

# Sky's the limit

Clients flying via Asia? Capitalise by selling them a city stopover, writes Laura French

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**F**rom the glittering palaces to the gold-bedecked temples, the hectic markets to the history-steeped streets, Asia shines out among the stars of the world, and for those who have time to explore each of its diverse countries in depth, it's one of the most intriguing and rewarding continents around.

But for those who don't, a city stopover can prove ample compensation, providing a glimpse into the vibrancy of its cultures, cuisines and sights in the space of a few days, and adding another dimension to a trip.

That's just the icing on the cake when it comes to stopovers here, of course. Adding on a short break in the region when clients are flying via one of its airports anyway means giving them a chance to break up a longer journey, gradually adjust to the time difference and get some shut-eye so they arrive feeling fresh – all without necessarily upping the cost.

"What many people don't realise is that it can actually be

cheaper to fly a few days earlier than initially planned and include a few nights' stopover," says Chris Greener, southeast Asia senior product executive for InsideAsia Tours. "Even if it doesn't work out cheaper, it certainly adds value to your trip, essentially giving you an extra holiday."

In turn, that means plumping up your commission by adding hotels, transport and tour packages to the booking, while giving you a chance to demonstrate expertise, says Brad Bennetts, national sales manager for Kuoni. "It ensures your itinerary is harder to compare online, meaning you remain the expert," he adds.

To help inspire you on what, where and how to upsell, we've rounded up the highlights in some of the continent's most popular stopover cities.

## ► HONG KONG

**Why:** With Cathay Pacific flights regularly docking at its slick airport, and connections to more than 220 destinations from here, it's little surprise operators





## 3 ALTERNATIVE STOPOVERS

### Colombo

Sri Lanka is on the radar with a wealth of new hotels, and the free 48-hour visa available on arrival is a key selling point for a short stopover here.

### Beijing

This history-rich city is a popular connecting point for trips to Japan on Air China, with visa-free transits valid for up to six days.

### Ho Chi Minh City

For flights touching down in Vietnam, it's well worth tagging on an extra few days. Look to Isango! for unusual experiences including a guided Vespa tour and Saigon River dinner cruise, plus a commissionable hop-on, hop-off bus tour visiting the key sites.

→ cite Hong Kong as one of their most popular stopover destinations.

"The buzz of Hong Kong is often a good contrast with other parts of Asia and it's an easy city to navigate due to the widespread use of English," says John Warr, global sales director for Wendy Wu Tours. "It's our number-one stopover choice."

Add in good transport links, a relatively compact size and a unique fusion of east meets west and you have a city that's easy to see in a short space of time and appealing to a diverse market.

**The highlights:** For clients on a quick stopover, Dawn Page, Hong Kong tourist board director UK & northern Europe, recommends Victoria Peak and the Ocean Terminal Deck, which both offer panoramic views over the city, and the 'Big Buddha' statue on Lantau Island. Other highlights include the Sham Shui Po district, which boasts one of the world's cheapest Michelin-starred restaurants, Tim Ho Wan, and the Symphony of Lights, a nightly music and laser show that sees 40 buildings illuminated in a mesmerising spectacle.

**Upsell:** Encourage clients to linger a little to get under the skin of the city and boost your booking with a multi-day tour. Trafalgar's Singapore and Macau Experience is a good option, combining more unusual activities such as a sampan ride at Aberdeen Fishing Village and a visit to the Jumbo Floating Restaurant



PICTURES: ISTOCK/TAWATCHAI PRAKOBIT; HONG KONG TOURISM BOARD



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with casino-filled Macao. The four-day guided trip starts at £1,325, including B&B accommodation, transport and hand-picked Insider Experiences.

### ► SINGAPORE

**Why:** For stopovers on the way to the likes of Bali, Thailand, Australia and

New Zealand, Singapore is an excellent option, combining diverse cultural influences with world-class shopping, and a buzzing arts scene with world-renowned cuisine. "I'd always recommend travelling via here when flying to further afield destinations such as New Zealand," says Rebecca Turner, senior product manager for Asia & Australia at Gold Medal.

