

IAT 007 // Spring 2018

# east



Travel inspiration from **InsideAsia Tours**  
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## *Alternative* **CHERRY BLOSSOM** **SEE JAPAN IN BLOOM**

EXCLUSIVE  
INTERVIEW WITH  
**DAVID BADDIEL**  
ON **PAGE 24**

**Family Cambodia** ● **Ancient Bagan** ● **Japan Photography**



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## Welcome to *East*

What are your travel plans for 2018? Whether you want to join a group tour, travel solo, with family, or as a couple you'll find this edition of *East* packed full of inspiration.

Organising special trips is a real privilege and it's great to read about how Megan and her husband fell in love with Vietnam during their honeymoon; we agree that you can't beat Hoi An for a romantic atmosphere and great food, as well as a bit of pampering.

It was a pleasure to arrange David Baddiel's family holiday this summer. If you are thinking of taking your tribe to Japan then have a read of his tips and trip highlights including river swims, hot spring baths and Tokyo's Robot Restaurant.

Two of our tour leaders have made contributions to this edition with Mark Fujishige extolling the virtues of the group experience, and David Lovejoy reporting back from Burma. The tour leaders really do go to extraordinary efforts for their groups - check out the Ferris wheel story.

We like to do things a bit differently at IAT; whether it is finding alternative cherry blossom spots on the Izu Peninsula in Japan, a different way to see the temples of Bagan in Burma or taking the kids to the Phare Circus in Cambodia. It's all about creating space and time for you to enjoy your holiday and get beneath the surface of the country.

The best bit of advice we've heard this month? That would be from our happy honeymooners: 'just go!' Happy travels and a Happy New Year.



Alastair Donnelly



Simon King

## JUST BACK



**Claire Allison**

As well as stays in Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka and Nagoya, Claire

got firmly off the beaten track on the beautiful island of Shikoku.

**Memorable moment:** Sinking into a secluded *onsen* (hot spring bath) surrounded by unspoilt views of the Iya Valley.



**Lawrence Pryer**

Lawrence travelled from Sapa in Vietnam and down the coast to Ho Chi

Minh City before hopping across the border to Cambodia.

**Memorable moment:** While walking through the beautiful Ta Giang Phinh Valley in Sapa, I saw rural life and locals harvesting rice.



**Elisa Ferroni**

Elisa visited the cities of Yangon and Mandalay, the ancient temples of

Bagan, and little-visited Morywa, as well as getting out into nature at Inle Lake, and mountainous Kalaw.

**Memorable moment:** Feeding a retired elephant in Kalaw, and biking around Bagan was special, but a cheeky monkey jumping on my head in Po Win Taung was particularly memorable!



**Madeleine Bromige**

Madeleine's trip started up in the mountainous area of Yamagata on

Honshu Island, before flying down to Japan's smallest island, Shikoku.

**Memorable moment:** So hard to pick! I loved hiking Mount Haguro with the yamabushi mountain priests, and making tempura at a homestay in Shikoku's Iya Valley.



# INSIDESCOOP

## GO IT ALONE ON JAPAN SOLO



### DID YOU KNOW?

2019 tour dates for Japan, Indochina and Burma have just been released!  
[bit.ly/InsideAsiaTours](http://bit.ly/InsideAsiaTours)

### JAPAN

Set the pace and move to the beat of your own drum on our brand new Self-Guided Adventure, Japan Solo. We've combined the liberation of travelling independently, with the opportunity to meet new people – you certainly won't be lonely. While you can contemplate in a Zen

garden, soak up the atmosphere amidst the skyscrapers in Tokyo, and eat your dinner in peace (solo dining is a big thing in Japan), you will also have plenty of group experiences to dip into. Try swishing a *katana* (samurai sword) in Kyoto, get creative with woodblock printmaking

in the capital, and document your experiences with a photography lesson in buzzy Osaka.

**DO IT:** *Japan Solo*, from £2,040 for 11 nights (exc. intl. flights). Call one of our experts on 0117 244 3464 or visit [bit.ly/East-Japan-Solo](http://bit.ly/East-Japan-Solo) to find out more.

