

Two's company!

Combine cultural attractions on the mainland with a standout stay on a paradise island to upsell an Asia escape, writes **Alice Barnes-Brown**



PICTURE: Shutterstock/Fokke Baarsen

for anyone new to the world's largest continent, the choice of holidays in Asia can be overwhelming. But pairing up a stay in a gateway city with a relaxing beach break means the chance to fly direct, acclimatise in an exciting place, taste fabulous street food and get a feel for the culture, before easing into soft sands and warm seas for the rest of the trip.

An island add-on makes a fabulous twin-centre option, and with a range of archipelagos across Asia to pick from, agents will find there's a patch of paradise to suit every type of client. ➤



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: NH Collection Samui Peace Resort; Victoria Memorial, Kolkata; Wat Arun temple, Bangkok

PICTURE: Shutterstock/Arko 1988, fokke baarssen



BEST FOR... BEGINNERS

With Bangkok gaining Norse Atlantic flights from Manchester this summer and a boosted BA schedule next year, the Thai capital is one of the easiest gateways into Asia – and twin-centre trips in Thailand rank among many operators’ best-selling Asia holidays.

Kuoni alone has seen 20% year-on-year growth in Thailand bookings made through the trade. Sarah Weetman, the operator’s head of trade partnerships, says: “Whether it’s a classic Bangkok and beach escape to Koh Samui, or a journey into Chiang Mai’s cultural heartland and Krabi’s dramatic landscapes, Thailand truly has something for everyone.”

In Bangkok, clients can take tuk-tuks to elaborate Thai monuments, including a wealth of golden Buddha statues, the Grand Palace and the tiled stupa of Wat Arun temple, or hit shopping districts and street markets.

Clients then travel to Koh Samui, Thailand’s second-largest island, where white-sand beaches, waterfalls, 4x4 safaris and rainforest hiking await. Or they can explore the NH Collection Samui Peace Resort, where complimentary kayaking, stand-up paddleboarding, muay Thai workshops and cooking classes are an antidote to the pace of the capital.

Book it: Kuoni’s 10-night Bangkok and Koh Samui Twin-Centre trip costs from £1,699 per person, based on two sharing and a June 2026 departure. The price includes B&B accommodation, transfers, luggage and indirect flights from Heathrow with Qatar Airways. kuoni.co.uk

BEST FOR... ADVENTURERS

West Bengal’s bursts of colour are an epic introduction to India: clients can experience Kolkata’s melting-pot heritage in temples, synagogues and churches, supersized monuments built during the height of the British Raj and fragrant flower markets. For an extra selling point, suggest departing from Kolkata on a Hooghly River cruise, slowly exploring rural villages and artisan workshops while staying on one sleek ship.

After the hustle and bustle of Bengal, the little-known Andaman Islands are just a two-hour flight away. Asiya Zargar, Indus Experiences marketing director, says: “They have a more ‘barefoot’ vibe than the Maldives; guests can go night kayaking and see nesting turtles from November to April, as well as snorkelling and diving.

“For clients interested in history, the Andaman Islands have it in spades. They had a strategic location on the trade routes between India, China and southeast Asia, and vessels would stop there as early as the eighth century. Capital Port Blair is home to the Cellular Jail, where the British used to send freedom fighters and political prisoners.”

Book it: Indus Experiences sells a 15-day holiday to Kolkata and the Andaman Islands from £4,649 per person, based on two sharing on an October 2026 departure. The price includes indirect Emirates flights from Heathrow to Kolkata, a nine-night full-board Pandaw cruise, transfers and five nights with breakfast at Tilar Siro Andamans, on Havelock Island. indusexperiences.co.uk ➤



“With plenty of flight availability between destinations, it is a great option to combine a mainland stay with an island. Creating twin-centre itineraries isn’t just an exciting enquiry for agents, as bookings also often have higher margins.”

Deborah Wadhams,
head of long-haul
product, Gold Medal



“Twin-centre holidays are a fantastic way to explore Asia’s diverse and vibrant culture, stunning landscapes and authentic cuisine.”

**Chris Logan, commercial
director, Tui UK & Ireland**



“Typically spending less time travelling [than multi-centre trips], twin-centres pair relaxation with a city stop. The best time to travel to southeast Asia is October to May, so it’s perfect for a winter escape.”

