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10 EASY TRIPS

Highland horse riding in Semarang, candle-lit floats in Chiang Mai, Penang's Jazz tunes, and Tasmania's food and wine



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10 EASY TRIPS



Semarang, Indonesia

WHY GO NOW?

As Central Java's capital and also its largest city, Semarang's rich history as a major port city has resulted in a melting pot of Chinese, Indian, Arab and European cultures, maintaining too its old-world charm and colourful culture. Just 20 minutes from the airport is Stasiun Basar – Asia's first ever railway. A short taxi ride away is Sam Poo Kong, built by 15th century Chinese explorer Admiral Zheng He, the man who paved the way for Semarang's maritime heritage. Explore various temple structures, even the original anchor used in his expeditions, as well as the original grotto where Zheng He

strategised his voyages. Next, check out Lawang Sewu, the former railway terminal, once the main office for the Dutch Indies Railway Company and where today, a magnificent – albeit non-working – steam locomotive still stands.

Heading out towards Semarang county, the 1.5 hour journey will pass by numerous paddy fields, before arriving on the slopes of Mount Ungaran, home to the religious site of Candi Gedong Songo. Inundated with fresh air and Mount Merapi and Mount Sumbing towering in the background, the best way to explore is to mount a horse (US\$8) on a leisurely saunter around five

gorgeous Hindu temples – the highest of which sits at 1,200 metres above sea level. For lunch, make a trip to Susan Spa & Resort, where a restaurant within serves up delicious local and Chinese fares. Those smitten by the

resort's Rome-like pool, mini zoo area (home to peacocks, deers and mandarin ducks) and Eden Park, which houses a dreamy pavilion used for weddings and events, can opt to stay overnight as well (susansparesort.com).

HOW DO I MAKE IT HAPPEN?

- SilkAir (silkair.com), the regional wing of Singapore Airlines, recently launched direct flights from Singapore to Semarang, thrice weekly onboard their full-service carriers. From Kuala Lumpur, SilkAir flies to Semarang's Achmad Yani International Airport.
- Abiding closely to Indonesia's colonial past is Balemong Resort

Ungaran, 10 km away from Mount Ungaran. Displaying architecture and design steeped in traditional Javanese and Dutch roots, Joglos (rooms) even include one built in 1852 belonging to Laweyan batik merchants, and other houses that had fallen into ruins but are now restored to their former glory (US\$50; balemongungaran.com).

Chiang Mai, Thailand

WHY GO NOW?

Loy Krathong, also known as Loy Gramong, is Thailand's 'festival of lights' and will last from 15 to 18 November, with the major portion of the festival falling on 17 November this year in many areas in the country. Chiang Mai is a notable destination within Thailand for witnessing this festival due to the local population's sheer enthusiasm for the celebration.

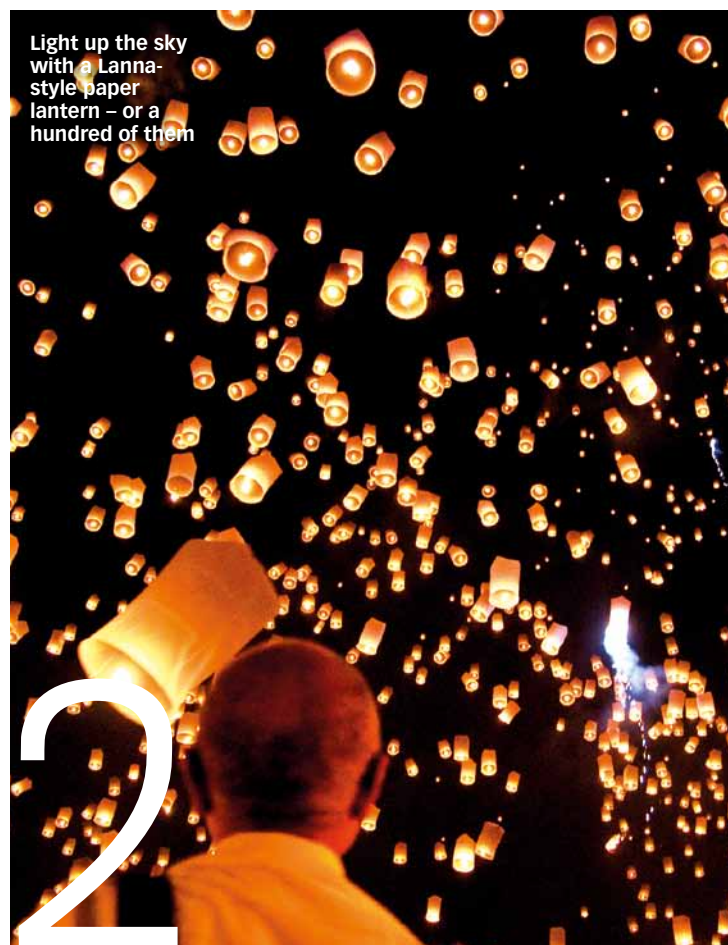
During the festival, participants decorate 'krathongs' – colourful candle-lit floats – and set them adrift toward the Ping River, forming a long and mesmerising parade of light. Others launch floating lanterns, locally known as 'khom loy', which gracefully float into and light up the night sky. Tourists are welcome to join in the celebrations alongside the local revellers.

