



100+ TIPS FOR SOUTHEAST ASIA

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PACKING

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1. USE A BACKPACK

This one is not a must but I'll tell you that a backpack, a quality one, will be your best bet. Picture this—crumbling streets, boats waiting for you a few feet out in the water, crowded roads, and rough baggage handlers everywhere (buses, planes, trains...). Now picture your wheely suitcase in these situations. It won't be fun and you will surely need to buy a new one at the end of the trip (if not sooner). Get a good backpack and you'll be navigating the streets much easier.

Oh, and yes, at some locations you'll need to bring your own luggage on the boats a few feet in the water. I hope your biceps can lift your suitcase above your head.



2. GET A GOOD DAY BAG

Don't go too cheap on your day bag. The extra security that comes with a durable day bag will do wonders for your sanity. Nobody wants their bag spilling out everywhere, bag slashing isn't super prevalent but can happen, plus, when you go out for the day and need a bunch of things, a small uncomfortable bag is NOT what you want on your back. Get a decent one!

In addition, this bag will be where all your important belongings go when you're moving cities, on a long bus, or the bag that's at your feet on a flight. It's holding your valuables so like, put that stuff in a decent bag so they last your whole trip!



3. PACK LIGHT

This has to be one of the most important tips when it comes to packing. Remember, whatever you pack, you have to carry! You can always wash your clothes as you go along, and really, does it matter if you wear the same pair of shorts 2 days in a row? Also, clothing here is quite cheap so you can always pick up an extra t-shirt somewhere.

With that said, I understand overpacking, I do the same sometimes. Just know that it's really hot, you're carrying all your stuff, often for extended periods of time, and it will get very old very quick. So pack what you're comfortable carrying.



4. PACK A RAINCOAT

When it rains in Southeast Asia, it pours! Although the weather may still be warm, expect short and heavy downpours every now and again, especially in the monsoon season. Simply carry a light raincoat in your backpack for when this happens so you don't get soaked, and then before you know it, the sun will come out again. An umbrella is cumbersome and lame, don't bother with it.



5. GET A DRY BAG

Southeast Asia is home to some stunning coastlines, and chances are, many of your adventures will be water based. It would be sensible to invest in a dry bag to keep all of your valuables safe. This way, you won't have to leave all your belongings unattended on the beach when you have a swim (perfect for solo travelers), and it makes a great rainy day bag.

For the true budget conscious, this bag also makes a great hand washing bucket. I literally did my laundry for four years in my dry bag (OK fine, I did use a machine sometimes!)



6. CLOTHES FOR TEMPLES

The temples in Southeast Asia are fascinating to explore, but all will require you to be respectful when you enter. This means having your legs, shoulders and belly covered, so make sure you have packed appropriate clothing. Light kimonos, sarongs, and scarves are my favorite thing to carry around for covering up.



7. PACK WALKING SHOES

Although the warm weather may tempt you to pack pretty sandal after pretty sandal, be prepared to do a lot of walking on cracked asphalt with debris on the sidewalks. A good pair of walking shoes is highly recommended no matter what time of year. You can't be trekking through the rainforest or up a mountain without some sensible shoes! And yes, flip flops are still OK just make sure you bring quality ones that won't break on day 2.

A person's hands are shown holding a small box of Imodium medication. The box is blue and white with a picture of a person. The hands are positioned over a red and white patterned fabric. The background is a wooden surface with a map and some other items.

8. BRING IMODIUM/OTHER MEDS

Unfortunately, on your trip, there may be a time where your food does not agree with you, and at these times, Imodium will be your hero! Especially if you have a long day on a boat, bus or plane in front of you. Activated Charcoal and any anti-vomiting medication would serve you well too. The good news is, you can easily buy this in Southeast Asia if you forgot/don't have room. Just buy it before the sickness hits you so you're not having to find a pharmacy while sick.



9. EAR PLUGS ARE ESSENTIAL

Ear plugs will come in handy for a number of different occasions. Not only for long plane or bus journeys, but also for if you are staying in a noisy dorm, or if you are struggling to sleep with the constant sound of traffic outside your window.



10. IDENTIFICATION DOCUMENTS

By law, visitors are required to carry a form of identification with them at all times. Have a copy of your passport on you (as it's a bit riskier to carry the real thing) and your driver's license. I'd email yourself and a family member copies of all your documentation just in case as well.



11. BRING INSECT REPELLENT

You certainly won't regret spending a few bucks on some insect repellent, especially during the night, when the biters come out to play!



12. PACK A PORTABLE CHARGER

These are perfect for keeping your GoPro or phone's battery topped up as you'll likely run the battery down using it for pics and maps. Get one that's solar charging as well and you'll never run low on battery.



13. CHARGERS

Don't forget any chargers at home. They are a bit difficult to find in Southeast Asia and when you do find them, it will be a poor knock off version or it will be the real thing, just more expensive.

A person's hands are shown holding a small, clear bottle of sunscreen. The hands are positioned over a map that is spread out on a wooden surface. The map shows various geographical features and labels. The person is wearing a red and white patterned garment. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the map and the wooden surface.

14. BRING YOUR OWN SUNSCREEN

You'll find the majority of things are incredibly cheap in Southeast Asia, but the same cannot be said about sunscreen. Prices can be sky high for just a small bottle, so this is something that may be worth bringing from home.

MONEY

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A nighttime street scene in Southeast Asia, featuring a wooden lattice archway, a motorcycle, and a person in the background.

15. TAKE THE BUS

The cheapest option when it comes to travel is always going to be the bus. Although a flight or taxi may be quicker, if you want to save some money, then take the bus. The bus network across Southeast Asia is usually pretty good, and you should be able to get to where you need to go with relative ease.

The best buses are night buses since it doesn't eat up a day of your vacation and you save a few bucks on accommodation for the night.

A night street scene in an Asian city, likely Thailand, with a white text box overlay. The background shows a street with a motorcycle, a building with a wooden lattice archway, and a person walking. The text box contains the title '16. JUST FLY' and a paragraph of text.

16. JUST FLY

Not to contradict myself from the last tip but if you're really low on time, then just fly! Air Asia and other airlines are sometimes only a few bucks more than a bus ride and will save you half a day worth of traveling. It's certainly worth doing the math to see if flying is a better option—even within the same country.