**The highlights:** Nature lovers should make a beeline for the Botanic Gardens and Gardens by the Bay, a sprawling park that hosts the daily Supertree light and sound show, while shopaholics will find plenty to please on Orchard Road, scattered with almost 30 malls. Beyond that, there's Sentosa Island – home to the British-built Fort Siloso and Universal Studios Singapore – and the Marina Bay Sands, where you'll find one of the most Instagrammable rooftop infinity pools on Earth.

**Upsell:** Add a day tour to a hotel package, so clients can whizz through the highlights in a short time without the stress of organising it themselves, and boost the booking value in the process. Cox & Kings offers a half-day excursion visiting one of the oldest temples in Singapore, Thian Hock Keng, plus Little India, Chinatown, Merlion Park and the Singapore Botanic Gardens, available on its tailor-made packages.

### ► KUALA LUMPUR

**Why:** The tourist board has made a particular effort to promote Kuala Lumpur as a stopover point for



**ABOVE:**  
Big Buddha,  
Hong Kong

**LEFT:**  
Dinner cruise,  
Ho Chi Minh City

PICTURE: FADURRAHMAN MAKSON; DIEP CHANEL MALAYSIA TOURISM



**LEFT:**  
Kuala Lumpur

**RIGHT:**  
Banyan Tree  
Bangkok

**BELOW:**  
Grand Palace,  
Bangkok



➔ Europeans flying to Australia or New Zealand of late, and it seems to be paying off. Premier Holidays say it's one of its four most popular stopovers thanks to excellent shopping, food, sightseeing and a vibrant cultural mix, all of which make it a viable alternative to Singapore.

**The highlights:** Chinatown, the Central Market and Little India are worth suggesting to foodie types, while the Royal Palace and Thean Hou Buddhist Temple, just outside the city, add appeal for history buffs. Most unusual are the Batu Caves, a series of



**Markets bursting with colours, and tuk-tuks dodging their way through the traffic – Bangkok is as crazy as they come**



limestone formations draped in stalactites and stalagmites that house a collection of ornate Hindu shrines and statues.

**Upsell:** For clients wanting to take the hassle out of arranging transport and individual activities while keeping their independence, book them a city package. Wendy Wu offers a three-day stay with transfers to and from the airport and a guided half-day tour visiting the King's Palace, Lake Gardens, National Mosque, Independence Square, Petronas Twin Towers and other highlights.

If they've got a little less time but still want to delve deep, look to Urban Adventures, which offers a morning market trip – think live chickens squawking, electronics blaring and plenty of sampling – with the chance to learn more about the city from guides in the know (from \$63).

## ▶ BANGKOK

**Why:** Markets bursting with colours and sounds, tuk-tuks dodging their way through honking traffic and street-food vendors selling scorpions on sticks: Bangkok is as vibrant, hectic and crazy as they come. It's also a key connection point for Australia, New Zealand and the rest of southeast Asia, so it makes perfect sense to suggest adding on a night or two here.

**The highlights:** The Grand Palace, built in 1782 as the home of the Thai king, needs to be high on the list with its opulent temples – all intricate Buddha statues and ornate stone structures – drawing visitors from far and wide. Key spots elsewhere include Wat Arun, an opulent riverside temple accessed by boat, and the Chatuchak weekend market, which sees approximately 15,000 stalls pop up on Saturdays and Sundays.

**Upsell:** Tag on a multi-day tour for those wanting to get beyond Bangkok's basics. Intrepid Travel offers a two-day break in the city that's ideal for foodies, with a crawl through culinary-loving Yaowarat (Chinatown), a ferry ride along the Chao Phraya River, a visit to a market and an excursion to an orchard farm for a cooking demonstration. It costs from £197, including accommodation, transport and meals.

Alternatively, if it's just the hotel package they're after, suggest Banyan Tree Bangkok. It's Kuoni's top pick in the city thanks to its excellent spa and al fresco rooftop restaurant, which offers panoramic views over the twinkling lights come nighttime.

We can't guarantee they'll make it to their final destination with all this to be getting on with, mind. **TW**