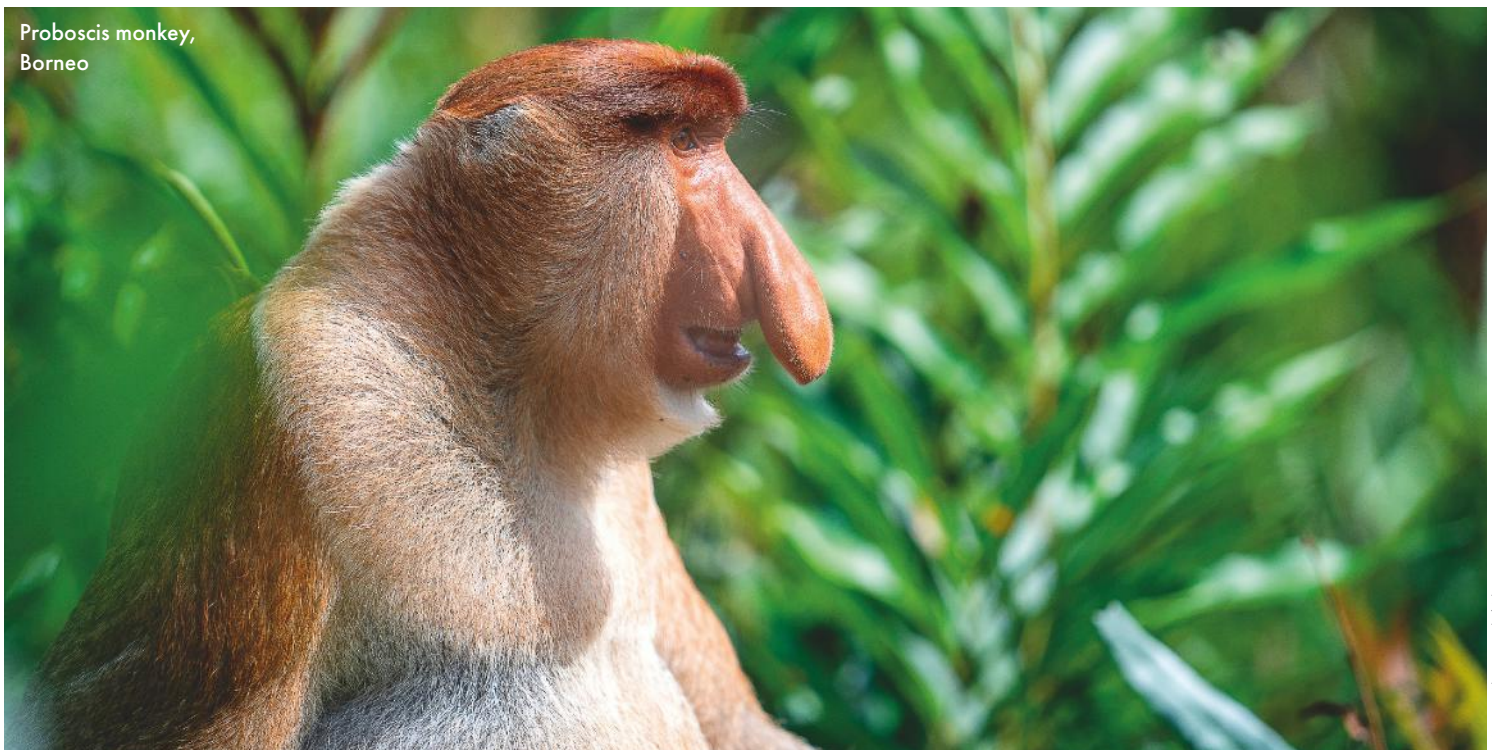


New adventures IN ASIA

These latest tours are just the ticket to inspire an escape with a twist, writes **Emma Blackmore**



Proboscis monkey,
Borneo

PICTURE: Shutterstock/OlegD

With increasing demand for trips that delve deeper into a destination, clients are on the lookout for new and novel ways to experience all that Asia has to offer. Tour operators are rising to the challenge, with a wealth of inventive itineraries launching this year and next. From wildlife-rich safaris and opulent rail journeys to monastery visits and jungle treks, these new Asia itineraries offer a meaningful experience for every type of client. All prices are per person, based on two sharing.