A night street scene in an Asian city. In the foreground, a motorcycle is parked on the left. A wooden lattice archway is visible on the right. The background shows a street with some lights and a sign that says "HOTEL".

17. HOSTELS AREN'T SO BAD

Not only are they cheap, but they can also be a good way to make friends and socialize with other travelers. If you're a solo traveler, a bit scared and unsure of your travels, just book a dorm! I can guarantee you'll walk out of it with a new friend or five.

A night street scene in an Asian city, likely Vietnam, with a white text box overlay. The background shows a street with a motorcycle on the left, a building with a wooden lattice archway on the right, and a street sign with Chinese characters. The text box contains a section header and a paragraph of text.

18. BUT GUESTHOUSES AND HOTELS ARE SOMETIMES BETTER

I will admit, I'm not a hostel person, I love my privacy (and my sleep). Guesthouses and some hotels will give you a private room with a shared bathroom or your own for around the same price as some hostels. I'd rather have my own room—personally. So if you're like me, don't think you'll need to sell your left arm to afford a place to yourself.



19. BE PREPARED TO HAGGLE

If you want a bargain, you can't be shy. If you are in the markets, then stall holders expect to be haggled with, so they may set their prices a little higher than what they intend to sell their goods for. Plus, as they are expecting you to ask for a discount, there is no need to feel embarrassed.

*Extra Tips:

- Don't aim too low and insult them.
- Generally speaking, when the prices are displayed, that's the price. Only when you buy numerous things would it be appropriate to ask for discounts.
- Never get heated when haggling, you'll never get your way that way.

A nighttime street scene in Southeast Asia, featuring a wooden archway with a lattice pattern on the right, a motorcycle on the left, and a person carrying a basket on their head in the background. The scene is dimly lit with streetlights and building lights.

20. DOWNLOAD GRAB

Grab is essentially the Southeast Asia version of Uber, and works pretty much in the same way. This can help with budgeting as you'll know exactly how much your journey is going to cost you before you ride. No haggling or worrying they don't understand where you're going. The app does it for you. For solo travelers, this is a way to keep extra safe too.



21. AGREE TO A TAXI PRICE BEFORE YOU RIDE

If Grab isn't available, you won't be short of ways to get around in Southeast Asia, with tuk tuks and taxis around every corner in most major towns and cities. However before setting off, make sure you have agreed on a set price for your journey, this will prevent you being over-charged when you reach your destination. It also helps if you have a rough idea of where you should be heading, as it has been known for drivers to take a detour in order to charge you more. Follow along on your offline map.

A night street scene in an Asian city, likely Bangkok, featuring a white text box overlay. The background shows a street with a motorcycle on the left, a building with a wooden lattice facade on the right, and a street sign with Chinese characters. The text box contains a section header and a paragraph of advice.

22. TUK TUKS/TRICYCLES/RICKSHAWS

They are so cute, and popular, but are NOT the only way to get around. Get on another mode of transport if you can. These modes of transport are OK but are often the most expensive and they are mostly a tourist thing. Do it for the experience, sure, but don't solely use these methods to get around, there's a 99% chance there's a cheaper way.

A night street scene in Southeast Asia, likely in a market area. On the right, there is a wooden structure with a lattice pattern, possibly a stall or entrance. A person is visible in the background near the structure. On the left, a motorcycle is parked. The scene is illuminated by streetlights, creating a warm, slightly blurred atmosphere. A large white rectangular box is superimposed over the center of the image, containing text.

23. SPLURGE EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE

Southeast Asia is one of the cheapest places you will ever stay, so you might as well make the most of it while you can! Even a fairly luxurious hotel room won't set you back too much, so it might be worth splashing out every once in a while and living the high life for a few days. Getting a few massages is a MUST. Nowhere else in the world can you get one for around \$10.

A night street scene in a market area. In the background, there is a wooden lattice archway. To the left, a motorcycle is parked. The scene is illuminated by streetlights, creating a warm, yellowish glow. The overall atmosphere is that of a bustling market at night.

24. CARRY CASH

In most countries you visit, you won't pay for much on your card, and when you do, depending on the card you have, you'll likely be charged a fee. Cash is always preferred no matter what you are paying for, so make sure you keep some on you.

A night street scene in an Asian city, likely Thailand, with a white text box overlay. The background shows a street with a motorcycle on the left, a building with a wooden lattice archway on the right, and a street sign with Thai characters. The text box contains a numbered tip about getting the right card before leaving.

25. GET THE RIGHT CARD BEFORE YOU LEAVE

What card can you get that won't charge you international fees? For Americans, it's Charles Schwab. Don't leave home without getting this card for ATM and debit use! ATMs can charge fees around \$5 USD but on top of that, your bank charges you a few bucks too! It adds up.

It's also safer to extract more frequently as it's not smart to walk around with loads of cash on you.

A night street scene in Southeast Asia. In the background, there is a wooden archway with a lattice pattern. To the left, a motorcycle is parked on the street. The scene is illuminated by streetlights, creating a warm, yellowish glow. The overall atmosphere is that of a quiet street at night in a tropical or subtropical region.

26. CHANGE MONEY BEFORE LEAVING THE COUNTRY

When visiting some of the countries where the currency is weak or less common, you may struggle to convert it once you cross the border. Be sure to change up your currency before you leave the country. No one will buy Riel or Kip off of you after leaving Cambodia and Laos.

A night street scene in Asia, likely in a market area, with a white text box overlay. The background shows a street with a motorcycle on the left, a building with a wooden lattice archway on the right, and a street sign with Chinese characters. The text box contains the title '27. EXPLORE THE OPTIONS' and two paragraphs of text.

27. EXPLORE THE OPTIONS

There are going to be tons of tour companies all offering the exact same tour, so there is no harm in shopping around to see where you can get the best deal. Don't just accept the first offer you come across. And never accept offers that are offered to you randomly in the streets.

For some of the most trusted tours around, try searching on Klook first. They are popular for tours around Asia and you can browse the reviews before purchasing.



28. GET YOUR WALKING SHOES ON

In the cities, chances are the main attractions will all be within walking distance from each other, such as in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. Relying on your feet is not only completely free of charge, and is a great way to really explore the city you are in, and could even save you time if the traffic is heavy (looking at you Manila!).

