com) or the **US Peace Corps** (☎ in the USA 800-424-8580; www.peacecorps.gov) for placement in one of the Southeast Asian countries. See also Volunteering in the individual chapters for country-specific organisations.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

While travel in Southeast Asia for women is generally safe, solo women travelling in Muslim areas have reported some negative reception. In conservative Muslim areas, local women rarely go out unaccompanied and are usually modestly dressed (including headscarves). Foreign women who enter these areas without observing local customs infrequently incur a sexual or anti-Western backlash.

Keep in mind that modesty in dress is culturally important across all Southeast Asia. Covering past the shoulders and above the knees helps define you as off limits. The ever popular spaghetti-strap singlets inadvertently send the message that you're a prostitute; likewise, save the topless sunbathing for home or the nude-magazine spread.

In conservative Muslim areas, you can sometimes cut your hassles in half just by tying a bandanna over your hair (a minimal approximation of the headscarf worn by most Muslim women).

Solo women should also be on guard when returning home late at night or arriving in a new town at night. While physical assault is rare, local men often consider foreign women as being exempt from their own society's rules of conduct regarding members of the opposite sex.

Treat overly friendly strangers, both male and female, with a good deal of caution.

Many travellers have reported small peepholes in the walls and doors of cheap hotels, some of which operate as boarding houses or brothels (often identified by the advertisement of 'day use' rates). If you can afford it, move to another hotel or guesthouse.

Use common sense about venturing into dangerous-looking areas, particularly at night or if you're alone. If you do find yourself in

a tricky situation, try to extricate yourself as quickly as possible – hopping into a taxi or entering a business establishment and asking them to call a cab are often the best solutions.

Finally, you can reduce hassles by travelling with other backpackers. This doesn't necessarily mean bringing a friend from home; you can often pair up with other travellers you meet on the way.

WORKING

Teaching English is the easiest way to support yourself in Southeast Asia. For short-term gigs, Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) and Jakarta have a lot of language schools and a high turnover. In Malaysia,

expat families sometimes need English-speaking au pairs and, in the Philippines, English speakers are often needed as language trainers for the call centres. In Indonesia and Thailand there is some dive-school work. There is also limited opportunity for bar work in some of the beach resorts, but often these jobs are reserved for locals.

Payaway (www.payaway.co.uk) provides a handy online list of language schools and volunteer groups looking for recruits for its Southeast Asian programmes.

Transitions Abroad (www.transitionsabroad.com) and its namesake magazine cover all aspects of overseas life, including landing a job in a variety of fields. The website also provides links to other useful sites and publications.

Transport

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This chapter gives an overview of the transport options for getting to Southeast Asia, and getting around the region once you're there. For more specific information about getting to (and around) each country, see Transport in the country chapters.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Step one is to get to Southeast Asia, and flying is the easiest option. The only overland possibilities from outside the region are from Papua New Guinea into Indonesia, and China into Myanmar (Burma), Vietnam or Laos.

AIR Tickets

The major Asian gateways for cheap flights are Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Denpasar (Bali). The boom of Asian budget carriers has brought about cheap fares between Chinese cities and Southeast Asia. Compare the cost of flying to an East Asian city from your home country and then connecting to a budget carrier into Southeast Asia. Some of the budget carriers based in Asia are starting to offer long-distance routes to smaller European hub cities. These low-cost fares are sometimes only available on the company's website rather than online fare search engines, so it is worth perusing the internet for budget carriers.

Also be flexible with your travel dates and know when to buy a ticket. Trips that last longer than two weeks tend to be more expensive. Buying a ticket too early or too late before your departure will affect the price as well. The ticket-purchasing sweet spot is 21 to 15 days before departure. When researching airline fares, be sure to dump your computer's cookies, which track your online activity and can sometimes result in a higher fare upon subsequent searches.

The following online resources can help in researching bargain airfares:

Attitude Travel (www.attitudetravel.com) Offers a guide to low-cost carriers in Asia, including a list of airlines and destinations.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Click on Booking & Services to research multistop destination trips.

COURIER FLIGHTS

Courier flights – in which you get a bargain fare by acting as a passenger agent for a company's parcel shipment on a commercial flight – are available for trips to Asia, but they don't always represent the best deal. Travel is usually last-minute and luggage is limited to a carry-on bag. You'll need to join the Air Courier Association or the International Association of Air Travel Couriers to obtain flight listings.

ROUND-THE-WORLD & CIRCLE ASIA TICKETS

If Asia is one of many stops on a worldwide tour, consider a round-the-world (RTW) ticket, which allows a certain number of stops within a set time period as long as you don't backtrack; for more information, talk to a travel agent.

THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and not as a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

Circle Asia fares (sometimes called All Asia Passes or Discovery Pass) are offered by various airline alliances for a circular route originating in the USA, Europe or Australia and travelling to certain destinations in Asia, including South-east and East Asia. Before committing, check out the fares offered by the budget regional carriers to see if the circle pass provides enough of a saving. Contact the individual airlines or a travel agent for more information.

From Asia

India and China are fused to major Southeast Asian cities through several low-cost airlines. Some budget carriers making the hop include **Pacific Airlines** (code BL; <http://pacificairlines.com.vn>), **One-Two-Go** (code OTG; www.fly12go.com), **Jetstar Asia** (code 3K; www.jetstar.com), **Air Asia** (code AK; www.airasia.com) and **Tiger Airways** (code TR; www.tigerairways.com). In most large cities with a tourist industry, there are also bucket shops that can sell cheap tickets to any destination you can dream of.

From Australia

Jetstar (code JQ; www.jetstar.com) flies into several Southeast Asian cities from Australia. Also look for cheap fares in the travel sections of weekend newspapers such as the *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Also try searching **Travel.com** (www.travel.com.au).

Two well-known agencies for cheap fares: **Flight Centre** (☎ 133 133; www.flightcentre.com.au) Has dozens of offices throughout Australia.

STA Travel (☎ 134 782; www.statravel.com.au) Has offices in all major cities and on many university campuses.

From Canada

Canadian air fares tend to be higher than those sold in the USA, and it is more expensive to fly from the east coast than the west. The *Globe & Mail*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Montreal Gazette* and the *Vancouver Sun* are good places to look for cheap fares. **Travel CUTS** (www.travelcuts.com) is Canada's national student travel agency and has offices in all major cities.

From Continental Europe

France has a network of student travel agencies, including **OTU Voyages** (www.otu.fr), which can supply discount tickets to travellers of all ages. General travel agencies in Paris include **Nouvelles Frontières** (☎ 08 25 00 07 47; www.nouvelles-frontieres.com; 21 ave des Gobelins) or **Voyageurs du Monde** (☎ 08 92 68 83 63; www.vdm.com; 55 rue Sainte Anne).

In Switzerland, **STA Travel** (☎ 058 450 4020; www.statravel.ch; Ankerstrasse 12, Zurich) specialises in student, youth and budget fares; there are also branches in other major Swiss cities.

In the Netherlands, **NBBS Reizen** (☎ 0900 1020 300; www.nbbs.nl; Kleinpolderlaan 4, 2911 PA, Nieuwerkerk a/d IJssel) is the official student travel agency.

In Germany, **STA Travel** (☎ 01805 456 422; www.statravel.de) caters for travellers under 26.

From New Zealand

The *New Zealand Herald* has a helpful travel section. **Flight Centre** (☎ 0800 243 544; www.flightcentre.co.nz) has a large central office in Auckland and many branches throughout the country, while **STA Travel** (☎ 0800 474 400; www.statravel.co.nz) has offices in Auckland, Hamilton, Palmerston North, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin.

From the UK

Budget carriers such as **Oasis** (code 08; www.oasishongkong.com) and **Mahan Air** (code W5; www.mahan.aero) have begun long-haul flights to Southeast Asia. Advertisements for many travel agencies appear in the travel pages of the weekend broadsheets, such as the *Independent* and the *Sunday Times*.

For students or travellers under 26, the following are popular travel agencies:

STA Travel (☎ 0871 2300 040; www.statravel.co.uk)

Has offices throughout the UK.