HOW DO I MAKE IT HAPPEN?

■ Travellers from Singapore's Changi Airport can book SilkAir's daily direct flights. Visitors departing from Kuala Lumpur can fly with AirAsia (airasia.com) directly to Chiang Mai International Airport.

■ Complete your stay in Chiang Mai with the luxuries extended to

guests at Shangri-La Hotel, Chiang Mai. Conveniently located by the Ping River, the primary location for Loy Krathong festivities, the hotel's rooms feature Thai silk pillows, mood lighting and local artwork evocative of the styles of Northern Thailand (from US\$169; shangri-la.com)



Light up the sky with a Lanna-style paper lantern – or a hundred of them

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PHOTOGRAPH: TOURISM AUTHORITY OF THAILAND; MACAU GOVERNMENT TOURIST OFFICE



Formula Three is a breeding ground for future F1 racers

Macau, China

WHY GO NOW?

From 9 to 17 November, Macau will host the sensational Macau Grand Prix, an event organised every year since 1954. Hailed as one of the most challenging street circuits in the world, the six-kilometre long Guia Circuit will be the setting for a series of car and motorcycle racing events, including the Macau Formula Three Grand Prix, which is the gateway race for professional drivers hoping for a career in the prestigious Formula One World Championships.

Visitors who are interested in motorbike racing can catch some of the world's top motorcyclists zip through the streets while executing tight, high-speed turns during the Star River Windsor Arch Macau Motorcycle Grand Prix for that additional adrenaline fix.

HOW DO I MAKE IT HAPPEN?

■ Tiger Airways (tigerairways.com) flies from Singapore Changi Airport to Macau International Airport, while both Tiger Airways and AirAsia caters flights from Kuala Lumpur. Alternatively, visitors from both origins can fly direct to Hong Kong on Cathay Pacific (cathaypacific.com) and take an hour-long ferry ride with TurboJet from the Hong Kong – Macau Ferry Terminal (turbojet.com.hk).

■ Located in the city centre, a mere 1.5 kilometres away from the Macau Grand Prix area, Holiday Inn Macau Hotel is one of the best locations to reside during the Grand Prix season. The hotel also provides free shuttle service to and from the hotel and the Hong Kong – Macau Ferry terminal for the convenience of guests (from US\$329; ihg.com).



Catch international Jazz acts and participate in Jazz-related workshops and activities at PIJF



Penang, Malaysia

WHY GO NOW?

Penang is rich in history and beautiful colonial architecture. Dotted with exquisite temples, intriguing museums, brilliant street art, a rising boutique hotel scene and magnificent mosques, George Town, capital of Penang, is an ideal getaway from bustling Kuala Lumpur. Home to historical sites such as the Chew Jetty, Wat Chayamankalaram Thai Buddhist Temple, and the Chinese clan association Leong San Tong Khoo Kongsi, Penang has plenty to offer beneath its sleepy façade.

