

# Top 2019 picks for SE Asia

Inbound travel agents from the 10 ASEAN member countries pick the hottest adventure, nature and culinary attractions that are on their radar this year. Compiled by TTG Asia reporters

## BRUNEI by S Puvaneswary

### Chang Ming Vui

Managing director, BruVacation

**ADVENTURE** Diving is a new activity promoted by Brunei Tourism. We work closely with dive operators to promote diving off the Brunei-Muara, Tutong and Belait districts, which are all home to a number of shipwrecks and a healthy fish population, which makes for beautiful underwater scenery. These dive sites are not crowded, hence appealing to tourists from Asia and Europe.

### Sugumaran Nair

Inbound manager, Freme Travel Services

**NATURE** Visitors who like sea sports should try stand-up paddleboarding (SUP) on Lugu Lake with SUP Safari, the only SUP provider in Brunei. The 80-minute session, with lesson and eco tour components, is led by a professional SUP instructor, and is safe and suitable even for non-swimmers. Tourists will get a full safety briefing and learn about SUP's history, equipment, and different strokes for kneeling and standing. You might also be able to spot hornbills, monkeys and jungle creatures in a serene environment.

## CAMBODIA by Marissa Carruthers

### Miles Gravett

General manager, Khiri Travel Cambodia

**ADVENTURE** What's happening at Cardamom Tented Camp in Koh Kong is exciting for nature lovers. It's a perfect balance of badly needed conservation efforts and tourism. With some efforts being put into marine conservation, diving in Cambodia is also getting better. Additionally, kayaking down the Mekong River is a magical once-in-a-lifetime experience.

### Andy Brouwer

Production and research consultant, Hanuman Travel

**NATURE** There is a new elephant experience at Phnom Tamao with

Wildlife Alliance. Entitled Elephant Keeper for a Day, participants get to work with elephant keepers and learn about elephant care.

### Steve Lidgley

General manager, Travel Asia a la Carte

**CULINARY** Cambodian cuisine is becoming more popular. Many restaurants, such as the recently opened Pou Kitchen & Café in Siem Reap, provide new interpretations of authentic Khmer cuisine.

## LAOS by Marissa Carruthers

### Stefan Scheerer

General manager, Khiri Travel Laos

**ADVENTURE** Khammouane Province is opening up for adventure, with activities such as kayaking through cave formations, while the Bolaven Plateau is suitable for trekking, waterfalls and Jeep safaris.

### Linh Le

Group managing director, Asia DMC

**NATURE** In the Bolaven Plateau, we offer a jeep tour integrated with kayaking in 4,000 Islands. Guests will be able to enjoy the year-round beautiful vegetation in Southern Laos.

### Virginie Kury

General manager, Asian Trails Laos

**CULINARY** Paste is a new restaurant in Luang Prabang. It is owned by a Michelin-star chef from Bangkok, Bee Satongun, and her husband Jason Bailey.

## MALAYSIA by S Puvaneswary

### Ken Lau

CEO and founder, Adventoro

**ADVENTURE** Kedah in (Peninsular Malaysia's) north-west is a new adventure destination thanks to improved air links as well as the upgraded facilities at Langkawi airport. Among Kedah's offerings we are promoting to adrenaline junkies and millennials is paragliding on Mount Jerai. It offers scenic views of paddy fields, and a birds'-eye view of the Straits of Melaka and its offshore islands.



Above: Canoeing on Cheow Lan Lake in Khao Sok National Park, Thailand

### Manfred Kurz

Managing director, Diethelm Travel Malaysia

**NATURE** Samadhi Belum, set within the Royal Belum Rainforest in Perak, will offer 55 luxury tents when it opens in late 2019. I'm looking forward to the opening as it will offer Malaysia's first luxury tented camp experience set within a 130-million-year-old rainforest, which is also a protected area. Our clients are mainly Europeans and Americans, and they will love the concept of being close to nature, while not sacrificing on comfort.

### Arokia Das Anthony

Director, Luxury Tours Malaysia

**CULINARY** Plane in the City is a new product introduced by Two-Spicy Entertainment Live. The 90-minute fine dining experience revolves around a Boeing B737 aircraft, and allows guests to take pictures and selfies in the cockpit, or walk on the wing of the plane. The Western-style cuisine served is prepared by Le Méridien Kuala Lumpur and guests

can choose between a three- or four-course meal.

## MYANMAR by Marissa Carruthers

### Sammy Samuels

Founder, Myanmar Shalom Travels

**ADVENTURE** Caving adventures in Hpa-An and hiking or trekking in Chin State are becoming popular. Trekking around Hsipaw and Keng Tung are places to watch out for in 2019 and beyond.

### Min Than Htut

Founder, Pro Niti Travel

**NATURE** For nature, there are exciting things happening in southern Myanmar. In particular, the coastal towns of Myeik, Kawthaung and Dawei, which are also great gateways to the many untouched islands in the south.

### Edwin Briels

General manager, Khiri Travel Myanmar

**CULINARY** Cooking classes, food tastings and discovering the flavours of tribal food in Kachin, Wa, Shan and Rakhine. The first episode of *Myanmar Masterchef* was a huge

Below, from left: A traditional Cambodian dish called fish amok; terraced rice fields in Muong Hoa Valley in Sapa, Vietnam



success and has led to an increased awareness in Myanmar food.