Traifinders (☎ 0845 058 5858; www.traifinders.co.uk)

From the USA

Ticket promotions frequently connect Asia to Los Angeles, New York and other big cities. The *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *San Francisco Examiner* all produce weekly travel sections in which you will find a number of travel-agency ads and fare promos.

Students and travellers aged under 26 should try the US offices of **STA Travel** (☎ 800 781 4040; www.statravel.com).

LAND

The land borders between Southeast Asia and the rest of Asia include the frontier that Myanmar shares with India and Bangladesh, and the Chinese border with Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam. Of these, it is possible to travel overland from China into Myanmar (but not vice versa) and in either direction between China and Laos, and China

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flying & Climate Change

Pretty much every form of motor travel generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon Offset Schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow jetsetters to offset the level of greenhouse gases they are responsible for with financial contributions to sustainable travel schemes that reduce global warming – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, supports the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: lonelyplanet.com.

and Vietnam. See p525 for information on the Myanmar–China border crossing; p387 for the Laos–China border crossing; and p837, p843 and p848 for Vietnam–China border crossings.

Another international crossing is between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea; see p330 for more information.

SEA

Ocean approaches to Southeast Asia from your home continent can be made aboard cargo ships plying various routes around the world. Ridiculously expensive and hopelessly romantic, a trip aboard a cargo ship is the perfect opportunity to write that novel that never writes itself. Ships usually have space for two to eight non-crew members, who have their own rooms but eat meals with the crew. Prices vary widely depending on the departure point, but start at around US\$5000.

Charter boats can transport you from Papua New Guinea to Papua (formerly Irian Jaya) in Indonesia.

GETTING AROUND

AIR

Air travel can be a bargain within the region, especially from transit hubs such as Bang-

kok, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. No-frills regional carriers such as **Air Asia** (code AK; www.airasia.com) have made travelling between capital cities cheaper than taking land transport in some cases. Air routes between Southeast Asian countries are listed in the Transport sections of each country chapter.

A little caution is necessary when buying tickets from travel agents. Carefully check the tickets to make sure that the dates meet your specifications and confirm with the airline as soon as possible. Favourite tricks include tickets with limited validity (when you've been told the tickets are valid for one year). Get recommendations from fellow travellers or ask for a list of licensed agents from the country's tourist office.

Most airports in Southeast Asia charge a departure tax, so make sure you have a bit of local currency left.

Approximate intra-Asia fares are shown on the Southeast Asian Air Fares map (p928).

Air Passes

National airlines of Southeast Asian countries frequently run promotional deals from select Western cities or for regional travel. **Airtimetable.com** (www.airtimetable.com) posts seasonal passes and promotions.

An ongoing deal is the Asean Air Pass, offered through cooperating airlines for travel in

Southeast Asia. Visit **Thai Airways International** (THAI, code THA; www.thaiair.com) for more details.

BICYCLE

Touring Southeast Asia on a bicycle has been gaining more and more supporters. Many long-distance cyclists start in Thailand and head south through Malaysia to Singapore. Road conditions are good enough for touring bicycles in most places, but mountain bikes are recommended for forays off the beaten track.

Vietnam is a great place to travel by bicycle – you can take bikes on buses, and the entire coastal route is feasible. If flat-land cycling is not your style, then Indonesia might be the challenge you're looking for. Road conditions are bad and inclines steep, but the Sumatran jungle is still deep and dark. In Laos and Cambodia, road conditions can impede two wheeling, but light traffic, especially in Laos, makes pedalling more pleasant than elsewhere. **Mr Pumpy** (www.mrpumpy.net) provides all the inside information to get your wheels spinning.

Top-quality bicycles and components can be bought in major cities such as Bangkok but, generally, fittings are hard to find. Bicycles can

travel by air; check with the airline about extra charges and shipment specifications.

BOAT

Ferries and boats make trips between Singapore and Indonesia, Malaysia and Indonesia, and Thailand and Malaysia.

Typically, guesthouses or travel agents sell tickets and can provide updated departure times. Be sure to check the visa regulations at port cities.

BORDER CROSSINGS

Going through the region overland is getting easier as potholed ditches become major highways. The border crossings for the region are listed here by country; the following abbreviations are used for convenience: B (Brunei), ET (East Timor), C (Cambodia), I (Indonesia), L (Laos), M (Malaysia), My (Myanmar), P (Philippines), T (Thailand) and V (Vietnam).

Be aware of border closing times, visa regulations and any transport scams by asking your fellow travellers before making a long-distance trip or by referring to the relevant country chapters.

Brunei

The Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah form a C clamp around Brunei. All border crossings feed into the Brunei capital of Bandar Seri Begawan.

The first four of the following crossings are from Sarawak, while the fifth is from Sabah:

- Kuala Baram (M) to Kuala Belait (B), from Miri (M); see p50, p506
- Limbang (M) to Kuala Lurah (B); see p49, p508
- Limbang (M) to Bangar (B); see p51, p508
- Lawas (M) to Bangar (B); see p51, p509
- Pulau Labuan (M) to Muara Port (B); see p49, p484

Cambodia

FROM LAOS

The only border passage to Cambodia is south of Si Phan Don (Four Thousand Islands) through Voen Kham (L) to Dom Kralor (C); see p115, p402. The main town on the Cambodian side is Stung Teng.

FROM THAILAND

There are five border crossings between Thailand and Cambodia:

- Aranya Prathet (T) to Poipet (C), which links Bangkok (T) to Siem Reap (C); see p97, p709
- Hat Lek (T) to Krong Koh Kong (C), which runs along the coast; see p113, p765

There are also three crossings in remote areas:

- Chong Jom (T) to O Smach (C); see p89, p753
- Choam Srawngam (T) to Choam (C); see p101, p755
- Ban Pakard (T) to Psar Pruhm (C); see p101, p765

FROM VIETNAM

There are three border-crossing options and word of a fourth:

- Moc Bai (V) to Bavet (C), for quick passage between Ho Chi Minh City (V) and Phnom Penh (C); see p79, see p893
- Vinh Xuong (V) to Kaam Samnor (C), linking Chau Doc (V) in the Mekong Delta to Phnom Penh (C); see p79, p900
- Tinh Bien (V) to Phnom Den (C), a remote crossing; see p81, p901

- Prek Chek (C) to Xa Xia (V), a possible new border crossing

East Timor

The Motoain (I) to Batugade (ET) border crossing (between East Timor and Indonesian West Timor) is open and serviced by bus; see p141, p297.

Indonesia

FROM EAST TIMOR

See the entry under East Timor.

FROM MALAYSIA

High-speed ferries run between Malaysia and the Indonesian island of Sumatra:

- Pulau Penang (M) and Belawan (I), which links to Medan (I); see p262, p451
- Melaka (M) and Dumai (I), which links to Bukittinggi (I); see p267, p438
- Johor Bahru (M) to Pulau Bintan and Pulau Batam in the Riau Islands (I); see p267, p456

On the island of Borneo, the Indonesia–Malaysia border can be crossed at the following spots:

- Tawau (M) to Nunukan (I), linking to Tarakan (I); see p304, p492
- Tebedu (M) and Entikong (I), which links to Kuching (M); see p310, p498

FROM SINGAPORE

Ferries run from Singapore to Pulau Bintan and Pulau Batam in the Riau Islands (I); see p267, p654.