A night street scene in Southeast Asia, featuring a white text box overlay. The background shows a street with a motorcycle on the left, a building with a wooden lattice archway on the right, and a street sign with Chinese characters. The text box contains the title '29. LOOK FOR FREE ATTRACTIONS' and a paragraph about experiencing Southeast Asian culture for free.

29. LOOK FOR FREE ATTRACTIONS

You can experience the rich culture of many Southeast Asia attractions without spending a penny. Every city has a range of free attractions and sights for you to enjoy if you're running low on cash. Look up free walking tours, temple hopping and local parks, all of which shouldn't cost anything.

A night street scene in a market area. In the background, there is a wooden lattice archway. To the left, a motorcycle is parked. The scene is illuminated by streetlights, creating a warm, yellowish glow. The overall atmosphere is that of a busy, yet quiet, night market.

30. BE PREPARED FOR TWO PRICES

Just because you are a tourist, you can expect to pay a lot more for things, often more than double what the locals are expected to pay. For example, National Parks will have two entry prices, one for tourists and one for locals, and you can guess which is more expensive.

A night street scene in Southeast Asia, likely in a market area. On the right, there's a wooden structure with a lattice pattern, possibly a stall or entrance. A person is visible in the background near the structure. On the left, a motorcycle is parked. The street is dark, with some lights visible. A large white text box is overlaid on the center of the image.

31. MORE PEOPLE, LESS MONEY

Yes it's true, and unfortunate for solo travelers, but the more people, the cheaper. Luckily, Southeast Asia is a crazy easy place to make friends! So come with buddies or make some new ones so you can save a few bucks on a room, a scooter, a taxi, a tour... Pretty much everything.

A night street scene in Southeast Asia, likely in a market area. On the right, there is a wooden structure with a lattice pattern, possibly a stall or entrance. A person is visible in the background near the structure. On the left, a motorcycle is parked. The scene is dimly lit with some streetlights. A large white rectangular box is overlaid on the center of the image, containing text.

32. INVEST IN TRAVEL INSURANCE

There's no point trying to save a few bucks and not buying proper travel insurance, you don't even want to think about the cost of medical fees if you need it. Luckily the fees in Southeast Asia are cheap but if something serious happens, your pocket will also get hurt.

A night street scene in Japan, likely in a city like Tokyo. The background shows a street with a motorcycle parked on the left, a building with a traditional Japanese lattice facade on the right, and a street sign with Japanese characters. A large white text box is overlaid on the center of the image.

33. CARRY SMALL MONEY

The ATMs love giving you big bills but you'll want to break those ASAP. When you purchase things from big stores and chains like 711, always use your big bills so you can break them up. Shop vendors don't always have change for big bills and some may try to hand you back the incorrect amount of change, which is much easier to mix up without you noticing.

34. GO SLOWER

98% of the people reading this tip will ignore it. I get it, you're excited, you want to see ALL the things, and you'll sleep when your dead. But I can't stress enough how much more rewarding it is to get to know "pockets" of places than it is to rush through everything. Rushing also means you're spending A LOT more cash. Hotels will often give you weekly discounts, and not getting on a bus every other two days and instead just doing it every other 7-10 days will save you so much money. But most only learn this after a few months, when they are burnt out and broke from going too fast!



FOOD AND DRINK

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35. DRINK BOTTLED WATER

As with many foreign countries, the water is generally not safe to drink, and could leave you with a rather upset stomach. Safe, bottled water is available everywhere, and won't cost you too much, and is a much safer option when it comes to staying hydrated. It also may be worth considering purchasing a filter bottle, which will save you buying endless plastic bottles. At the least, to cut down on waste, some bigger towns and cities have water refill stations. If you're somewhere for an extended time, consider buying the larger plastic jugs to cut down a bit too.



36. TRY THE STREET FOOD

Street food doesn't have to be scary, and often it is the tastiest cheapest food around. Sampling the local cuisine is sometimes the best way to fully immerse yourself in a new culture, it's an essential part of the experience, and getting ill from it is a rarity.

*Extra Tips:

- Sorry to say (and promise it's not because I'm pescatarian), the meat is often the sketchiest.
- Always make sure you're getting hot food or reheated food, particularly when there's meat.
- Sliced up fruit is fine.
- Many stalls often offer fresh cooked meals, it's easy to find something fresh.
- Be weary of anything that's been sitting out if you arrive late to the market.



37. THE ICE IS FINE

The ice will be safe to consume, even the locals don't use ice that isn't filtered. DON'T dare pass up the opportunity to drink fruit shakes in Southeast Asia, you'll be missing out.



38. EAT WHERE THE LOCALS EAT

You'll find the tastiest food where the locals are, so you might as well follow their lead, be it a restaurant or a street vendor. Generally, the more people at the stall, the better.

A top-down view of a dining table with several white plates containing different types of food, including what looks like pad thai and other Asian dishes. Several people's arms are visible around the table, some with tattoos and one with a metal bracelet. The background is slightly blurred, focusing attention on the food and the text overlay.

39. STEP AWAY FROM THE STAPLE FOOD

If you go to Thailand and eat pad thai everyday, you're missing out. If you go to Vietnam and gorge yourself on phở 5 out of 7 nights, you're missing out. I get it, you want to try the cuisine you've heard of but there is SO much to try. Try the staples, move on, try other things. You'll be happy you did and you might even find a new fav food.



40. ICE YOUR BEER

You may be a bit weirded out when you order a beer and there's an option to add ice, or it comes with it on the side. It's HOT which means anything that's cold is welcomed, and beers get warm fast. Ice in beer is a thing here, just go with it!

SAFETY

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41. MONKEYS ARE CHEEKY

Monkeys are everywhere in Southeast Asia, from on the beach, to in towns or in the rainforest. Although they may look sweet, it is advisable that you keep your distance, as some can have sharp little teeth. If they do get up close and personal, then make sure you have a tight hold of ALL your belongings, as they have a tendency to simply take what they want, and then good luck getting it back!

A background image showing a street scene with lush green trees at the top, a white car on the right, and a road with yellow dashed lines at the bottom. A white rectangular box is centered over the image, containing text.

42. DON'T FEED THE MONKEYS

You might be tempted to give the monkeys a little scrap of food, because at the end of the day they are pretty cute. However, by feeding the animals they will start to associate people with food, which can cause a big problem for locals. They could also end up losing the skills they need to feed in the wild.