**SINGAPORE** by Pamela Chow

**Daniel Tan**

Founder, Let's Go Tour Singapore  
**ADVENTURE** Sentosa's upcoming developments will be interesting. We have been having discussions with the companies operating some attractions there, as we've realised that tourists who choose bicycle tours usually also want to try something different. We might have synergy and are looking into cross-promoting.

**Jane Goh**

Xperience director, Xperience Singapore Events & Travel  
**NATURE** 2019 will see the opening of Floral Fantasy at Gardens by the Bay, which will have four themed garden landscapes, plus a 4D multi-sensorial ride. It should be interesting to see another part of the gardens transformed. In the National Orchid Garden, the Tan Hoon Siang Mist House, Yuen Peng McNeice Bromeliad Collection enclosure and the Cool House will be reopened in 2019 after major redevelopments. This will enhance the visitor experience to the Botanic Gardens.

**Fadz Abdhan**

General manager for Singapore and Malaysia, Lotus Asia Tours  
**CULINARY** With World's 50 Best Restaurants Awards coming to Singapore, we won't just look at bringing guests to these restaurants. We can take famous chefs out of their restaurants and bring them closer to our guests in any location of their choice – be it Gardens by the Bay or the Singapore Flyer – and have a cooking class or multi-course meal.

**THAILAND** by Xinyi Liang-Pholsena

**Matt Blench**

Adventure director, Exo Travel  
**ADVENTURE** One of the recent trends we have been seeing is a growing demand for family adventures in Thailand, especially in Mae Wang district, central Chiang Mai. Whether it's deep in nature such as cooking a delicious meal in the jungle, or cultural interactions in homestays, there



**Above: Plane in the City experience in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia**

is a wide variety of activities suitable for any family.

**Christian Sutton**

Director of product & contracting, Diethelm Travel Thailand  
**NATURE** Khao Sok National Park is without doubt one of the most stunning parts of Thailand. Our full day excursion is full of community interaction, and is an intimate affair for just six visitors twice-daily. During the tour, we meet Somboon the elephant, who was rescued from a nearby camp. Guests feed and bathe him, and also learn about the job of mahout.

For the second half of the day, guests cross a picturesque bridge and visit a small village. Here they meet a local community and are given a tour of the fruit orchards before settling down to eat a tasty southern Thai lunch. The excursion can be booked from Khao Lak, or added to a tailor-made overnight itinerary which includes trekking, kayaking and also a night on a floating bungalow on beautiful Cheow Lan Lake.

**Soontarut Wattanahongsiri**

Founder, Blackrice Travel  
**CULINARY** I think the farm-to-table concept will be the new culinary programme for 2019, as people wish to learn more about the

whole supply chain. This includes learning about the origin of food from the source of the ingredients, engaging in local culture including eating and learning about local traditions, and the cooking process.

**VIETNAM** by Marissa Carruthers

**Tanya Trang**

Marketing manager, Luxury Travel Vietnam  
**ADVENTURE** Cruising is a key attraction. The discovery of the Halong Bay region, which extends up to Bai Tu Long Bay and Cat Ba Archipelago by Emperor Cruises delivers a sophisticated yet stylish adventure.

**Ken Lau**

CEO, Adventoro  
**NATURE** The Muong Hoa Valley – Sapa Rice Terraces Adventure tour is a great way to explore Sapa's natural beauty, taking in rice terraces, the valleys of Muong Hoa and meeting local tribes.

**Sandor Leinwand recte Rein**

General manager, Exo Travel Vietnam  
**CULINARY** Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) now boasts an impressive lineup of local, craft beer specialists. The craft beer culture is thriving, giving the Exo food discovery tours a nice extra twist.

**PHILIPPINES** by Rosa Ocampo

**Gia Fortun**

Marketing director, Fiesta Tours and Travel  
**ADVENTURE** Masungi Georeserve in Rizal is popular among millennials due to its panoramic views and easy access from Manila.

Millennials are also into mountain climbing on Mounts Macolod and Pulag, as well as surfing in Siargao, La Union and Zambales. Adventure travel also encompasses the Visayas and Palawan.

**Jordan Mamaril**

Tours and PR manager, Regent Travel Philippines  
**NATURE** Ecotourism is the next big thing as travellers look for new destinations, and the government gets serious about developing sustainable and responsible tourism. We're looking at Quirino Province in the north. It's raw, with vast natural offerings like nature parks, caves, mountains and rapids. The local government is also keen on promoting it for nature tourism.

Other destinations to look out for are the untapped nature resort of Dakak in Dapitan; Isla de Gigantes, a pristine island in Iloilo; as well as Dumaguete which is the jumping-off point to several destinations in Negros and Siquijor.

**JP Cabalza**

Inbound manager, Corporate International Travel and Tours  
**CULINARY** Quality restaurants – from the private dining halls of Bale Dutung and Denlim's Kitchen to the carinderia-style Mila's eatery – sprouting in Pampanga lend credence to the province's sobriquet as the Philippines' culinary capital.

Pampanga has also crafted exotic dishes including *sisig* or sizzling pork cheeks, ears and brain served with liver sauce; crab fat; fermented rice with fish or shrimp paste; and deep fried farm-raised frogs. And we haven't included to-die-for desserts in the list.

To satisfy the increasing demand, we offer standalone culinary tours or, for tourists to Bataan or Subic, we combine it with a meal in one of Pampanga's restaurants.

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