### JAPAN

## YAYOI KUSAMA MUSEUM COMES TO TOKYO

The vibrant swirls of colour, psychedelic musings and mind-bending polka dots of eminent Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama can now be seen at a permanent location in Tokyo. The new five-storey museum in Shinjuku has exhibition spaces with silkscreens, huge colourful canvases, and documents that give an insight into the 88-year-old's illustrious

career. Perhaps most exciting of all is a floor dedicated to her immersive, mirrored 'infinity rooms'.

**DO IT:** *The Yayoi Kusama Museum*, 107 Benteicho Shinjuku-ku Tokyo 162-0851. Tickets must be purchased at least two months in advance:  
[www.yayoikusamamuseum.jp](http://www.yayoikusamamuseum.jp)



### New discovery at Angkor Wat

A 12th century statue has been unearthed by archaeologists in Angkor Wat. The impressive two-metre figure is believed to have been a guardian at the entrance of a hospital.





## LAOS

## LAP OF LUXURY IN LAOS

Explore some of Laos' most remote regions, meet local communities and see some very beautiful architecture on this brand new luxury Fully Tailored Journey. Take a sunset cruise on the Mekong Delta, weave through dramatic mountainous scenery in Vang Vieng, and hike in the rolling hills of Muang La. Bring the days' adventures to a close with some very special places to lay

your head: an elegant 1930s colonial mansion, a mountainous hideout with a thermal spa, and a governor's residence complete with botanical gardens.

**DO IT:** See a stylish side of Laos on our *Luxurious Laos Fully Tailored Journey*, from £3,440 for 11 nights (exc. intl. flights). Call one of our Laos experts on 0117 244 3464 to find out more.



## VIETNAM

Insider Experience:  
Trace Vietnam's history through art

From colonial-era paintings to propaganda posters, art gives a fascinating insight into Vietnam's history. On our brand new Insider Experience, you'll meet up with a Hanoi resident and travel through time on a guided tour

around contemporary galleries, classic museums and art cafés.

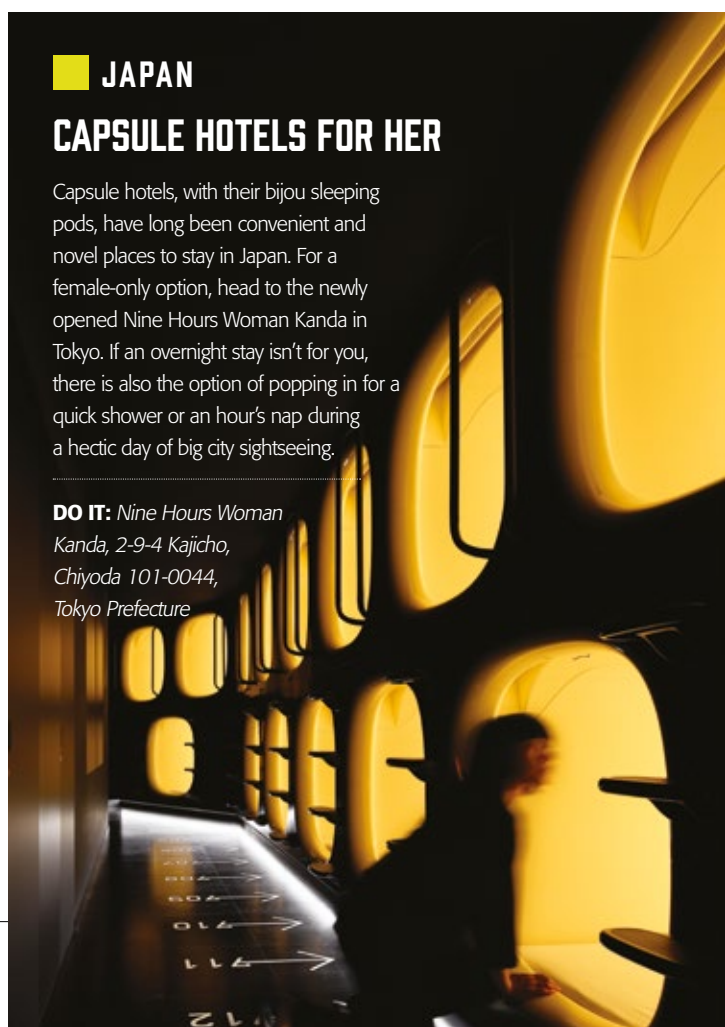
**DO IT:** Call one of our Vietnam experts on 0117 244 3464 to find out more.