Laos

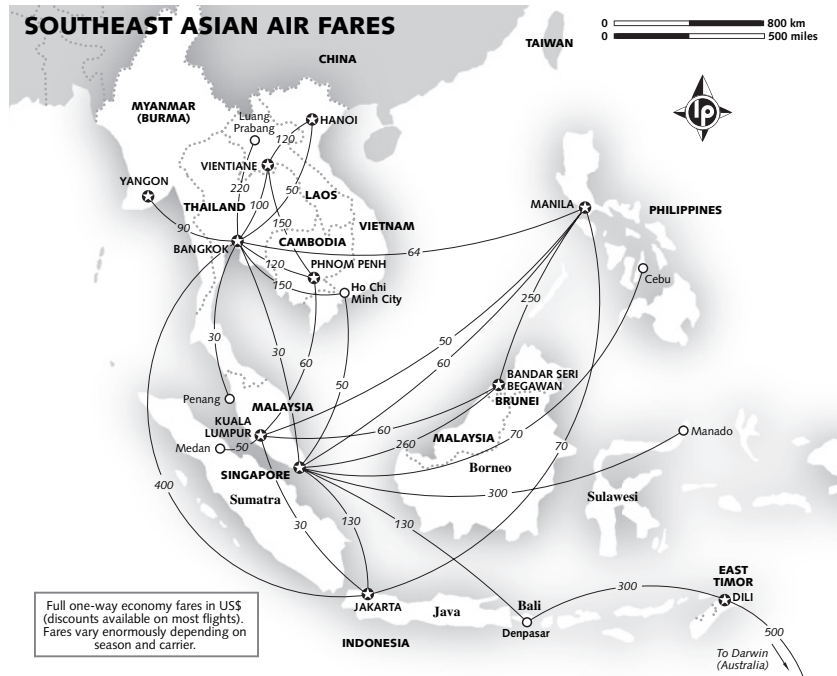
FROM CAMBODIA

See the entry under Cambodia.

FROM THAILAND

There are five border crossings into Laos:

- Chiang Khong (T) to Huay Xai (L), which links northern Thailand to Luang Prabang (L) via boat; see p390, p744
- Nong Khai (T) to Vientiane (L); see p362, p758
- Mukdahan (T) to Savannakhet (L), a popular route between southern Laos and northeast Thailand; see p394, p756
- Chong Mek (T) to Vang Tao (L), which links Ubon Ratchathani (T) to Pakse (L); see p398, p755



■ Nakhon Phanom (T) to Tha Khaek (L), a far-flung river crossing in the north-east of Thailand; see p394, p757

FROM VIETNAM

There are five land crossings from Vietnam, but only three are easily accessible:

■ Lao Bao (V) to Dansavanh (L), an easy border crossing linking to Savannakhet (L); see p394, p858

■ Dien Bien Phu (V) to Tay Trang (L), gateway to Phongsali province (L); see p384, p839

■ Cau Treo (V) to Kaew Neua (L), linking to Vinh (V); see p362, p838

■ Nam Can (V) to Nam Khan (L), a remote crossing; see p380, p838

■ Nam Xoi (V) to Na Maew (L), another remote crossing; see p383, p839

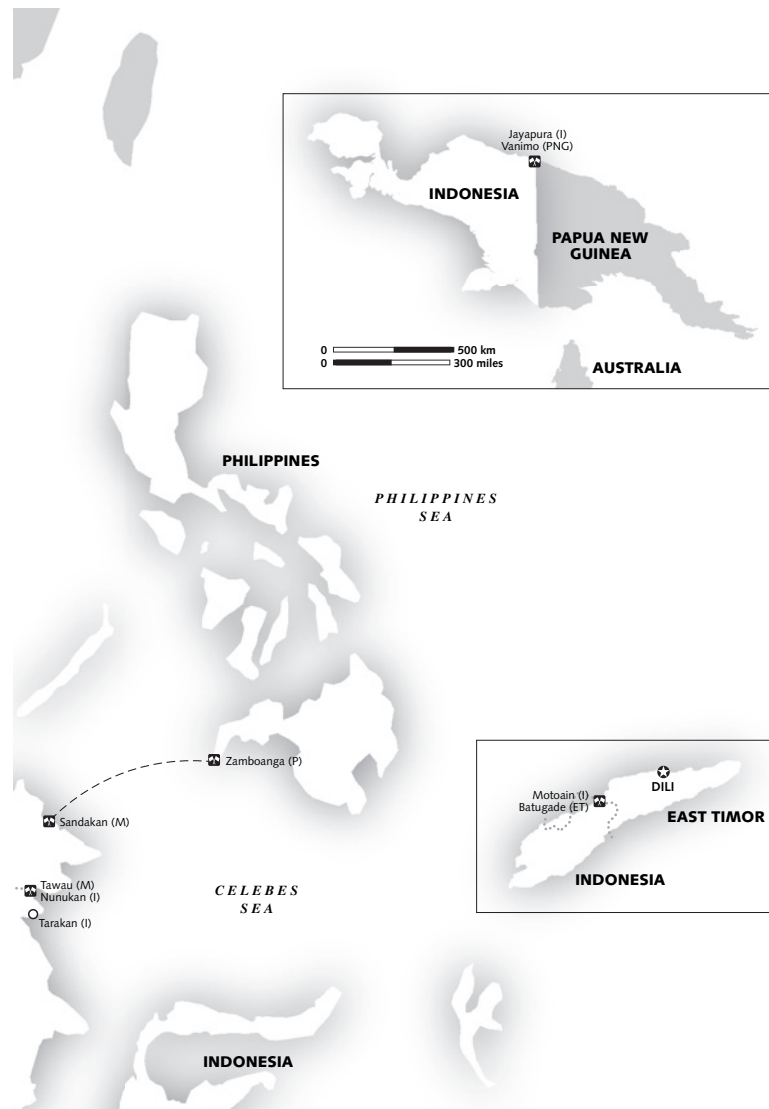
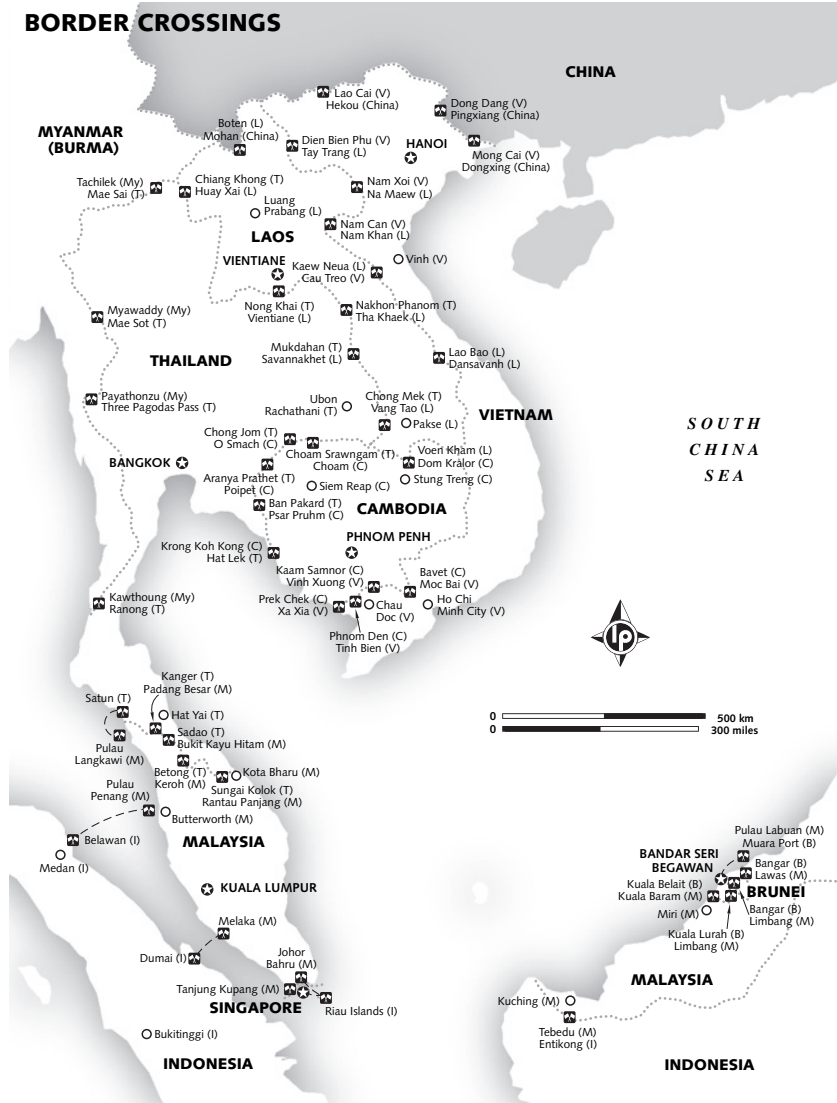
Malaysia

FROM BRUNEI

See the entry under Brunei.