43. DON'T LEAVE BELONGINGS UNATTENDED

Your bag and your belongings are your lifeline while traveling, so whatever you do, make sure you don't leave them unattended at any part of your trip, not even when you pop into the bathroom for second.

The background of the page is a photograph of a street scene. On the left, a green bus is partially visible. On the right, a silver car is parked. The street is paved with asphalt and has yellow dashed lines. In the background, there are lush green trees and a clear sky.

44. DON'T EXPECT COMPLETE SAFETY

The safety standards in Southeast Asia are simply not the same in other parts of the world, so whereas in many countries a boat will have at least one life jacket for every passenger, in Southeast Asia, this may not be the case. The driving may also be a little precarious, especially round twisting mountain roads. Longtail boats are always leaky, a seatbelt on the bus may or may not be present, and your driver may be on his third energy drink. This is just something to be prepared for, you should be fine...



45. SEE A DOCTOR BEFORE YOU TRAVEL

It is important that you pay a visit to a doctor and let them know where you intend to go. They will be able to let you know what vaccines you need and if you will need to take any additional medication such as malaria tablets. These will not only stop you getting ill, but also stop you bringing anything nasty back into the country.



46. BE WARY OF THE TRAFFIC

When you arrive in Asia, one of the first things that will strike you is the sheer amount of traffic on the roads. Expect taxis, tuk tuks, scooters, vans and bikes all fighting for a space on the road, plus people don't always pay attention to traffic lights, signs or rules in general. It's chaos but somehow, it does kind work.



47. BRING A PADLOCK

No matter if you are staying at a budget friendly hostel or a classy hotel, a padlock will come in handy. Keep your valuables locked up whenever you can, including forms of identification that you are not carrying with you. Sometimes your hotel room is locked with a padlock and if you have your own, it's an added level of safety.



48. DRINK RESPONSIBLY

Sure, you are on vacay, so you are going to want to enjoy a drink or two. Especially at the legendary parties. Just be aware how much you are drinking, and what it is you are drinking! Don't do anything stupid that you wouldn't do back home. Use your common sense and make sure you have friends to go out with, drink close to your hotel, and know how to get home if you're getting more than buzzed.

A background image of a street scene. On the left, a green bus is partially visible. On the right, a silver car is parked. The top of the image shows dense green trees against a bright sky. The bottom of the image shows a road with yellow dashed lines.

49. USE CROSS-BODY BAGS

To carry valuables such as identification, money and your electronics, you should use a bag that goes across your body. This should be enough to prevent potential thieves from simply snatching your bag in the street. A popular way to steal purses are people on motorbikes snatching them off shoulders. It's less likely they will choose you if yours is crossbody.



50. WATCH YOUR DRINK

This applies to all countries, but especially where drinking in excess is taking place, such as beach parties. It is not uncommon for drinks to be spiked if they are left unattended, and you definitely shouldn't accept drinks from strangers. Always keep an eye on your drink, watch people pour them or open the bottle. Just like you would at home.



51. SCAN A COPY OF DOCUMENTS

Although you are sure to be keeping your passport and travel documents safe, scan a copy of everything and send it to your email so you have a backup. This will make the process of getting a new one a lot easier. I sent an email to my mom just for good measure as well.

52. TAKE CARE GOING OUT ALONE

This applies to all places in the world, especially at night. If possible, try not to go out alone. Even if you are a solo backpacker, chances are you are going to have made friends along the way, so try to always walk around new places with someone, it is a lot safer. If you do go out alone, male or female, make sure your hotel is close by, you grabbed a business card/pinned the address, you texted someone back home letting them know, and make sure you understand what the transportation system is like before you have a drink. Don't get anything more than tipsy, you can get a bit more than that if you are with trusted people or down the way from your hotel—maybe. Just be extra safe.



SCAMS

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53. THE METER ISN'T WORKING

Nope, don't listen! Just get another cab if they refuse to use the meter. You'll get charged at least three times the price. Sometimes you'll have to ask 5 taxis before you'll find a "good" one who will actually use the meter. This is popular particularly in Bangkok but in other major cities too.



54. THE METER IS RIGGED

Yep, now that you got in a taxi that uses their meter, you'll need to keep a close eye on it to see if it's acting strangely. Do the numbers leap at a ridiculous rate? Are they pressing random buttons on the meter? Ask the driver to stop and hail a new one if yours is going off and being unreasonable. It may not be obvious to you so this scam may happen under your nose.



55. GETTING A TOUR OF TOWN

The taxi may be taking you on the long route to rake in a few extra bucks on your toll. Follow along on your offline map and ask them to steer in certain directions. They may make up excuses like construction or *insert other lie* and really, this one is hard to avoid as you don't know the roads. May this is the fastest way? Either way I like to make them aware I'm following the way on my map in a nice way.

Extra tips:

Taxis are THE WORST which is why I try to avoid them. Take public transport when you can or use Grab. If a tuk tuk or taxi is your only choice, I ALWAYS ask a neutral party (the bartender or my hotel receptionist) about how much a ride from A to B is so I know the round about price for my trip.



56. DON'T GET LURED BY ATTRACTIONS

If you are on your way to an attraction and someone comes up to you informing you it is closed today, don't always listen to them. They may be genuine, but this is also a common scam in Southeast Asia (especially Bangkok), as they will then try and take you into their gallery or shop instead



57. THE HOTEL/TAXI SCAM

This one is kind of another taxi scam but relating to your hotel. The driver will tell you your hotel is closed or not good. He will then try to convince you to go to his friend's hotel instead, how convenient! Except it's not, he will get a commission from his friend and you'll probably end up at a hotel that's OK (or potentially awful) but get charged more (someone has to pay for that commission!)



58. THEFT IN THE UNDERCARRIAGE

Don't leave valuables anywhere but on your person. Leaving anything of value in the undercarriage of the bus (AKA the bus storage area that's out of your sight and where the big bags go) is unwise and is known to be a place where people rummage through bags.



59. GET OFF THE BUS

Some bus scams get a bit scary, this is one of them but it's a rather rare one. They tell you to get off at a place that's not your final destination in the middle of nowhere and at night. DON'T get off the bus, no matter how intimidating they are. Check on your phone if you're at your final destination, if not, remain on the bus no matter what. They hope you get off, have no choice but to stay at their friend's crappy hotel and then have to take a tuk tuk (their friend as well) to your final destination.