However, before the big

Christmas celebrations get underway, Penang gets livened up by the popular Penang Island Jazz Festival (PIJF), held this time from 5 to 8 December. Already into its tenth year, things are getting jazzed up, literally, as participants can expect a newly minted 'opening concert', led by American Idol finalist Casey Abrams, talented singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist. Following the strong international lineup are Alison Burns and Martin Taylor, Freddy Cole, Hedvig Mollestad Trio, Yoon-Jeong Heo, Jazzkamikaze, and more acts all

taking to the Jazz by the Beach stage; while local acts will star in the various fringe programmes. And as you groove to the blues, broaden your artistic interests

with the variety of supporting workshops, exhibitions, After Hours Jazz Jam, a drum circle, and The Island Forum sessions (penangjazz.com).

HOW DO I MAKE IT HAPPEN?

■ SilkAir, AirAsia, Jetstar (jetstar.com), and Tiger Airways all fly direct from Singapore Changi Airport to Penang international Airport. Alternatively, you could drive from Singapore to Penang on the North-South Expressway, but the journey will take approximately 10 hours. The drive from Kuala Lumpur to Penang will

take about five hours.

■ Hard Rock Hotel Penang is a lovely beachfront property located at Batu Ferringhi. The hotel's selling point is its unique design theme which incorporates Rock 'n' Roll memorabilia and furnishing elements (from US\$148, penang.hardrockhotels.net).

Siem Reap, Cambodia

WHY GO NOW?

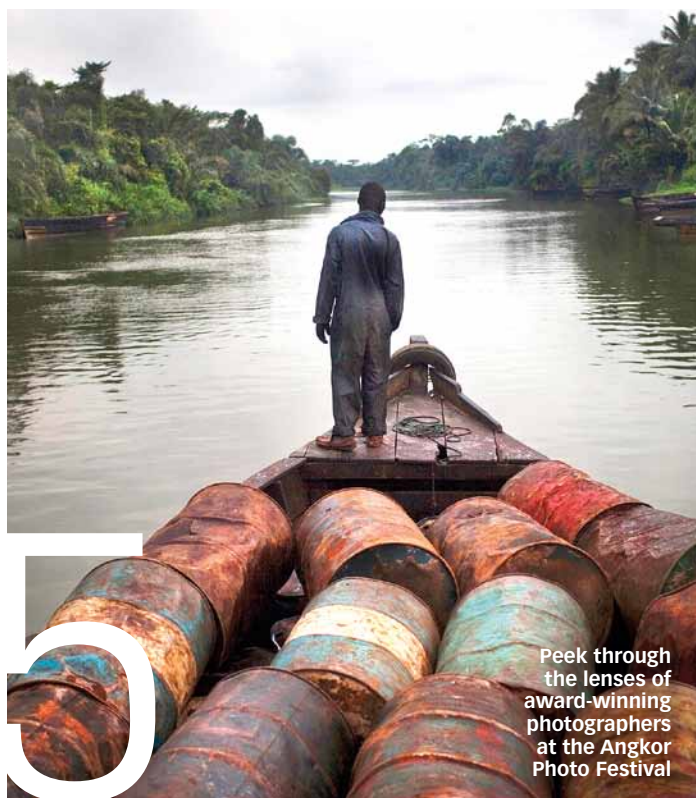
Enjoy the work of over 130 photographers, half of whom are from Asia, at the Angkor Photo Festival from 23 to 30 November in Siem Reap Province, Cambodia. Initiated in 2005, the annual festival is held in the city of Siem Reap. All eight exhibits and daily slideshows open to the public free-of-charge and without prior registration. Guest curators for this year include Bangladesh-born Shahidul Alam, a photographer, writer and activist who is also the founder of biennial international photography festival, Chobi Mela, as well as Jean-François Leroy, founder of international photojournalism festival, Visa Pour l'Image in Perpignan, France. Both will also be presenting their individual showcases.

With its focus on discovering and developing

new talents in photography in Asia, the Angkor Photo Festival also conducts free workshops conducted by renowned photographers for those identified as promising candidates.

HOW DO I MAKE IT HAPPEN?

■ From Singapore, fly direct from Changi Airport to Siem Reap International Airport with SilkAir. Visitors travelling from Kuala Lumpur can fly direct to Siem Reap on either Malaysia Airlines (malaysiaairlines.com) or AirAsia. ■ Managed by the Hyatt group, the Park Hyatt Siem Reap is located in the city central, close to the festival's location and is 15 minutes away from the UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Angkor Wat. Don't miss out on the hotel spa's signature treatments inspired by Apsara legends that promise a truly authentic Cambodian experience (from US\$358; siemreap.park.hyatt.com).