Best for... wildlife lovers

If listening to the rustle of orangutans in the rainforest is high on your client wish lists, take a look at Mercury Holidays' new Wild Borneo and the Sultanate of Brunei itinerary. Departing this September, its wildlife highlights include seeing crocodiles in Similajau



An experienced tour guide changes the whole context of the excursion – from simply looking at impressive sights and monuments to being truly immersed in the meaning and context behind them all

National Park, birdwatching on a river cruise and visiting proboscis monkey sanctuaries. Plus they'll explore the so-called 'Cat City' of Kuching and the world's largest stilt village at Kampong Ayer.

Michael Priest, Mercury Holidays' head of product, says: "This tour sits within one of the most biodiverse regions on Earth, providing visitors the rare opportunity to encounter species such as pygmy elephants, sun bears and the elusive Sunda clouded leopard – alongside more than 420 bird species. Time in Brunei offers a fascinating glimpse into the culture and heritage of this unique sultanate."

Book it: The 17-day tour costs from £3,129, including accommodation, transfers, select meals, listed excursions and flights from Heathrow. mercuryholidays.co.uk

Or try: Set out on a safari through northern Sri Lanka's open plains and dense forests with Riviera Travel's



Haeundae Sky Capsule,
South Korea



Prayer flags,
Tibet



Tea estate,
south India

new 16-day Wild Sri Lanka tour. Expect elephants, leopards and sloth bears roaming free, plus a mix of national parks, temples and coastal lagoons to explore. It is priced from £3,299, including accommodation, transfers, flights from Heathrow, listed experiences and select meals. Departs June 15, 2027. rivieratravel.co.uk

Best for... trekking travellers

Tell clients to lace up their walking boots: Ramble Worldwide's new South India's Hill Stations and Tea Plantations tour, departing in November, treks through sweeping grasslands, along slopes draped with tea terraces and past misty peaks. With its longest walk measuring 12.5 miles, it's a good option for relative beginners or intermediate hikers.

Clients will also explore Kerala's backwaters by boat, learn traditional crafts and visit the grand Mysore Palace. Aanjla Sengupta, head of customer experience at Ramble Worldwide, says: "South India's cooler mountain climate means guests can enjoy comfortable walking conditions, while the sweeping tea estates, lush forests and welcoming local communities create unforgettable moments. The region is scenic, culturally rich and full of variety, which makes it an easy sell for agents who are looking to offer something that's both distinctive and deeply rewarding."

Book it: From £5,299 for 16 nights, with full-board accommodation, flights from Heathrow, transfers and excursions, based on a November 30 departure. rambleworldwide.co.uk

Or try: Cross jungle rivers in Bali, climb the 1,670m Pergasingan Hill in Lombok and discover rice terraces and sacred waterfalls on Explore's new Walking in Bali and Lombok tour. The 10-day itinerary costs from £1,370, including accommodation, transfers, breakfast and some other meals, but excluding flights. explore.co.uk

Agent's view



Dan Bartholomew Oates,
director, **The Awesome Adventure Company**

"The vast size of Asia, the depth and variety of the culture across the region, and the complexity of arranging travel between different countries make it extremely difficult for clients to independently replicate what a tour can offer. Tours mean knowledgeable guides, excursions, photo opportunities, off-the-beaten-track restaurants and pre-arranged travel between all the stops. Of course, clients can travel to Angkor Wat in Cambodia or Khiva in Uzbekistan, but an experienced tour guide changes the whole context of the excursion – from simply looking at impressive sights and monuments to truly immersing themselves in the meaning and context behind them all."