60. VISA FEES

This is popular for Cambodia, they will tell you you need to pay \$X extra to get your visa so it "can get done faster." When you're on a bus full of people and everyone gives into this scam, it's a bit hard to get of it. It's not the worst scam (most people don't even know it is a scam), it's usually \$5 extra, you do get your visa done faster, but it's straight up extortion as the border agents are all in on it. If you try to go alone, they may make you wait for nothing and the bus can drive off without you. It's crappy. So try getting your visa online first and just fly in to avoid this or just pay up. If the bus is all up for revolting, which would be ideal, then you'll now know why!



61. YOU DID THE DAMAGE

No matter what you're renting, car, motorbike, jet ski etc... Always take video and picture evidence of marks and scuffs otherwise, they may try to blame it on you and make you pay!

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62. ANYTHING ON OFFER

If ANYONE, ANYWHERE, comes up to offer you ANYTHING... Say no thank you. You'll get offered a "deal" for a hotel right off the boat in Koh Phi Phi, you'll get offered drugs everywhere roaming the Gili Islands, and you and the boys will get promises of free drinks at the local bar by a pretty lady... All of these offers (and more) are major red flags. NEVER accept anything offered randomly to you in the street. If you want anything, go somewhere, to a proper establishment, and get it or ask for it.



63. GEMS

They are probably fake. Just avoid purchasing gems and any “too good to be true” scenarios.



64. THE MENU IS RIGGED

When you go out to eat, only eat at places with prices on the menu. Otherwise you're ordering in the dark and they can make up prices, and they will! Also, it may be best to hang on to a menu at the table as sometimes they give you an inflated bill and when you ask to see the menu again, to compare the price you thought you saw, they will give you the rigged menu, not the one you originally saw.



65. CHANGING MONEY

Be very cautious about exchanging money. Sometimes they can short change you (some currencies have SO many zeros to keep track of, it gets confusing for a tourist) or sometimes they give you an absurd exchange rate. Honestly, the best way to avoid this is to not exchange money! I always just use ATMs, the best rate and no human to try and scam me. If you do exchange, triple check everything, don't look away while they count, recount in front of them, check exchange rates on XE (app) make sure the bills aren't too rough looking, and just be wary!



66. GETTING A TICKET

When driving a motorbike you may be given a ticket for a real reason or not. This one is hard to avoid but sometimes police officers will say you did something wrong, although you didn't and demand you pay for the ticket right there. It's often not much money (\$10 or less unless you actually did something wrong!) but still annoying. If you know you did nothing wrong, you can have a small amount of cash in your wallet while the rest is hidden and say it's all you have. It's usually enough for them to let you go.



67. THE HELPFUL GUIDE

Who actually turns out to be a money grubber. Never trust someone super friendly and wanting to guide you for seemingly no money... They WILL ask for money and sometimes they will have led you to a place where you're confused, lost, and have no choice but to follow them back. Sometimes they get intimidating and really demand cash. Just avoid them from the get go.



68. ATM MACHINE SKIMMING

A bit more popular than one would hope but luckily it's easily avoidable! Sometimes, individuals rig the ATM machine to read your card when you take it out of the slot. Your card info is now stolen. The best way to avoid it is to use ATMs outside of banks, those are safe. This usually happens at those lonely and sketchy ATMs. If you're forced to use one, check out the slot out for weird contraptions or a rickety extra plastic bit. When you remove your card, wiggle it out so if there's a skimmer it can't read your info since you didn't give it a "clean swipe" out of the slot.



69. MOTHER AND CHILDREN NEED MONEY

This one is dark. There are a few of these scams, the two most popular are "my baby needs formula." They make you think they are legit because they don't ask for money, just for you to go into the store that's conveniently right there, buy formula, and you feel good. The thing is, they go in return it, and take the cash. The next one is even worse. Some "mothers" drug their children/babies so they are quiet while the mom sits on the corner begging for money. Don't support this. Find a proper organization.



70. DON'T GIVE MONEY TO CHILDREN

Although it may pull on your heartstrings when a child comes up to you on the street begging for money or trying to sell you something, you shouldn't give them money. This will encourage their parents to see them as a form of monetary gain instead of sending them to school. If you want to help, look out for local restaurants and programmes that help children instead.



71. TRAVEL AGENCIES

They should overall be avoided. There is almost no reason why you can't book most things online or directly with the company/hotel/bus etc. They often grossly over charge, in the best scenario, or give you fake tickets and confirmations in the worst case scenario. It's not to say they are all bad, just be VERY careful where you choose and if you want to avoid them altogether, which I would, then use Klook for tours and Agoda for hotel bookings. Both specialize in the Asian market and are 100% reliable.



72. SHORT CHANGED

Always check your change, from anyone, anywhere, particularly when you're handing over a big note.

Vietnam, Indonesia, and Laos are some of the worst countries because their currencies involve many zeros—it's very confusing! Take your time, know what you're handing over and count your change. Study the notes for a few minutes when you arrive in a new country.

PLANNING

An aerial photograph of a tropical coastline. On the left, the deep blue ocean meets a sandy beach. Several small, white, rectangular structures are scattered along the shoreline. To the right of the beach, a cluster of buildings with colorful roofs (red, orange, and grey) is nestled among lush green trees. The water near the shore is a lighter, turquoise color, indicating a shallow reef flat or lagoon. The overall scene is vibrant and scenic.

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An aerial photograph of a tropical coastline. The top half shows deep blue ocean water. The bottom half shows a sandy beach, green trees, and some buildings. A large white rectangular box is overlaid on the image, containing text. The text box is positioned on the left side, covering the ocean and beach areas.

73. PLAN AROUND THE WEATHER

Although it may be monsoon season on one side of the country, it doesn't mean that it is on the other as well. When deciding where you are going to travel and when, it is worth doing some research into when you can expect the best weather. You may end up missing the bad weather entirely.

An aerial photograph of a tropical beach. The top half of the image shows deep blue ocean water. Below the water is a white sandy beach. To the right of the beach, there is a line of green trees and some buildings, including one with a red roof. The bottom half of the image shows more greenery and a few parked cars.

