

Alternative Asia

There's nowhere else on Earth that's quite as energetic, diverse or culture-filled as Asia. From white-sand beaches to world-renowned cities, World Heritage Sites to wellness mountain retreats, it's one crazy whirlwind of a continent.

All of this means that it offers just about everything a culture-seeking, adventure-roving traveller might ask for – and one visit is never enough. This is the type of place that reels you in and makes you want to come back again and again.

If clients are looking to do just that they'll likely need an

alternative to the classic Thai beaches and Mekong cruises (extraordinary as they are). So here are some suggestions to appease those Asia-loving veterans who've already been there, done that and got the 'I heart Thailand' T-shirt.

► BEACH

So they've been to: Thailand

How about: Bali

Sell it: From budget backpacker to high-end honeymooner, Bali appeals to pretty much any beach-loving, paradise-seeking dreamer. And like the beaches of Thailand, its long stretches of

sand border clear, curacao waters that no self-respecting sunbather could resist swimming in.

Among the most popular resorts is Seminyak, which sits on the southern coast of the island and offers a horde of sleek hotels, stylish bars and one-off boutiques. Crashing waves on the wide, sandy beach make it an ideal spot for surfers, and there's a string of contemporary restaurants along the shore that provide stunning views of the sunsets – think strokes of fiery red and orange plunging down onto the sea.

For something a little more peaceful, suggest Pemuteran →

Steer second-time visitors to Asia towards the spots that will inspire them, suggests Laura French

@laurafrench121

Four Seasons
Resort Bali



ABOVE: The Legian Bali, Seminyak

→ Bay, a quiet fishing village in the northwest with excellent diving and snorkelling, with turtles, manta rays and whale sharks all passing through its waters. Over on the southwest there's Jimbaran Bay – a secluded, tranquil spot that's home to a stylish Four Seasons Resort and an InterContinental – and Nusa Dua, a luxury beach destination popular with golfers and spa-seekers. **Book it:** Kuoni offers seven nights at The Legian Bali, Seminyak, including breakfast, flights and private transfers in resort, from £1,780, departing May 2017. **agents.kuoni.co.uk** **Or try:** Japan. This tech-loving nation might not be the first place you think of when it comes to kicking back by the sea, but the 100-plus beaches on the islands of Okinawa offer beautiful white-sand shores, alongside agreeable year-round temperatures. Among

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The 100-plus beaches around Okinawa offer white-sand shores and agreeable year-round temperatures

the most idyllic is Kabira Bay on Ishigaki Island – think emerald ocean flanked by palm trees and mountains. **► CITY** **So they've been to:** Singapore **How about:** Bangkok **Sell it:** If the vibrant, sense-engaging streets of Singapore got your clients giving rave reviews, it's time for something a little more rough-and-ready. For that there's Bangkok. Like Singapore, it's a focal point



ABOVE: Bangkok

for food lovers, with street stalls offering curries in every colour for as little as 50p and higher-end restaurants lining the pavements of the glossier areas. It's all interspersed with the same buzzing (read: hectic) lifestyle – think loud, in-your-face markets where vendors vie for your attention and bartering is the order of the day. Sure, the streets are a little dustier than in Singapore, but what it lacks in glitter it makes up for in culture. Ornate temples and buildings – from the gold-covered Grand Palace to the brightly coloured Wat Pho – are

everywhere you look, long-tail boats amble down the river and floating markets offer a back-end, authentic feel that doesn't let you forget where you are. Away from the more traditional neighbourhoods are modern, skyscraper shopping malls, hotels and bars such as Sirocco, which overlooks the twinkling lights below and lays claim to being the highest al fresco restaurant in the world, a one-off worth highlighting to those on the higher end of the budget scale. **Book it:** Premier Holidays offers an 11-night Glimpses of Gold tour which passes through Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Pattaya, from £999 including accommodation, flights, private transfers and some sightseeing. **trade.premierholidays.co.uk** **Or try:** Mumbai. For more courageous types, Mumbai needs to be on the list; it's busy, hectic and hard-hitting on the senses, but its rewards – incredible buildings, tucked-away bazaars and one-of-a-kind nightlife – make it all worth the effort. **► BUCKET LIST** **So they've been to:** The Great Wall of China **How about:** Angkor Wat **Sell it:** When it comes to those things that just need to be ticked off the bucket list, the Great Wall is up there, and for good reason. But to those who have already done it, suggest Cambodia's historic Angkor temples as a worthy alternative. Built under the Khmer empire between the 9th and 15th centuries, it's a dazzling complex of ancient buildings whose sheer scale is hard to comprehend. Intricate carvings and bas-reliefs cover the exterior, telling stories of its history, with more than 3,000 apsaras – 'heavenly nymphs' – carved into its