Peek through the lenses of award-winning photographers at the Angkor Photo Festival

Dolphin watch and get wet with water activities galore



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Kalpitiya, Sri Lanka

WHY GO NOW?

Witness thousands of spinner dolphins gliding through the deep indigo waters off this coastal town from now till March next year. Majestic blue whales and sperm whales, along with charming turtles and flying fish, can also be observed frolicking in their natural habitat during the four-hour boat tour.

Dive or snorkel at Bar Reef, the largest coral reef system in Sri Lanka and teeming with the richest biodiversity in waters around India. Engage in water sports at Alankuda Beach, canoe along scenic coastlines, and steer a four-wheel-drive

across luxurious sand dunes after having spent the day exploring historical sites of colonial heritage.

HOW DO I MAKE IT HAPPEN?

■ Singapore Airlines flies from Singapore to Colombo Bandaranaike International Airport, and the Sri Lankan capital is a three and a half hour drive away from Kalpitiya. ■ Udekki offers homely comfort and privacy with villas that offer views of the sand and the sea. Its kitchen is popular for serving up quality fare, while numerous facilities and amenities – a highlight of which is an outdoor bathtub – are available too (from US\$250; udekki.com).

10 EASY TRIPS

Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

WHY GO NOW?

Exercise imagination and personal interpretation of contemporary pieces from 50 international galleries at Abu Dhabi Art from 20 to 23 November. Visitors will be able to participate in talks, dialogues, and design workshops by prominent industry professionals at the UAE Pavilion and Manarat Al Saadiyat on Saadiyat Island.

While there, make a trip to the intricately embellished Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, capable of catering up to 41,000 worshippers and its astounding size and beauty a majestic sight to behold. Thrill-seekers may ride the world's fastest roller coaster at Ferrari World Abu Dhabi, get up close to gazelles, hyenas, and cheetahs at Arabian Wildlife Park, then wind down as you stroll along Corniche

beachfront, admiring the city's skyline.

HOW DO I MAKE IT HAPPEN?

- Fly direct to Abu Dhabi International Airport from both Singapore and Kuala Lumpur via UAE's national carrier, Etihad Airways (etihad.com).
- The chic Fairmont Bab Al Bahr is conveniently located near Abu Dhabi Mall and Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre and has rooms with stunning views of Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque. The beachfront business hotel houses an impressive variety of dining options, some of which include Frankie's Italian Restaurant & Bar, Marco Pierre White Steakhouse & Grill, and Chocolate Gallery (from US\$245; fairmont.com/abu-dhabi).



Enrich yourself with various art events at Manarat Al Saadiyat

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Visit the fully-marbled Victoria Memorial Hall, which also serves as a museum

Kolkata, India

WHY GO NOW?

Be enthralled by gems of Indian cinema and with choice global picks at the Kolkata International Film Festival.

Back for the 18th year from 10 to 17 November, the event will screen at 12 venues 180 films from 60 countries, spotlighting several unparalleled classics and noteworthy African flicks.

Climate-wise, the best time to visit is now till February as the weather is coolest (12-25°C). See thousands of pilgrims pay their respects at Kalighat Kali Temple in a day, marvel at the famed fully Makrana-marbled Victoria Memorial Hall, and catch a game of cricket at Eden Gardens, the second largest stadium home to this sport in the world. It is said that every visitor to this city has to cross

Howrah Bridge on foot at least once, so jostle your way to this celebrated symbol of Kolkata and West Bengal and soak up the sights of the Hooghly River.

HOW DO I MAKE IT HAPPEN?

- From Singapore, fly direct to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport (CCU) via Singapore Airlines, SilkAir, or AirAsia.
- Designed with signature Victorian and Indian elements, The Oberoi Grand has been accommodating guests with class and grace for over 125 years. It is located at the heart of the city centre and situated close to many dining, business, and entertainment avenues (from US\$174; oberoihotels.com/oberoi_kolkata).

10 EASY TRIPS

Tasmania, Australia

WHY GO NOW?