FROM INDONESIA

See the entry under Indonesia



FROM THE PHILIPPINES

There are infrequent passenger ferries from Zamboanga (P) on Mindanao to Sandakan (M) in Sabah; see p488, p635.

FROM SINGAPORE

A 1km-long causeway connects the northern end of Singapore in the suburb of Woodlands to Johor Bahru (M). To the west another bridge connects Singapore in the suburb of Tuas with Tanjung Kupang (M). For details, see p456, p654.

FROM THAILAND

The crossings between Thailand and Malaysia are by road, boat and train. Until the safety situation improves, avoid train travel via Sungai Kolok (T) in the restive Muslim-majority provinces of southern Thailand. The crossings include the following:

- Satun (T) to Pulau Langkawi (M); see p455, p803
- Sungai Kolok (T) to Rantau Panjang (M), linking to Kota Bharu (M); see p470, p786
- Kanger (T) to Padang Besar (M), linking Hat Yai (T) to Butterworth (M); see p453, p784
- Sadao (T) to Bukit Kayu Hitam (M), linking Hat Yai (T) to Butterworth (M); see p453, p784

There is also a crossing between Betong (T) and Keroh (M), but using this crossing was extremely inadvisable at the time of writing due to violence in Yala Province.

Myanmar

Myanmar has land borders with Thailand, but most are either closed or have travelling restrictions. There are two legitimate crossings:

- Mae Sai (T) to Tachilek (My); see p552, p746
- Ranong (T) to Kawthoung (My); see p546, p787

There are also two day-pass points, but travellers can only travel from Thailand to Myanmar (and not the other way round):

- Mae Sot (T) to Myawaddy (My); see p726
- Three Pagodas Pass (T) to Payathonzu (My); see p716

Philippines

See the entry under Malaysia.

Singapore

Singapore has land crossings into Malaysia and sea crossings into Indonesia; see the entries under those countries.

Thailand

Thailand has border crossings to/from Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia and Myanmar; see the entries under those countries.

Vietnam

Vietnam has open borders with Cambodia and Laos; see the entries under those countries.

BUS

In most cases, land borders are crossed via bus, which either travels straight through the two countries with a stop for border formalities or requires a change of buses at the appropriate border towns.

Bus travellers will enjoy a higher standard of luxury in Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia, where roads are well paved, reliable schedules exist and, sometimes, snacks are distributed. Be aware that theft does occur on some long-distance buses, especially those departing from Bangkok's Th Khao San heading south; keep all valuables on your person, not in a stowed locked bag.

Local buses in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam are like moving sardine cans, but that is part of their charm.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

What is the sound of freedom in Southeast Asia? The put-put noise of a motorcycle. Convenient for getting around the beaches or touring in the country, motorcycles are available for hire or purchase, but they require a lot more investment and safety precautions than many visitors realise.

It is advisable to hire a car or motorcycle for local sightseeing rather than depend on it for long-distance travel. You could hit Thailand and Malaysia by car pretty easily, enjoying well-signposted, well-paved roads. Road conditions in Laos and Cambodia vary, although sealed roads are becoming the norm. Indonesia and the Philippines have roads that vary between islands but most are

in need of repair. Vietnam's major highways are in relatively good health.

See p919 for driving licence laws.

Hire

There are Western car-hire chains camped out at Southeast Asian airports, capital cities and major tourist destinations. On many tourist islands, guesthouses and locals will hire motorcycles and cars for an affordable rate.

Insurance

Get insurance with a motorcycle if at all possible. The more reputable motorcycle-hire places insure all their motorcycles; some will do it for an extra charge. Without insurance you're responsible for anything that happens to the bike. To be absolutely clear about your liability, ask for a written estimate of the replacement cost for a similar bike – take photos as a guarantee. Some agencies will only accept the replacement cost of a new motorcycle.

Insurance for a hired car is also necessary. Be sure to ask the car-hire agent about liability and damage coverage.

Road Rules

Drive carefully and defensively; lives are lost at astounding rates on Southeast Asian highways. Remember too that smaller vehicles yield to bigger vehicles regardless of circumstances – on the road, might is right. The middle of the road is typically used as a passing lane, even if there is oncoming traffic, and your horn is used to notify other vehicles that you intend to pass them.

Safety

Always check a machine thoroughly before you take it out. Look at the tyres for treads, check for oil leaks, test the brakes. You may be held liable for any problems that weren't duly noted before your departure.

When riding a motorcycle, wear protective clothing and a helmet; long pants, long-sleeved shirts and shoes are highly recommended as sunburn protection and as a second skin if you fall. If your helmet doesn't have a visor, wear goggles, glasses or sunglasses to keep bugs, dust and other debris out of your eyes.

HITCHING

Hitching is never entirely safe in any country in the world, and is not recommended. Trav-

MOTORCYCLE TIP

Most Asians are so adept at driving and riding on motorcycles that they can balance the whole family on the front bumper or even take a quick nap as a passenger. Foreigners unaccustomed to motorcycles are not as graceful. If you're riding on the back of a motorcycle remember to relax. For balance hold on to the back bar, not the driver's waist. Tall people should keep their long legs tucked in as most drivers are used to shorter passengers. Women wearing skirts should collect loose material so that it doesn't catch in the wheel or drive chain. Now enjoy the ride.

ellers who decide to hitch should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk. People who do choose to hitch will be safer if they travel in pairs and let someone know where they are planning to go.

LOCAL TRANSPORT

Because personal ownership of cars in Southeast Asia is limited, local transport within a town is a roaring business. For the right price, drivers will haul you from the bus station to town, around town, around the corner, or around in circles. The bicycle rickshaw still survives in the region, assuming such aliases as *sāmlāw* in Thailand and *cyclo* in Vietnam. Anything motorised is often modified to carry passengers – from Thailand's obnoxious three-wheeled chariots known as *túk-túk* to the Philippines' altered US Army jeeps. In large cities, extensive public bus systems either travel on fixed routes or do informal loops around the city, picking up passengers along the way. Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore also boast state-of-the-art light-rail systems that make zipping around town feel like time travel.

TRAIN

For intercountry travel, the *International Express* train travels from Thailand all the way through the Malay peninsula, ending its journey in Singapore. Trains also serve Nong Khai, on the Thailand-Cambodia border, and Aranya Prathet, on the Thailand-Laos border.

You'll find that Thailand and then Malaysia have the most extensive intracountry rail systems, although trains rarely run on time.

Health

Dr Trish Batchelor

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Health issues and the quality of medical facilities vary enormously depending on where you travel in Southeast Asia. Many of the major cities are now very well developed, although travel to rural areas can expose you to a variety of health risks and inadequate medical care.

Travellers tend to worry about contracting infectious diseases when in the tropics, but infections are a rare cause of serious illness or death in travellers. Pre-existing medical conditions, such as heart disease, and accidental injury (especially traffic accidents) account for most life-threatening problems. Becoming ill in some way, however, is relatively common. Fortunately, most common illnesses can be either prevented with some common-sense behaviour or treated easily with a well-stocked traveller's medical kit.

The following advice is a general guide and does not replace the advice of a doctor trained in travel medicine.

BEFORE YOU GO

Pack medications in their original, clearly labelled containers. A signed, dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic

names, is a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles, have a physician's letter stating their medical necessity. If you have a heart condition, bring a copy of your ECG.

If you take any regular medication, bring a double supply in case of loss or theft. In most Southeast Asian countries, excluding Singapore, you can buy many medications over the counter, but it can be difficult to find some of the newer drugs, particularly the latest antidepressants, blood-pressure medications and contraceptive pills.