74. NOT ALL SEASONS ARE CREATED EQUAL

Seasons are different out here and just because it's about to be rainy season, doesn't mean anything bad. Sometimes, it's good! Things cool down a bit, less tourists, cheaper prices... Don't be afraid to dabble in shoulder season, it can be the best time to visit Southeast Asia.

An aerial photograph of a tropical beach. The top half shows deep blue ocean water with a small white boat. The bottom half shows a sandy beach with green trees, a blue tent, and some parked cars.

75. LAYERS IS KEY

Sometimes it can be hot, and sometimes it can be cold, yeah weird, right? The best way to work around this weather is to wear and pack layers. You won't need anything crazy thick but you could need a light but warm jacket. If you're chilling in the mountains of Banaue or Pai, on an overnight bus that practically has icicles dangling above you, or you attempted to do a sunrise hike at Mount Ijen, you'll need a jacket.

An aerial photograph of a tropical beach. The top half of the image shows deep blue ocean water. Below the water is a white sandy beach with some people and beach chairs. To the right, there are lush green trees and a small building with a red roof. The bottom half of the image shows more greenery and a small body of water.

76. DON'T OVER PLAN

It's definitely good to plan a bit and have a solid idea of where you want to go, but the joy of traveling is seeing where your journey takes you. You never know who you are going to meet and what experiences you will be offered, but if you have already booked all your flights and accommodation, you might miss out on some of what could be the best and most spontaneous parts of your trip.

An aerial photograph of a tropical beach. The top half of the image shows deep blue ocean water. The bottom half shows a sandy beach with green trees and some buildings. A white text box is overlaid on the right side of the image.

77. BE FLEXIBLE

Sometimes things don't always go to plan, and that is something you just have to accept. Go with the flow and enjoy yourself! Also, get it in your head now, not many things are on time around Southeast Asia.



78. KNOW WHAT VISAS ARE REQUIRED

Each country will have its own set of requirements when it comes to visas, such as if you need a photo, what currency you need to pay in and how much it will cost. Staying a while? You may want to get a visa OUTSIDE of the country first as sometimes it's required to do so to get the maximum amount of days without having to leave. Check the requirements for your country of residence and the desired country you want to visit.

An aerial photograph of a tropical coastline. The top half shows a deep blue ocean with a small white boat. The bottom half shows a sandy beach with green trees, a few buildings, and parked cars. A white text box is overlaid on the left side of the image.

79. TRAVEL BY NIGHT

Traveling at night has many benefits. Not only is it likely to be cheaper and quieter, but you'll also save money by not having to pay for an extra night's accommodation somewhere. Some countries have comfortable sleeping trains or busses, so you can get some shut eye on your journey, and save your days for sightseeing.

80. RENT A SCOOTER

Renting a scooter is one of the best ways to see all the sights that this beautiful part of the world has to offer, and allows you to get off the beaten track a little. Just make sure you have your license/International driver license, wear a helmet and feel confident enough to drive it. (Americans can get an international drivers license for only \$20 at AAA, just walk in).

Notes:

- Driving will not be like home it's hectic, and truly, not the safest. Be VERY careful riding around Southeast Asia.
- Don't forget to take pictures and video of your scooter!

81. TALK TO PEOPLE

One of the best ways to make friends and find out about cool new spots is to simply talk to people! Chatting to your roommates in your hostel is one of the best places to start, but other options are on organised day tours, in local bars or even on the bus. Even if you're not alone, branch out from your clique, get advice from others, you could find something really cool!



82. END YOUR TRIP WHERE YOU'RE LIKELY TO SHOP

There is no point starting your journey in a city where you are planning on buying lots of souvenirs and things to take home, you'll just have to carry them around with you. Save all your souvenir buying for the last few days!

An aerial photograph of a tropical coastline. The top half shows deep blue ocean water with a small white boat. The bottom half shows a sandy beach, green trees, and some buildings. A white text box is overlaid on the right side of the image.

83. TALK TO LOCALS

There is no better way to delve into a new culture than to talk to the people that are living it. Most people will be really friendly, and will gladly have a chat with you and give you tips on the best places to eat and visit. The best and least awkward way to do this is to talk to your bartender, the person at the hotel front desk, your waitress (if they are not too busy), and at the bar. Just like home, I guess.



84. DON'T UNDERESTIMATE JET LAG

You may think as soon as you touch down you'll be ready to explore, but remember, you would have flipped about 180 degrees on time, and it could take you 1-5 days to recover from this shift. In fact, expect to feel a little foggy and strange for a good few days after you land, so don't book anything too strenuous in the beginning. If it's any consolation, I always feel worse going from Southeast Asia to the USA, so hopefully your worse jet lag will be after you visit!

An aerial photograph of a tropical coastline. The top half shows deep blue ocean water with a small white boat. The bottom half shows a sandy beach, green trees, and some buildings. A white rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing text.

85. TRY NEW THINGS

Traveling is the time in your life where you are almost expected to try new things and step out of your comfort zone. Sure, some things will make you a little nervous, but looking back you will be so thankful you did so many amazing things.



86. JUST DON'T BE AN *SS OR RECKLESS

I like to call this my "travel bubble theory." People go on vacation, they think they're invincible, get hurt or worse. They don't think they can get hurt on vacation but hey, you can! So have fun but don't be disrespectful or irresponsible.

An aerial photograph of a tropical beach. The top half shows deep blue ocean water with some coral reefs visible. The bottom half shows a sandy beach with green trees and some buildings. A white text box is overlaid on the right side of the image.

87. AVOID TEMPLE BURNOUT

There are so many stunning temples across the whole of Southeast Asia, there is no way you are going to be able to see them all. Temple burnout happens when you see so many that they all start to seem the same, and you don't want to see anymore. This is such a shame, especially as they are SO many good ones. Try picking out a few in each destination that you really want to see, and plan other activities around them.

An aerial photograph of a tropical beach. The top half of the image shows deep blue ocean water transitioning into a shallow, turquoise lagoon. A small white boat is visible in the upper right. The bottom half shows a sandy beach with several people, a small blue tent, and a line of lush green trees. Behind the trees, there are some buildings and parked cars, including a red one. The overall scene is vibrant and idyllic.