## JAPAN

## CAPSULE HOTELS FOR HER

Capsule hotels, with their bijou sleeping pods, have long been convenient and novel places to stay in Japan. For a female-only option, head to the newly opened Nine Hours Woman Kanda in Tokyo. If an overnight stay isn't for you, there is also the option of popping in for a quick shower or an hour's nap during a hectic day of big city sightseeing.

**DO IT:** *Nine Hours Woman Kanda*, 2-9-4 Kajicho, Chiyoda 101-0044, Tokyo Prefecture





## VIETNAM

### NEW TAKE ON HOUSE PLANTS IN HO CHI MINH CITY

Creative architects have come up with a novel way of bringing nature to inner-city houses in Ho Chi Minh City. The Stacked Planter House is designed to encourage trees to grow through the ceilings, spreading foliage to every floor.



## BURMA

### YANGON'S FIRST CAT CAFÉ

After flourishing in Japan, cat cafés with plush cushions and adventure play-pens have been popping up to the cheer of cat-lovers internationally. You can now sip a frothy coffee while making a feline friend in Yangon at the new Catpuchino Café. Visitors need to

book a slot in advance so the kitties don't get cuddled-out.

**DO IT:** Book in advance – Catpuchino Café, No.81 Pan Hlaing Road, San Chaung Township, Yangon.



## JAPAN

### Wes Anderson goes barking for Japan



Wes Anderson, known for his fantastical film design, is setting his next release, *Isle of Dogs* in Japan. This star-studded animation is actually about a dystopian future, so unlikely to provide holiday inspiration...

**DO IT:** *Isle of Dogs* will be hitting UK cinema screens in April 2018.

## JAPAN

### Disappearing act for Tokyo train

An 'invisible' train is set to hit Tokyo's rails in 2018. In a bid to help transport co-exist with the scenery, top architect Kazuyo Sejima has designed a train with reflective materials to camouflage it as it travels from the mountainous area of Chichibu to the capital.



### Forget hygge, use *ikigai* for a happy life

The Japanese concept of *ikigai* could overtake Scandinavian hygge as the next buzzword in all things self-fulfilment. *Ikigai* is loosely translated as 'a reason for being', or 'a reason to get up in the morning', and finding one's own *ikigai* is the recipe for a long and happy life. Count us in.

**DO IT:** *The Little Book of Ikigai* is published by Quercus and available at all good bookshops.



## BURMA

### Lost Tea Company

*Lahpet*, Burma's popular tea leaf salad, has now made its way to the UK. The Lost Tea Company has imported samples all the way from the hills of Shan State, so you can now get a taste of Burma at home.

**DO IT:** Buy your tea leaf salad kit at [www.lostteacompany.com](http://www.lostteacompany.com)



## JAPAN

# Meditate with mountain priests

## DID YOU KNOW?

We release two exclusive blogs about Japan every week. Subscribe to make sure you never miss a post again!  
[bit.ly/InsideJapanBlog](http://bit.ly/InsideJapanBlog)



Head to the hallowed Three Mountains of Dewa for mindful hiking with the yamabushi mountain priests. Wrap up in a white cotton outfit (complete with handy bell), wield your hiking stick, and

take the gentle walk up Mount Haguro past enormous cedars, numerous shrines and flowing waterfalls. Simple temple lodgings and vegetarian fare await at the top. Wake up to

beautiful views and a guided morning meditation session.