INSURANCE

Even if you are fit and healthy, don't travel without health insurance – accidents do happen. Declare any existing medical conditions you have – the insurance company will check if your problem is pre-existing and will not cover you if it is undecleared. You may require extra cover for adventure activities such as rock climbing. If your health insurance doesn't cover you for medical expenses abroad, consider getting extra insurance. If you're uninsured, emergency evacuation is expensive – bills of more than US\$100,000 are not uncommon.

Find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers or reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures. (In many countries doctors expect payment in cash.) You may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly rather than you having to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim later, make sure you keep all documentation. Some policies ask you to call (reverse charges) a centre in your home country, where an immediate assessment of your problem is made. Some policies offer a range of medical-expense options; the higher ones are chiefly for countries that have extremely high medical costs, such as the USA.

VACCINATIONS

Specialised travel-medicine clinics are your best source of information; they stock all available vaccines and will be able to give recommendations specifically for you and your trip. The doctors will take into account factors such as past vaccination history, the length

of your trip, activities you may be undertaking and underlying medical conditions, such as pregnancy.

Most vaccines don't produce immunity until at least two weeks after they're given, so visit a doctor four to eight weeks before departure. Ask your doctor for an International Certificate of Vaccination (otherwise known as the yellow booklet), which will list all the vaccinations you've received.

Recommended Vaccinations

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends the following vaccinations for travellers to Southeast Asia:

Adult diphtheria and tetanus Single booster recommended if you haven't had one in the previous 10 years. Side effects include a sore arm and fever.

Hepatitis A Provides almost 100% protection for up to a year; a booster after 12 months provides at least another 20 years' protection. Mild side effects such as a headache and a sore arm occur in 5% to 10% of people.

Hepatitis B Now considered routine for most travellers. Given as three shots over six months. A rapid schedule is also available, as is a combined vaccination with Hepatitis A. Side effects are mild and uncommon, usually a headache and a sore arm. Lifetime protection occurs in 95% of people.

Measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) Two doses of MMR are required unless you have had the diseases. Occasionally a rash and a flu-like illness can develop a week after receiving the vaccine. Many young adults require a booster.

Polio Only one booster is required as an adult for lifetime protection. Inactivated polio vaccine is safe during pregnancy.

Typhoid Recommended unless your trip is less than a week long and is only to developed cities. The vaccine offers around 70% protection, lasts for two to three years and comes as a single shot. Tablets are also available. However, the injection is usually recommended as it has fewer side effects. A sore arm and fever may occur.

Varicella If you haven't had chickenpox, discuss this vaccination with your doctor.

The following immunisations are recommended for long-term travellers (more than one month) or those at special risk:

Japanese B Encephalitis Three injections in all. A booster is recommended after two years. A sore arm and headache are the most common side effects, although a rare allergic reaction comprising hives and swelling can occur up to 10 days after any of the three doses.

Meningitis Single injection. There are two types of vaccination: the quadrivalent vaccine gives two to three years'

protection, while the meningitis group C vaccine gives around 10 years' protection. Recommended for long-term backpackers aged under 25.

Rabies Three injections in all. A booster after one year will then provide 10 years' protection. Side effects are rare – occasionally a headache and a sore arm.

Tuberculosis (TB) A complex issue. It is usually recommended that long-term adult travellers have a TB skin test before and after travel, rather than vaccination. Only one vaccine is given in a lifetime.

Required Vaccinations

The only vaccine required by international regulations is for yellow fever. Proof of vaccination will only be required if you have visited a country in the yellow-fever zone within the six days before entering Southeast Asia. If you are travelling to Southeast Asia from Africa or South America you should check to see if you require proof of vaccination.

MEDICAL CHECKLIST

Recommended items for a personal medical kit:

- antibacterial cream, eg mupirocin
- antibiotic for skin infections, eg amoxicillin/clavulanate or cephalixin
- antibiotics for diarrhoea, such as norfloxacin or ciprofloxacin; azithromycin for bacterial diarrhoea; tinidazole for giardiasis or amoebic dysentery
- antifungal cream, eg clotrimazole
- antihistamine, such as cetirizine for daytime and promethazine for night
- anti-inflammatory such as ibuprofen
- antiseptic, eg Betadine
- antispasmodic for stomach cramps, eg Buscopan
- contraceptives
- decongestant, eg pseudoephedrine
- DEET-based insect repellent
- diarrhoea treatment; consider bringing an oral rehydration solution (eg Gastrolyte), diarrhoea 'stopper' (eg loperamide) and antinausea medication (eg prochlorperazine)
- first-aid items such as scissors, plasters, bandages, gauze, thermometer (but not one with mercury), sterile needles and syringes, safety pins and tweezers
- indigestion medication, eg Quick Eze or Mylanta
- iodine tablets (unless you are pregnant or have a thyroid problem) to purify water
- laxative, eg Coloxyl

- migraine medication; sufferers should take their personal medicine
- paracetamol
- permethrin to impregnate clothing and mosquito nets
- steroid cream for allergic or itchy rashes, eg 1% to 2% hydrocortisone
- sunscreen and hat
- throat lozenges
- thrush (vaginal yeast infection) treatment, eg Clotrimazole pessaries or Diflucan tablet
- Ural or equivalent if you're prone to urine infections

ONLINE RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel health advice on the internet. For further information, **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com) is a good place to start. The **World Health Organization** (www.who.int/ith) publishes a superb book called *International Travel & Health*, which is revised annually and is available online at no cost. Another website of general interest is **MD Travel Health** (www.mdtravelhealth.com), which provides complete travel health recommendations for every country and is updated daily. The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (CDC; www.cdc.gov) website also has good general information.

FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet's *Healthy Travel – Asia & India* is a handy pocket-size book that is packed with useful information, including pretrip planning, emergency first aid, immunisation and disease information, and what to do if you get sick on the road. Other recommended references include *Traveller's Health* by Dr Richard Dawood and *Traveling Well* by Dr Deborah Mills – check out www.travelingwell.com.au.

IN TRANSIT

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) occurs when blood clots form in the legs during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The longer the flight, the greater the risk. Although most blood clots are reabsorbed uneventfully, some may break off and travel through the blood ves-

sels to the lungs, where they may cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of DVT is swelling of or pain in the foot, ankle or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and difficulty in breathing. Travellers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of DVT on long flights you should walk about the cabin, perform isometric compressions of the leg muscles (ie contract the leg muscles while sitting), drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcohol.

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

Jet lag is common when crossing more than five time zones; it causes symptoms including insomnia, fatigue, malaise or nausea. To avoid jet lag, try drinking plenty of (nonalcoholic) fluids and eating light meals. Upon arrival seek exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep etc) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine) and meclizine (Antivert or Bonine) are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness. Their main side effect is drowsiness. A herbal alternative is ginger, which works like a charm for some people.

IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

AVAILABILITY OF HEALTH CARE

Most capital cities in Southeast Asia now have clinics that cater specifically to travellers and expats. These clinics are usually more expensive than local medical facilities, but are worth utilising as they will offer a superior standard of care. Additionally, they understand the local system and are aware of the safest local hospitals and best specialists. They can also liaise with insurance companies should you require evacuation. Recommended clinics are listed under Information in the capital city sections of country chapters in this book.

It is difficult to find reliable medical care in rural areas. Your embassy and insurance company are good contacts.

Self-treatment may be appropriate if your problem is minor (eg traveller's di-

arrhoea), you are carrying the appropriate medication and you cannot attend a recommended clinic. If you think you may have a serious disease, especially malaria, do not waste time – travel to the nearest quality facility to receive attention. It is always better to be assessed by a doctor than to rely on self-treatment.

Buying medication over the counter is not recommended, as fake medications and poorly stored or out-of-date drugs are common.

The standard of care in Southeast Asia varies from country to country:

Brunei General care is reasonable. There is no local medical university, so expats and foreign-trained locals run the health-care system. Serious or complex cases are better managed in Singapore, but adequate primary health care and stabilisation is available.

Cambodia There are a couple of international clinics in Phnom Penh, and one in Siem Reap, that provide primary care and emergency stabilisation.