88. HIT THE BEACH

With so much to see and do, taking some time to relax on the beach may end up taking a bit of a backseat. The beaches in this part of earth are some of the finest in the world, with the clear and warm tropical waters and vibrant marine life. Make sure you spare a few days to simply kick back and enjoy them.

An aerial photograph of a tropical beach. The top half of the image shows deep blue ocean water. Below the water is a white sandy beach. To the right of the beach is a line of lush green trees and vegetation. In the bottom right corner, there are some small buildings and parked cars. The text is overlaid on a white rectangular background in the center-left of the image.

89. SPLASH OUT ON VIP BUSES

Unless you are on a strict budget, it is sometimes worth splashing out on a VIP bus as they not only include air conditioning (oh, fancy!), but also on-board toilets, sometimes a snack, and maybe even fancy lights and plush seats.

An aerial photograph of a tropical coastline. The top half shows deep blue ocean water with a small white boat on the right. The bottom half shows a sandy beach, green trees, and some buildings. A large white rectangle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing text.

90. GET THE MASSAGE

Yes, it's cheap and amazing, treat yo' self. Get all the massages in this region, you'll never get one for this price ever again!

An aerial photograph of a tropical beach. The top half of the image shows deep blue ocean water. Below the water is a white sandy beach with some people and umbrellas. Further down is a dense line of green trees and foliage. In the bottom right corner, there are some small buildings and parked cars. The text is overlaid on a white rectangular background in the center-left of the image.

91. BOOK YOUR FIRST NIGHT

Many backpackers prefer the 'winging it' approach and simply book their accommodation as they go along. That is completely fine to do, but just at least make sure you have your first night booked, there is nothing worse than turning up in a new country, not having anywhere to stay, and lugging your stuff even more all around town trying to find a spot. It will get old very quickly.

An aerial photograph of a tropical beach. The top half of the image shows deep blue ocean water. Below the water is a white sandy beach. To the right of the beach, there is a line of green trees and some small buildings with colorful roofs. The bottom half of the image shows more greenery and a few parked cars.

92. HOW TO BOOK TOURS

Klook is well known in Asia for being a reliable tour operator. They specialize in Asia, so search here for any specific tours you may want. Like mentioned, be aware if you sign up with on the ground tours, do some research. Or just book online with Klook and check out reviews there and get your tour sorted so you can enjoy being in the moment.

An aerial photograph of a tropical beach. The top half of the image shows deep blue ocean water. Below the water is a white sandy beach. To the right of the beach, there is a line of green trees and some buildings, including one with a red roof. The bottom half of the image is mostly white, where the text is located.

93. GET PASSPORT PHOTOS

You'll need them crossing borders and applying for visa extensions. Get them before you come and you won't need to worry about it while on the ground. Although it is decently easy in the bigger cities to find a place to get them too if you forget.

94. JOIN FACEBOOK GROUPS

Facebook has everything nowadays and if you're looking for a travel partner, advice on something you can't find the answer to, or whether or not the tour you're looking at is worth it not... Facebook groups are gold. There are TONS of Southeast Asia specific groups, just do a quick search for the specific country or the region as a whole and start joining them. Just be sure to not be "that person" who doesn't search the group for the answer first or the person who obviously didn't Google a damn thing before asking the question. People will roast you for it.

An aerial photograph of a tropical beach. The top half of the image shows deep blue ocean water. Below the water is a white sandy beach. To the right of the beach, there is a line of green trees and some buildings, including one with a red roof. The bottom half of the image is mostly obscured by a white text box.

95. ONWARD TRAVEL

Be aware of the requirements for entering a country, as some will require you to have an outward flight already booked. In other words, they want to see your flight out of their country as “proof” you don’t intend to stay.

96. BOOKING TRANSPORT

It's actually really easy to book transport in most countries in Southeast Asia. However, there are some things to be aware of. DON'T buy bus tickets and such from random tour companies and in heavily tourist area, at worst, it could be fake, at best, you paid more for a crappier ride. Sometimes the best thing to do is to go to the bus station yourself and just buy it there. You're guaranteed to get the best price and a real ticket. If you don't want to waste time doing this though, using 12go.asia is best way to get real tickets! Purchase it online and forget about it until it's time to go.

A photograph of an ancient stone temple, likely in Cambodia, with two monks in orange robes walking towards the entrance. The temple features intricate carvings and a large, weathered stone structure. The scene is set against a backdrop of lush green trees and a clear blue sky. A blue rectangular overlay is positioned on the left side of the image, containing the word "OTHER" in white capital letters.

OTHER

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The background of the entire page is a photograph of ancient stone ruins, likely Mayan or Aztec, with intricate carvings and statues. The ruins are partially obscured by lush green trees and a clear blue sky with some light clouds. The foreground shows a stone-paved path.

97. CARRY TOILET PAPER

Toilet paper is like gold, hard to find in the places you need them most and very precious when it is found! Make sure you have some with you wherever you go, as it will certainly come in handy. You will find them often on restaurant tables but never in the toilet... go figure!



98. DON'T FLUSH THE TOILET PAPER

In Southeast Asia, the toilet paper that you use should not be thrown down the drain. The drainage system is simply not built for it, and you are likely to leave a nasty surprise for the person that uses it after you. There are bins to throw it in.

The background of the entire page is a photograph of ancient stone ruins, likely Mayan or Aztec, with intricate carvings and statues. The ruins are partially obscured by lush green trees and foliage. The sky is a clear, bright blue. The overall scene is a mix of natural and man-made elements, suggesting a tropical or subtropical environment.

99. EXPECT TO SQUAT!

In most public toilets you'll only ever find squat toilets, and even in some of the tourist attractions or a restaurant, so you better get used to using them. You'll have some sexy thigh and butt muscles after your trip!



100. BUM GUN

In fact, the whole toilet system may be strange, as instead of toilet paper you'll find a bum gun, and instead of a chain flush there may just be a bucket of water next to the toilet! The bum gun is a small water hose spray gun that you're supposed to aim you know where. This cleans pretty well! But you'll usually need to provide your own toilet paper (if we can only merge these two ways, it would be perfect!) The water bucket flush system is easy, just dump water in the toilet until it "manually" flushes.



101. CARRY HAND SANITIZER

Like toilet paper, soap may be hard to come by, so it can be handy to carry a small hand sanitiser around with you to use before you eat or after you have used the bathroom or public transport.