**Tamsin Ball, agency sales
manager, Bamboo Travel**



“Cambodia is trending – Siem Reap’s Angkor temples pair seamlessly with Koh Rong’s beaches. Indonesia is popular, and Java’s cultural treasures and dramatic landscapes balance perfectly with Lombok’s laid-back charm. These combinations are easy to sell.”

Melissa Nicholas,
product director,
Experience Travel Group

Island EXTENSIONS

Japan: Following some time on the mainland, exploring vast cities and contrasting zen gardens with rapid-fire ramen bars, suggest clients visit one of the country's smaller islands to experience a slower place of life. Wendy Wu Tours sells a three-night extension in Naoshima, an island in the Seto Inland Sea known for avant-garde art installations. Prices start at £1,630, including B&B accommodation, listed excursions and transfers. wendywutours.co.uk

Pumpkin sculpture at Port Naoshima



South Korea: The country's subtropical south offers a refreshing counterbalance to Seoul, the high-tech, high-fashion capital of K-culture. The island of Jeju is just over an hour's flight away and is popular with Koreans for many reasons: turquoise seas and white-sand shores, rockpools filled with sea life, extinct volcanoes and 264 miles of hiking trails. InsideAsia Tours sells a three-night Jeju Island Extension from £905, including three-star B&B accommodation, car hire, listed excursions and domestic flights. insideasiatours.com



Jeju Island



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Jeepney tour bus; Bawah Reserve, Indonesia; Shangri-La Boracay **RIGHT:** Petronas Towers, Kuala Lumpur; Pelangi Beach Resort & Spa, Langkawi

PICTURES: Aleksandar Todorovic; Markus_Gortz; Shutterstock/ Elizaveta Galitckaia, VTT Studio, plera; Kahnz@Empire



BEST FOR... LUXURY

A growing number of British tourists are seeing the appeal of the 7,641 islands of the Philippines, with the island nation experiencing an 8% year-on-year rise in UK visitors from January to August. Erica Moore, product manager at Inspiring Travel, says: "After some time in the cities – which can be an exciting assault on the senses – it's great to add some down time to relax on the beach."

The operator's Luxury Manila and Boracay itinerary gives clients three nights to sleep off the jet lag and discover Spanish-era monuments in the Philippine capital. They'll be based in The Peninsula Manila and, if they'd like to travel around town in five-star style, the hotel has a fleet of jeepneys (adapted 4x4 vehicles popularised in the Philippines after the Second World War). Suggest clients visit Intramuros, the Spanish-era walled city dating back to 1571, where clients can swap their Jeepney for a bamboo bike as they pedal slowly through cobbled streets.

Next up is a week in Boracay, where clients are based at the Shangri-La. Here, they will enjoy access to two secluded beaches, a treetop restaurant, buffet filled with local treats – look out for *halo-halo* dessert topped with purple yam ice cream – and a spa offering traditional massages using banana leaves.

Book it: Inspiring Travel's 10-night Luxury Manila and Boracay holiday starts at £4,796 per person, based on two travelling in October. The price includes bed and breakfast accommodation, transfers and flights.

inspiringtravel.co.uk

BEST FOR... URBAN RETREATS

Singapore's convenient flight links have given it a reputation as a stopover hotspot, but there's plenty to see in this multicultural city-state. Its hawkers sell some seriously tasty street food, while botanic gardens, futuristic skyscrapers and trendy shopping centres in a compact area mean days can be spent enjoying a mix of museums, nature and adventure.

After three nights in Singapore, clients can take a 75-minute seaplane transfer to Bawah Reserve, a complex of six private islands in the Indonesian Anambas archipelago. The resort offers plenty of ways for guests to immerse themselves in island culture, with everything from spa treatments to wild swimming challenges included in a stay.

Deepavali Gaiind, product manager for individual touring experiences at Carrier, says: "This combination is great for couples wanting a real connection with the people and places they visit. The stunning beaches and marine life are all a given at Bawah Reserve, but the real charm is how authentic the island is. Little touches are dotted all around, like handmade board games and vintage-style binoculars with animal print patterns."

Book it: Carrier offers an eight-night package from £8,335 per person, based on two sharing. The price includes three nights' B&B at Capella Singapore, five nights' full-board at Bawah Reserve, transfers and international flights departing February 6, 2026. carrier.co.uk