East Timor No private clinics. The government hospital is basic and should be avoided. Contact your embassy or insurance company for advice.

Indonesia Local medical care in general is not yet up to international standards. Foreign doctors are not allowed to work in Indonesia, but some clinics catering to foreigners have 'international advisers'. Almost all Indonesian doctors work at government hospitals during the day and in private practices at night. This means that private hospitals often don't have their best staff available during the day. Serious cases are evacuated to Australia or Singapore.

AVIAN INFLUENZA (BIRD FLU)

Six Southeast Asian countries (Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar), plus China, Japan and South Korea, reported an outbreak of avian influenza (bird flu). The strain in question, known as 'Influenza A H5N1' or simply 'the H5N1 virus', is a highly contagious form of avian influenza that has since spread as far as Europe to the west. Throughout the region, government officials are scrambling to contain the spread of the disease, which wreaks havoc with domesticated bird populations.

While the avian influenza virus usually poses little risk to humans, there have been several recorded cases of the H5N1 virus spreading from birds to humans. Human cases of avian influenza in the region have been reported from Indonesia and Thailand. At the time of writing, Thailand had reported 25 cases of humans contracting the virus since 2003, with 17 deaths. In Indonesia, there had been more than 100 cases, with more than 80 deaths, since July 2005. The main risk is to people who directly handle infected birds, or come into contact with contaminated bird faeces or carcasses. Because heat kills the virus, there is no risk of infection from cooked poultry.

There is no clear evidence that the H5N1 virus can be transmitted between humans. However, the main fear is that this highly adaptable virus may mutate and be passed between humans, perhaps leading to a worldwide influenza pandemic.

Thus far, however, infection rates are limited and the risk to travellers is low. Travellers to the region should avoid contact with any birds and should ensure that any poultry is thoroughly cooked before consumption.

Laos There are no good facilities in Laos; the nearest acceptable facilities are in northern Thailand. The Australian Embassy Clinic in Vientiane treats citizens of Commonwealth countries.

Malaysia Medical care in the major centres is good, and most problems can be adequately dealt with in Kuala Lumpur.

Myanmar (Burma) Local medical care is dismal and local hospitals should only be used in desperation. There is an international medical clinic in Yangon (Rangoon). Contact your embassy for advice.

Philippines Good medical care is available in most major cities.

Singapore Has excellent medical facilities, and it acts as the referral centre for most of Southeast Asia.

Thailand There are some very good facilities in Thailand, particularly in Bangkok. After Singapore this is the city of choice for expats living in Southeast Asia who require specialised care.

Vietnam Government hospitals are overcrowded and basic. In order to treat foreigners, the facility needs to obtain a special licence, and so far only a few have been provided. The private clinics in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City should be your first port of call. They are familiar with the local resources and can organise evacuations if necessary.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Cutaneous Larva Migrans

Risk areas All countries except Singapore. This disease, caused by dog hookworm, is particularly common on the beaches of Thailand. The rash starts as a small lump, then

slowly spreads in a linear fashion. It is intensely itchy, especially at night. It is easily treated with medications and should not be cut out or frozen.

Dengue

Risk areas All countries.

This mosquito-borne disease is becoming increasingly problematic throughout Southeast Asia, especially in the cities. As there is no vaccine available it can only be prevented by avoiding mosquito bites. The mosquito that carries dengue bites day and night, so use insect-avoidance measures at all times. Symptoms include high fever, severe headache and body ache (dengue used to be known as breakbone fever). Some people develop a rash and experience diarrhoea. Thailand's southern islands are particularly high risk. There is no specific treatment, just rest and paracetamol – do not take aspirin as it increases the likelihood of haemorrhaging. See a doctor to be diagnosed and monitored.

Filariasis

Risk areas All countries except Singapore.

This mosquito-borne disease is very common in the local population, yet very rare in travellers. Mosquito-avoidance measures are the best way to prevent this disease.

Hepatitis A

Risk areas All countries.

A problem throughout the region, this food- and water-borne virus infects the liver, causing jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), nausea and lethargy. There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A; you just need to allow time for the liver to heal. All travellers to Southeast Asia should be vaccinated against hepatitis A.

Hepatitis B

Risk areas All countries.

The only sexually transmitted disease that can be prevented by vaccination, hepatitis B is spread by body fluids. In some parts of Southeast Asia, up to 20% of the population carry hepatitis B, and usually are unaware of this. The long-term consequences can include liver cancer and cirrhosis.

Hepatitis E

Risk areas All countries.

Hepatitis E is transmitted through contaminated food and water, and has similar symp-

toms to hepatitis A but is far less common. It is a severe problem in pregnant women, and can result in the death of both mother and baby. There is currently no vaccine, and prevention is by following safe eating and drinking guidelines.

HIV

Risk areas All countries.

HIV is now one of the most common causes of death in people under the age of 50 in Thailand. The Southeast Asian countries with the worst and most rapidly increasing HIV problem are Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. Heterosexual sex is now the main method of transmission in these countries.

Influenza

Risk areas All countries.

Present year-round in the tropics, influenza (flu) symptoms include high fever, muscle aches, runny nose, cough and sore throat. It can be very severe in people over the age of 65, and in those with underlying medical conditions such as heart disease or diabetes; vaccination is recommended for these individuals. There is no specific treatment, just rest and paracetamol.

Japanese B Encephalitis

Risk areas All countries except Singapore.

While rare in travellers, this viral disease, transmitted by mosquitoes, infects at least 50,000 locals each year. Most cases of the disease occur in rural areas and vaccination is recommended for travellers spending more than one month outside of cities. There is no treatment – a third of infected people will die while another third will suffer permanent brain damage. Highest-risk areas in the region include Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia.

Leptospirosis

Risk areas Thailand and Malaysia.

Leptospirosis is most commonly contracted after river rafting or canyoning. Early symptoms are very similar to the flu, and include headache and fever. The disease can vary from very mild to fatal. Diagnosis is through blood tests and it is easily treated with doxycycline.

Malaria

Risk areas All countries except Singapore and Brunei.

For such a serious and potentially deadly disease, there is an enormous amount of misinformation concerning malaria. You must get expert advice about whether your trip actually puts you at risk. Many parts of Southeast Asia, particularly city and resort areas, have minimal to no risk of malaria, and the risk of side effects from the prevention tablets may outweigh the risk of getting the disease. For most rural areas, however, the risk of contracting the disease far outweighs the risk of any side effects. Remember that malaria can be fatal. Before you travel, seek medical advice on the right medication and dosage for you.

Malaria is caused by a parasite transmitted by the bite of an infected mosquito. The most important symptom of malaria is fever, but general symptoms such as headache, diarrhoea, cough or chills may also occur. Diagnosis can only be made by taking a blood sample.

Two strategies should be combined to prevent malaria – mosquito avoidance and antimalarial medications. Most people who catch malaria are taking inadequate or no antimalarial medication.

Travellers are advised to prevent mosquito bites by taking the following steps:

- Use an insect repellent containing DEET on exposed skin. Wash this off at night, as long as you are sleeping under a mosquito net. Natural repellents such as citronella can be effective, but must be applied more frequently than products containing DEET.
- Sleep under a mosquito net that is impregnated with permethrin.
- Choose accommodation with screens and fans (if not air-conditioned).
- Impregnate clothing with permethrin when in high-risk areas.
- Wear long sleeves and trousers in light colours.
- Use mosquito coils.
- Spray your room with insect repellent before going out for your evening meal.

There are a variety of medications available. Derivatives of artesunate are not suitable as a preventive medication, although they are useful treatments under medical supervision.

The effectiveness of the chloroquine and paludrine combination is now limited in most of Southeast Asia. Common side effects include nausea (40% of people) and mouth ulcers. The combination is generally not recommended.