The background of the entire page is a photograph of ancient stone ruins, possibly Mayan or Aztec, with intricate carvings and statues. The ruins are partially covered by lush green trees and foliage. The sky is a clear, bright blue with some light clouds. The overall scene is a tropical or subtropical environment.

102. EXPECT A SELFIE WITH THE LOCALS

In the more remote parts of some countries, the locals don't tend to see too many tourists, so don't be surprised if some people ask for a selfie, or they may even start taking photos of you like you are a celeb!

The background of the entire page is a photograph of ancient stone ruins, likely Mayan or Aztec, with intricate carvings and statues. The ruins are partially obscured by lush green trees and a clear blue sky with some light clouds. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

103. USE A TUK TUK BUT NOT OFTEN

Sure, a tuk tuk may not be the cheapest way to get from A to B, but it is such a huge part of Asian culture, you can't visit the country without riding in one! Not only that, but they are great fun, and tend to always be around. But really, keep it to a minimum because they are often more expensive than a taxi, public transport, or your own two feet plus they are "open" vehicles which means dust, dirt, fumes, and smog will be all up in your face the entire ride.



104. TEMPLE ATTIRE

At the entrance to some of the more touristy temples and Wats, there may be a small stall offering shawls for you to wear over your shoulders and around you waist. If you need to borrow one of these garments, make sure you have some spare change with you as a donation and a thank you.

The background of the slide features a photograph of ancient stone ruins, possibly Mayan or Aztec, with intricate carvings and statues. The ruins are partially obscured by lush green trees and foliage. The sky is a clear, vibrant blue with a few wispy clouds. The overall scene is bright and sunny, suggesting a tropical or subtropical environment.

105. NEW CULTURES

Every culture is different, meaning each will have things that they may find rude and disrespectful. For example, in Thailand it is disrespectful to point your feet at people or touch people on the head. Make sure you are aware of these things before entering a country so you don't offend anyone.

The background of the entire page is a photograph of ancient stone ruins, likely in Southeast Asia, with lush green trees and a clear blue sky. The ruins are made of weathered stone blocks and feature carvings of figures. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

106. YOU'LL BE FACING POVERTY

Although Southeast Asia has seen a massive growth in tourism over the past few years, it is still very much part of the developing world, plus has seen its fair share of natural disasters. Be prepared to see some poverty while you travel, especially in the more rural areas. Remember to carry some compassion with you.



107. THE PLASTIC PROBLEM

Unfortunately, most of Southeast Asia is obsessed with plastic. You'll purchase a plastic water bottle from 711, and they will then place the bottle in a plastic bag, AND stick in a straw or two with it. It's crazy, get used to declining bags, bring your own bag to use, reuse old plastic bags and perhaps even join a clean up! Trash Hero is the area's, well... trash heros! They are a great organization helping clean up all around the region. Reduce your use of plastic here and help clean up if you can!

The background of the entire page is a photograph of ancient stone ruins, likely Mayan or Aztec, with intricate carvings and statues. The ruins are partially obscured by lush green trees and a clear blue sky with some light clouds. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

108. LOSING FACE

This is an important tip to keep in mind at all times. It's very important you never embarrass, disrespect, or cause any comotion with locals. In this region of the world there's something called "losing face" and if you cause someone to lose it (AKA make them appear weak or not worthy of respect), you could be in deep trouble as this is a major no no. Never get loud or rude when you don't get your way, it's not the way to solve problems. I suggest reading a bit more about it!

The background of the page is a photograph of ancient stone ruins, likely Mayan or Aztec, with intricate carvings and statues. The ruins are partially covered by lush green trees and foliage. The sky is a clear, bright blue with some light clouds. The overall scene is bright and sunny, suggesting a warm, humid environment.

109. IT'S HUMID

Be prepared to get sweaty! Southeast Asia can be seriously humid at certain times throughout the year, and when doing strenuous activities you can get really overheated. Try to stay out of direct sunlight during the hottest part of the day if possible. Also, pack light cotton clothing, quick-dry items and those that can easily be washed.



110. OFFLINE MAP

Maps.Me, download this app - This is an offline map which is handy to have. You can follow your taxis, find trails easier, and simply have access to a map without wifi. Just remember to download it while on wifi!

The background of the entire page is a photograph of ancient stone ruins, possibly Mayan or Aztec, with intricate carvings and statues. The ruins are partially obscured by lush green trees and a clear blue sky with some light clouds. The foreground shows a stone-paved path.

111. BRING A HARD DRIVE

The best way to remember the places you have been and the adventures you have had are through photographs. With this in mind, it would be smart to bring a thumb drive or a hard drive so you can save and offload your devices. Depending on your type of camera, the photo quality, and how long you'll be away and taking pics a thumb drive could work but a real hard drive may be needed for extra space and durability.



112. HAVE AN AMAZING TIME!

Southeast Asia is a magical region and I wish you the best time here. I have more resources in this book and helpful emails to come so you can make the most of your visit.



MORE RESOURCES

WhereintheWorldisNina.com

YOUR SOUTHEAST ASIA RESOURCES:

Southeast Asia Packing List

Itinerary & Guide to Thailand

Itinerary & Guide to Laos

Itinerary & Guide to Indonesia

Itinerary & Guide to Cambodia

Itinerary & Guide to the Philippines

Itinerary & Guide to Malaysia

Itineraries: Vietnam | Singapore

Everything Else Southeast Asia

WhereintheWorldisNina.com

OTHER HELPFUL LINKS

- Most trusted tours: [Klook](#)
- Most popular hotel booking sites:
[Hostel World](#) | [Agoda](#) | [Booking](#)
Or [HotelsCombined](#) to compare them all
- How much does each country cost to travel? [Southeast Asia Budget Breakdown](#)
- Can I book transportation online? Yes — [12go.asia](#)
- Do you have an Airbnb discount code? [Yes! For new users, get a discount here.](#)
- Can I work/work in exchange in Southeast Asia?
Depends. Read more here:

[6 Ways to Travel for Free](#)
[Teaching English in Thailand](#)
[The Best Countries To Teach English In](#)
[How to Teach Online and Travel Anywhere](#)
[Start Freelancing, Work Online, and Travel](#)