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→ walls. The best time to see the whole thing is at sunrise, when the iconic pointed domes are silhouetted against a mystical sky of pink, purple and gold reflected in the water beneath, forming one giant, kaleidoscope-like mirror.

Book it: Travelsphere's 10-day Saigon, Angkor Wat & Mekong Delta tour includes a full-day visit to the Angkor temples as well as a cruise on the Mekong River, starting at £1,499 including flights, transport, accommodation and guides.

travelsphere.co.uk

Or try: The Taj Mahal. Equally impressive is India's most iconic mausoleum, which sits in a 17-hectare garden in Agra. Built in the 17th century, this ivory-white marble masterpiece is a feat of both art and architecture, studded with precious stones and detailed relief work that any bucket-list junkie will appreciate.

RIGHT:
Angkor Wat,
Cambodia

BELOW:
Rhinos, India



► JOURNEYS

So they've been to: The Mekong

How about: Cruising the Brahmaputra River

Sell it: Living on a boat while meandering down the Mekong is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, but it doesn't have to be the only time clients have one like it. Boaties looking to return



Angkor Wat is a dazzling complex of ancient buildings whose sheer scale is hard to comprehend

would do well to consider India's Brahmaputra in Assam, which winds its way through the ancient Ahom kingdom, passing Hindu monasteries and traditional villages alongside an array of rare wildlife – from one-horned rhinos to river dolphins and sleek otters.

Book it: Cox & Kings has a 15-day Cruising the Brahmaputra

tour starting from £3,795, which features a 10-day cruise beginning in Dibrugarh and includes flights, accommodation, meals and some activities.

coxandkings.co.uk

Or try: Silk Road. The world's most ancient trading route is steeped in legend, with several dynasties having passed



→ through its various sections. Stretching through China and far beyond, it's an immense collection of roads whose places, people and cultures make for an intriguing, explorative journey, and one which some of the most specialist escorted touring operators will happily guide clients through.

LOCAL CULTURE

So they've been to: Meet a geisha in Kyoto

How about: Street-food in Vietnam

Sell it: If clients fell in love with Kyoto for its geisha entertainment, chances are they like to dig deep into what makes a country tick. And nothing shows off a local culture better than its cuisine.

Now it's hardly difficult to find good grub in southeast Asia, but when it comes to real, authentic street food cooked in front of your eyes, Vietnam

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When it comes to real, authentic street food cooked in front of your eyes, Vietnam takes the crown

takes the crown. Here, scents of lemongrass, ginger, lime and coriander whirl through the streets, where locals sit making banh mi rolls and pho bowls, fragranced with chilli, soy and fish sauce. Fresh spring rolls, French-inspired dishes and exotic fruits are everywhere you look too, and a market tour will plonk clients into the heart of it all.

Book it: InsideVietnam offers an 11-night Culinary Vietnam trip from £1,950, which includes accommodation and food tours



PICTURES: KEN SEET; PREMIER HOLIDAYS; ISTOCK; SHUTTERSTOCK

ABOVE: Cai Rang Floating Market, Vietnam

in Hanoi, Hue, Ho Chi Minh, Hoi An and beyond.

insideasiatours.com

Or try: Meeting Nepali Sherpas on a trek. If your clients are as adventurous as they are culturally curious, suggest a trek through

the Himalayas. The Sherpas who live in its highest parts are some of the most welcoming, friendly people out there, and travellers passing through their land will get a genuine insight into their unique mountain lifestyle. **TW**



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