The daily doxycycline tablet is a broad-spectrum antibiotic that has the added benefit of helping to prevent a variety of tropical diseases, including leptospirosis, tick-borne disease, typhus and melioidosis. The potential side effects include photosensitivity (a tendency to sunburn), thrush in women, indigestion, heartburn, nausea and interference with the contraceptive pill. More serious side effects include ulceration of the oesophagus – you can help prevent this by taking your tablet with a meal and a large glass of water, and by never lying down within half an hour of taking it. It must be taken for four weeks after leaving the risk area.

Lariam (mefloquine) has received much bad press, some of it justified, some not. This weekly tablet suits many people. Serious side effects are rare but include depression, anxiety, psychosis and seizures. Anyone with a history of depression, anxiety, other psychological disorders or epilepsy should not take Lariam. It is considered safe in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy. It is around 90% effective in most parts of Southeast Asia, but there is significant resistance in parts of northern Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. Tablets must be taken for four weeks after leaving the risk area.

Malarone is a combination of atovaquone and proguanil. Side effects are uncommon and mild, most commonly nausea and headache. It is the best tablet for scuba divers and for those on short trips to high-risk areas. It must be taken for one week after leaving the risk area.

A final option is to take no preventive medication but to have a supply of emergency medication should you develop the symptoms of malaria. This is less than ideal, and you'll need to get to a good medical facility within 24 hours of developing a fever. If you choose this option, the most effective and safest treatment is Malarone (four tablets once daily for three days). Other options include mefloquine and quinine, but the side effects of these drugs at treatment doses make them less desirable. Fansidar is no longer recommended.

Measles

Risk areas All countries except Singapore and Brunei.

Measles remains a problem in some parts of Southeast Asia. This highly contagious bacterial infection is spread via coughing and sneezing. Most people born before 1966 are immune as they had the disease during childhood. Measles starts with a high fever and rash, and can be complicated by pneumonia and brain disease. There is no specific treatment.

Melioidosis

Risk areas Thailand only.

This infection is contracted by skin contact with soil. It is rare in travellers, but in some parts of northeast Thailand up to 30% of the local population is infected. The symptoms are very similar to those experienced by tuberculosis sufferers. There is no vaccine but it can be treated with medications.

Rabies

Risk areas All countries except Singapore and Brunei.

Still a common problem in most parts of Southeast Asia, this uniformly fatal disease is spread by the bite or lick of an infected animal, most commonly a dog or monkey. You should seek medical advice immediately after any animal bite and commence postexposure treatment. Having a pretravel vaccination means the postbite treatment is greatly simplified. If an animal bites you, gently wash the wound with soap and water, and apply iodine-based antiseptic. If you are not pre vaccinated you will need to receive rabies immunoglobulin as soon as possible.

Schistosomiasis

Risk areas Philippines, Vietnam and Sulawesi (Indonesia).

Schistosomiasis is a tiny parasite that enters your skin after you've been swimming in contaminated water. Travellers usually only get a light infection and hence have no symptoms. If you are concerned, you can be tested three months after exposure. On rare occasions, travellers may develop 'Katayama fever'. This occurs some weeks after exposure, as the parasite passes through the lungs and causes an allergic reaction; symptoms are coughing and fever. Schistosomiasis is easily treated with medications.

STDs

Risk areas All countries.

Sexually transmitted diseases most commonly found in Southeast Asia include herpes, warts, syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia. People carrying these diseases often have no signs of infection. Condoms will prevent gonorrhoea and chlamydia but not warts or herpes. If after a sexual encounter you develop any rash, lumps, discharge or pain when passing urine, seek immediate medical attention. If you have been sexually active during your travels, have an STD check on your return home.

Strongyloides

Risk areas Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand. This parasite, transmitted by skin contact with soil, is common in travellers but rarely affects them. It is characterised by an unusual skin rash called *larva currens* – a linear rash on the trunk that comes and goes. Most people don't have other symptoms until their immune system becomes severely suppressed, when the parasite can cause an overwhelming infection. It can be treated with medications.

Tuberculosis

Risk areas All countries.

While TB is rare in travellers, any medical and aid workers and long-term travellers who have significant contact with the local population should take precautions. Vaccination is usually only given to children under five, but it is recommended that adults at risk have pre- and posttravel testing. The main symptoms are fever, cough, weight loss and tiredness.

Typhoid

Risk areas All countries except Singapore.

This serious bacterial infection is spread via food and water. It gives a high and slowly progressive fever, a headache and may be accompanied by a dry cough and stomach pain. It is diagnosed by blood tests and treated with antibiotics. Vaccination is recommended for all travellers spending more than a week in Southeast Asia, or travelling outside of the major cities. Be aware that vaccination is not 100% effective so you must still be careful with what you eat and drink.

Typhus

Risk areas All countries except Singapore.

Murine typhus is spread by the bite of a flea, whereas scrub typhus is spread via a mite.

These diseases are rare in travellers. Symptoms include fever, muscle pains and a rash. You can avoid these diseases by following general insect-avoidance measures. Doxycycline will also prevent them.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

Traveller's diarrhoea is by far the most common problem that affects travellers – between 30% and 50% of people will suffer from it within two weeks of starting their trip. In over 80% of cases, traveller's diarrhoea is caused by bacteria (there are numerous potential culprits), and therefore responds promptly to treatment with antibiotics. Treatment will depend on your situation – how sick you are, how quickly you need to get better, where you are etc.

Traveller's diarrhoea is defined as the passage of more than three watery bowel actions within 24 hours, plus at least one other symptom such as fever, cramps, nausea, vomiting or feeling generally unwell.

Treatment consists of staying well hydrated; rehydration solutions such as Gastrolyte are the best for this. Antibiotics such as norfloxacin, ciprofloxacin or azithromycin will kill the bacteria quickly.

Loperamide is just a 'stopper' and doesn't get to the cause of the problem. It can be helpful, for example, if you have to go on a long bus ride. Don't take loperamide if you have a fever, or blood in your stools. Seek medical attention quickly if you do not respond to an appropriate antibiotic.

Amoebic Dysentery

Amoebic dysentery is very rare in travellers but is often misdiagnosed by poor-quality labs in Southeast Asia. Symptoms are similar to bacterial diarrhoea, ie fever, bloody diarrhoea and generally feeling unwell. You should always seek reliable medical care if you have blood in your diarrhoea. Treatment involves two drugs: tinidazole or metronidazole to kill the parasite in your gut, and then a second drug to kill the cysts. If left untreated, complications such as liver or gut abscesses can occur.

Giardiasis

Giardia lamblia is a relatively common parasite in travellers. Symptoms include nausea, bloating, excess gas, fatigue and intermittent diarrhoea. 'Eggy' burps are often attributed

solely to giardiasis, but work in Nepal has shown that they are not specific to this infection. The parasite will eventually go away if left untreated but this can take months. The treatment of choice is tinidazole, with metronidazole being a second option.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Air Pollution

Air pollution, particularly vehicle pollution, is an increasing problem in most of Southeast Asia's major cities. If you have severe respiratory problems, speak with your doctor before travelling to any heavily polluted urban centres. This pollution also causes minor respiratory problems such as sinusitis, dry throat and irritated eyes. If troubled by the pollution, leave the city for a few days and get some fresh air.

Diving

Divers and surfers should seek specialised advice before they travel to ensure their medical kit contains treatment for coral cuts and tropical ear infections, as well as the standard problems. Divers should ensure their insurance covers them for decompression illness – get specialised dive insurance through an organisation such as **Divers Alert Network** (DAN; www.danseap.org). Have a dive medical before you leave your home country; there are certain medical conditions that are incompatible with diving, and economic considerations may override health considerations for some dive operators in Southeast Asia.

Food

Eating in restaurants is the biggest risk factor for contracting traveller's diarrhoea. Ways to avoid diarrhoea include eating only freshly cooked food, and avoiding shellfish and food that has been sitting around in buffets. Peel all fruit, cook vegetables, and soak salads in iodine water for at least 20 minutes. Eat in busy restaurants with a high turnover of customers.