Ring in the New Year in Hobart as Tasmania celebrates its Silver Jubilee with The Taste of Tasmania. Held over seven days, from December 28 to January 3, the food and wine festival is expected to attract a crowd of 300,000 to Hobart's Salamanca and waterfront areas. Lauded as a grand advertisement for locally produced food and beverages, the event showcases the best of the Australian state's upcoming produce, and provides a platform for the community to gather and celebrate the summer.

As with previous years, the Princes Wharf Shed No.1 (PW1) building will be filled with a multitude of stalls, each promising to electrify your taste buds. In the PW1 forecourt, a street market and pop-up food vans threaten to burst your belt buckles with a glorious spread of trendy food. Wash down this feast with Tasmania's premium wines, beers, and ciders at the

Paddock marquee as you sip (or slug) a selection of offerings from local breweries and distilleries. In the evenings, family-friendly movies are screened and musical performers take to the stage, adding even more vibrancy to the event.

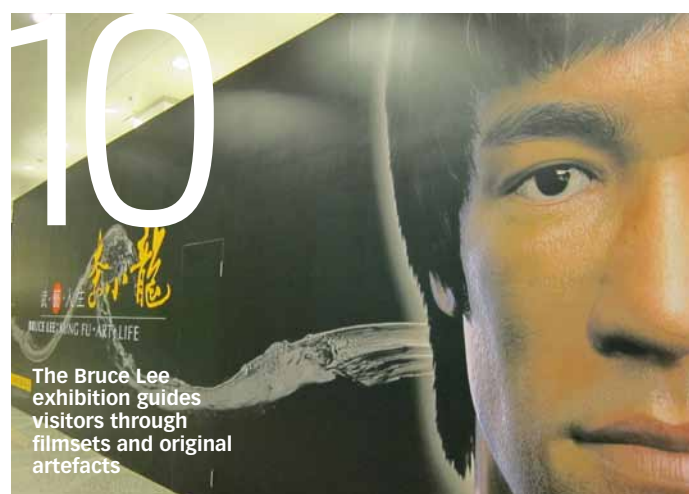
HOW DO I MAKE IT HAPPEN?

■ To get to Hobart from Singapore or Kuala Lumpur, fly to Melbourne, Sydney, or Brisbane, where you can connect to Hobart International Airport on either Jetstar Airways or Qantas (qantas.com.au).

■ Situated a stone's throw away from PW1 and Salamanca Place, the Salamanca Wharf Hotel is the perfect temporary home for visitors to the Taste Festival. Other than the handy location, the no-frills apartment hotel guarantees you a clean and comfortable room after a day of walking and eating (US\$176; salamancawharfhotel.com).



Celebrate the warmth of summer and the best of Tasmania's cuisine at the Taste Festival



Hong Kong, China

WHY GO NOW?

You don't have to be a Bruce Lee fan or a student of Jeet Kune Do to recognise the impact the man had during his short life. Forty years since his tragic passing brought tears to the world, a 3.5 metre side-kicking statue will be unveiled in the Hong Kong Heritage Museum in Sha Tin as part of the five-year long exhibition, Bruce Lee: Kung Fu-Art-Life, which opened in July 2013. The display is the largest and longest of its kind and features more than 600 artefacts, including the yellow tracksuit he made famous in *Game of Death*, recreations of film sets, and personal notebooks.

For a different kind of exhibition, visit 'Conceptual Walk Through', a collection of art installations, including paintings and films from Chinese conceptual artists Gao Weigang

and Kingsley Ng, that share themes of society, the environment, and humanities. This exhibition is held at Espace Louis Vuitton and is brought to the public by the French label.

HOW DO I MAKE IT HAPPEN?

■ Cathay Pacific, Jetstar Airways, Scoot (flyscoot.com), Singapore Airlines, and Tigerair fly direct from Singapore to Hong Kong. From Kuala Lumpur, AirAsia, Cathay Pacific, and Malaysia Airlines operate direct flights to Hong Kong.

■ One of Hong Kong's newest accommodations, the Mira Moon is a fashion-forward hotel that opened in November 2013. Book one of its 91 rooms with a 20 percent introductory discount from now until the end of the year (US\$258; miramoonhotel.com).