**DO IT:** Call our Japan experts on 0117 244 3463 to find out more.

## CAMBODIA

## Camping with a conscience



The Botum Sakor National Park in Cambodia's Cardamom Mountains has a new series of safari-style tents. With chunky wooden beds, smart interiors and private bathrooms, this isn't your average roll-out mat and bivvy bag affair. Best of all, the camp promotes sustainable tourism and protects the area from habitat destruction.

**DO IT:** Call one of our Cambodia experts on 0117 244 3464 to find out more.

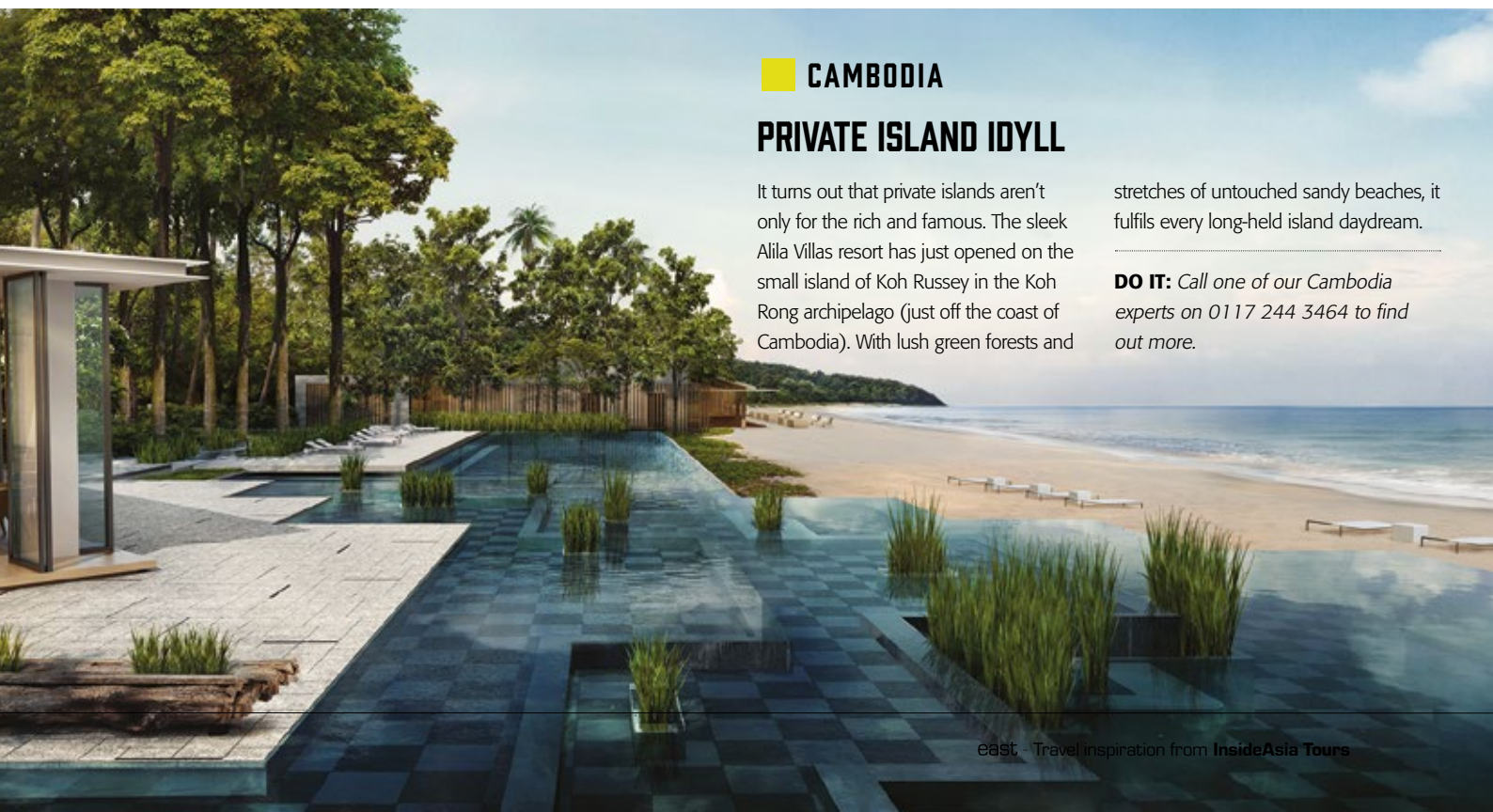
## CAMBODIA

## PRIVATE ISLAND IDYLL

It turns out that private islands aren't only for the rich and famous. The sleek Alila Villas resort has just opened on the small island of Koh Russey in the Koh Rong archipelago (just off the coast of Cambodia). With lush green forests and

stretches of untouched sandy beaches, it fulfils every long-held island daydream.