Heat

Many parts of Southeast Asia are hot and humid throughout the year. For most people it takes at least two weeks to adapt to the hot climate. Swelling of the feet and ankles is common, as are muscle cramps caused by excessive sweating. You can prevent these by avoiding dehydration and excessive activity

in the heat; you should also take it easy when you first arrive. Don't eat salt tablets (they aggravate the gut), but drinking rehydration solution or eating salty food helps. Treat cramps by stopping activity, resting, rehydrating with double-strength rehydration solution and gently stretching.

Dehydration is the main contributor to heat exhaustion. Symptoms include weakness, headache, irritability, nausea or vomiting, sweaty skin, a fast pulse, and a normal or slightly elevated body temperature. Treatment involves getting out of the heat, fanning the person and applying cool wet cloths to the skin, laying the person flat with their legs raised, and rehydrating them with water containing a quarter of a teaspoon of salt per litre. Recovery is usually rapid, though it is common to feel weak afterwards.

Heat stroke is a serious medical emergency. Symptoms come on suddenly and include weakness, nausea, a hot dry body with a body temperature of over 41°C, dizziness, confusion, loss of coordination, seizures, and eventually collapse and loss of consciousness. Seek medical help and commence cooling by getting the person out of the heat, removing their clothes, fanning them and applying cool wet cloths or ice to their body, especially to the groin and armpits.

Prickly heat is a common skin rash in the tropics caused by sweat being trapped under the skin. The result is an itchy rash of tiny lumps. Treat by moving out of the heat and into an air-conditioned area for a few hours and by having cool showers. Creams and ointments clog the skin so they should be avoided. Locally bought prickly heat powder can be helpful.

Tropical fatigue is common in long-term expats based in the tropics. It's rarely due to disease and is caused by the climate, inadequate mental rest, excessive alcohol intake and the demands of daily work in a different culture.

Insect Bites & Stings

Bedbugs don't carry disease but their bites are very itchy. They live in the cracks of furniture and walls, and then migrate to the bed at night to feed on you. You can treat the itch with an antihistamine.

Lice inhabit various parts of your body, but most commonly your head and pubic area. Transmission is via close contact with an infected person. Lice can be difficult to treat

DRINKING WATER

- Never drink tap water.
- Bottled water is generally safe – check the seal is intact at purchase.
- Avoid ice.
- Avoid fresh juices – they may have been watered down.
- Boiling water is the most efficient method of purifying it.
- The best chemical purifier is iodine. It should not be used by pregnant women or those with thyroid problems.
- Water filters should also filter out viruses. Ensure your filter has a chemical barrier such as iodine and a small pore size, eg less than four microns.

and you may need numerous applications of an antilice shampoo. Pubic lice are usually contracted from sexual contact.

Ticks are contracted after walking in rural areas. They are commonly found behind the ears, on the belly and in armpits. If you have had a tick bite and experience symptoms such as a rash at the site of the bite or elsewhere, or fever or muscle aches, you should see a doctor. Doxycycline prevents tick-borne diseases.

Leeches are found in humid rainforest areas. They do not transmit any disease but their bites are often intensely itchy for weeks afterwards and can easily become infected. Apply an iodine-based antiseptic to any leech bite to help prevent infection.

Bee and wasp stings mainly cause problems for people who are allergic to them. Anyone with a serious bee or wasp allergy should carry an injection of adrenaline (eg an EpiPen) for emergency treatment. For others, pain is the main problem – apply ice to the sting and take painkillers.

Most jellyfish in Southeast Asian waters are not dangerous, just irritating. First aid for jellyfish stings involves pouring vinegar onto the affected area to neutralise the poison. Do not rub sand or water onto the stings. Take painkillers, and if you feel ill in any way after being stung seek medical advice. Take local advice if there are dangerous jellyfish around and keep out of the water.

Parasites

Numerous parasites are common in local populations in Southeast Asia; however, most of these are rare in travellers. The two rules for avoiding parasitic infections are to wear shoes and to avoid eating raw food, especially fish, pork and vegetables. A number of parasites are transmitted via the skin by walking barefoot, including strongyloides, hookworm and cutaneous *larva migrans*.

Skin Problems

Fungal rashes are common in humid climates. There are two common fungal rashes that tend to affect travellers. The first occurs in moist areas that get less air, such as the groin, armpits and between the toes. It starts as a red patch that slowly spreads and is usually itchy. Treatment involves keeping the skin dry, avoiding chafing and using an antifungal cream such as clotrimazole or Lamisil. *Tinea versicolor* is also common – this fungus causes small, light-coloured patches, most commonly on the back, chest and shoulders. Consult a doctor.

Cuts and scratches become easily infected in humid climates. Take meticulous care of any cuts and scratches to prevent complications such as abscesses. Immediately wash all wounds in clean water and apply antiseptic. If you develop signs of infection (increasing pain and redness), see a doctor. Divers and surfers should be particularly careful with coral cuts as they can be easily infected.

Snakes

Southeast Asia is home to many species of both poisonous and harmless snakes. Assume that all snakes are poisonous and never try to catch one. Always wear boots and long pants if walking in an area that may have snakes. First aid in the event of a snakebite involves pressure immobilisation using an elastic bandage firmly wrapped around the affected limb, starting at the bite site and working up towards the chest. The bandage should not be so tight that the circulation is cut off, and the fingers or toes should be kept free so the circulation can be checked. Immobilise the limb with a splint and carry the victim to medical attention. Do not use tourniquets or try to suck the venom out. Antivenin is available for most species.

Sunburn

Even on a cloudy day sunburn can occur rapidly. Always use a strong sunscreen (at least factor 30), making sure to reapply after a swim, and always wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses outdoors. Avoid lying in the sun during the hottest part of the day (10am to 2pm). If you become sunburnt, stay out of the sun until you have recovered, apply cool compresses and take painkillers for the discomfort. One percent hydrocortisone cream applied twice daily is also helpful.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Pregnant women should receive specialised advice before travelling. The ideal time to travel is in the second trimester (between 16 and 28 weeks), when the risk of pregnancy-related problems is at its lowest and women generally feel at their best. During the first trimester there is a risk of miscarriage and in the third trimester complications such as premature labour and high blood pressure are possible. It's wise to travel with a companion. Always carry a list of quality medical facilities available at your destination and ensure you continue your standard antenatal care at these facilities. Avoid rural travel in areas with poor transport and medical facilities. Most of all, ensure travel insurance covers all pregnancy-related possibilities.

Malaria is a high-risk disease during pregnancy. WHO recommends that pregnant women do *not* travel to areas with chloroquine-resistant malaria. None of the more effective antimalarial drugs are completely safe in pregnancy.

Traveller's diarrhoea can quickly lead to dehydration and result in inadequate blood flow to the placenta. Many of the drugs used to treat various diarrhoea bugs are not recommended in pregnancy. Azithromycin is considered safe.

In the urban areas of Southeast Asia, supplies of sanitary products are readily available. Birth-control options may be limited so bring adequate supplies of your own form of contraception. Heat, humidity and antibiotics can all contribute to thrush. Treatment is with antifungal creams and pessaries such as clotrimazole. A practical alternative is a single tablet of fluconazole (Diflucan). Urinary tract infections can be precipitated by dehydration or long bus journeys without toilet stops; bring suitable antibiotics.

TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

Throughout Southeast Asia, traditional medical systems are widely practised. There is a big difference between these traditional healing systems and 'folk' medicine. Folk remedies should be avoided, as they often involve rather dubious procedures with potential complications. In comparison, healing systems such as traditional Chinese medicine are well respected, and aspects of them are being increasingly utilised by Western medical practitioners.

All traditional Asian medical systems identify a vital life force, and see blockage or imbalance of this force as causing disease.

Techniques such as herbal medicines, massage and acupuncture are used to bring this vital force back into balance, or to maintain balance. These therapies are best used for treating chronic disease such as chronic fatigue, arthritis, irritable bowel syndrome and some chronic skin conditions. Traditional medicines should be avoided for treating serious acute infections such as malaria.

Be aware that 'natural' doesn't always mean 'safe', and there can be drug interactions between herbal medicines and Western medicines. If you are using both systems, ensure you inform each practitioner of what the other has prescribed.