PICTURES: Andrew To Photography/Exodus Adventure Travels; Shutterstock/IT photo, Sarah Maroli

Best for... rail fans

All aboard this November for Newmarket Holidays' new Luxury Indian Rail Odyssey, where lavish style meets awe-inspiring landscapes and thrilling tiger safaris. From Delhi, clients head to the Shimla Toy Train – the Unesco-listed narrow-gauge Kalka-Shimla Railway, built in the early 20th century – that travels through scenic pine forests and Himalayan foothills. After a luxurious couple of nights in the Oberoi Cecil, board the plush Deccan Odyssey train to Ranthambore National Park, Agra, Jaipur, Udaipur and beyond. The train's spa, fine-dining cars and palatial carriages are sure to make clients feel like maharajas.

Hayley Morris, Newmarket Holidays' head of trade sales and partnerships, says: "Moving at a relaxed pace, guests enjoy all-inclusive dining and elegant surroundings, and unpack just once – a little like a cruise on rails."

Book it: The 14-day tour costs from £7,560, including full-board rail accommodation, half board in hotels, excursions, flights and transfers. newmarketholidays.co.uk

Or try: Zip through South Korea on high-speed trains with Trafalgar's 10-day Best of South Korea. Clients can admire sweeping sea views from Busan's elevated Haeundae Sky Capsule railway, explore temples and see the demilitarised zone between South and North Korea. From £4,450, including accommodation, ground transport, select experiences and meals, but excluding flights. Departs April 3. trafalgar.com

Potala Palace, Lhasa



PICTURES: Shutterstock/Ericliu08, Denis Cosfille, PhotoRoman, Olezzo

Best for... overland adventurers

Journeying from Beijing in China to Kathmandu in Nepal, Exodus Adventure Travels' Discover Tibet tour is an epic exploration that takes in the mystical Tibetan Plateau, the world's highest railway, grand monuments and Tibetan culture. Clients will take the high-altitude 'Sky Train' sleeper from Qinghai to Lhasa, where they can explore the 1,000-room Potala Palace. They'll taste Tibetan cuisine in a cooking class (think yak's milk butter and vegetarian momo dumplings), join a pilgrimage with Buddhist monks, then begin the final leg: a road trip through the jagged peaks of the Himalayas.

Exodus Adventure Travels' sales director Brendan Phelan says: "The journey is an adventure, with a mix of spectacular train and road journeys. As we approach the Nepalese border, we pass shimmering lakes and enjoy views of Mount Everest, then descend to Kathmandu."

Book it: The 15-day tour costs from £3,899, including accommodation, transfers, experiences and select meals, but excluding flights.

exodus.co.uk

Or try: Weave through ancient Silk Road cities and bustling souks with Travelsphere's 21-day Silk Road Adventure: The Five Stans, part of the Royal Geographical Society Collection. Priced from £5,529, it includes accommodation, most meals, flights (including options from regional airports) and experiences, based on a May departure.

travelsphere.co.uk ■

New private guided tours

Sri Lanka

Not In The Guidebooks has introduced an Immersive Country and Coast adventure, where clients hit Sri Lanka's Cultural Triangle and ride the Ella tea train before unwinding at the beach in Tangalle, a quiet, palm-lined stretch on the south coast. From £2,270 for 12 nights, with accommodation, activities, select meals and transfers. Departs May 1 or September 1. notintheguidebooks.com



Ella tea train



Halong Bay

Vietnam and Cambodia

On Headwater's Vietnam and Cambodia itinerary, clients will experience bustling Hanoi, Halong Bay's dramatic karsts and the imperial city of Hue, cruise through the Mekong Delta's floating villages, then cross into Cambodia to see Angkor's temples and capital Phnom Penh. Departs from September, from £2,269 for 14 nights, including transfers and most meals. headwater.com

Malaysia

One for foodies, Bamboo Travel's 12-day A Taste of Malaysia tour – which travels from Malacca to Penang via Kuala Lumpur and the Cameron Highlands – combines cooking classes, street food, thriving spice markets and historic towns. Departures start in April, costing from £4,295, including flights, transfers and select meals. bambootravel.co.uk



Kuala Lumpur