**DO IT:** Call one of our Cambodia experts on 0117 244 3464 to find out more.





WORDS BY **CHRIS GREENER**



# TAKING THE KIDS TO **CAMBODIA**

Having lived in Cambodia with his family, Chris Greener  
has seen first-hand how kids love the country





Two things spring to mind when people think of Cambodia: the extraordinary feat of ancient engineering that is Angkor Wat, and the devastatingly cruel period of the Khmer Rouge. Can a country known for temples and sites that dredge up memories of genocide really provide a fun family holiday?

**C**lambering through monkey-clad jungle ruins, we see enormous vines swallow ancient temples, and giant stone faces emerge through dense foliage, smiling serenely above the overgrown scene. My eldest traces ancient carvings before perching on a ledge at the base of a huge stone elephant, pausing to look over this bygone estate. I step into a hollow between some giant plaited roots with my awestruck youngest, her eyes widening as she looks up at branches that touch the sky. We are explorers discovering a long lost kingdom for the first time.

This is one of Cambodia's most famous sites, the much photographed tangled temple, Ta Prohm. Having crafted a scavenger hunt for my kids - complete with clues, riddles and an illustrated map - they busily weave around the site, holding important scraps of paper as they try to uncover the enigmas of this once great civilisation.

It isn't just us searching for secrets in every nook and cranny though; hordes of tourists visit these temples every day. But we've been let into a secret of a different kind. Apparently there's somewhere equally enchanting but nearly deserted; Koh Ker, a 10th century former capital of the Khmer Empire. A two-hour drive takes us out of Siem Reap to our camp in the heart of the jungle, just outside this ancient site. Waking early the next



**"We are explorers discovering a  
lost kingdom for the first time"**







morning, we peer out of our canvas home to see the first light find its way through clusters of leaves overhead, the only sound coming from birds bouncing from tree to tree. Unlike Angkor Wat and Ta Prohm, we have this ancient city to ourselves – we are the stars of our own Indiana Jones movie! Another day of adventure ensues. Who knew that kids could like temples?

### Making Cambodia home

It didn't take us long to find our feet after moving to Phnom Penh – largely thanks to the kind welcome from the community. 'Friendly locals' has become a tired trope in travel literature, seemingly applied anywhere, but Cambodia actually topped Rough Guide's 'friendliest countries in the world' list and I can certainly vouch for it. They embraced us as neighbours from our very first week.

Making our first hasty steps into the light, my wife and I were bleary-eyed from hours indoors unpacking our worldly

possessions. Our new life in Cambodia with our first child was just beginning; we were yet to make our first foray into the neighbourhood, but an empty fridge and a restless baby meant it was time to find food.

Delicious wafts escaped from a local restaurant, and we had barely stepped inside when my family and I were enthusiastically whisked through. A waitress came over to our table, beaming from ear to ear at my small child who was soon elevated to the highest echelons of celebrity. Before I knew it, he was good-naturedly kidnapped and taken on an impromptu tour of the restaurant. We were left standing, not quite sure what to make of someone stealing our child.

Chefs, waitresses and managers alike nattered behind the scenes, and just as we wondered if he was ever to return, he was carried back towards us with a happy chortle and a fistful of treats; squishy banana and the juiciest mango. From then on, every time we went for a

meal - or anywhere, really - the hospitality of the Khmer people (and their absolute love of all children) saw my kids making friends with just about everyone. We've been lucky enough to have family holidays all over the world, but the Cambodian's generosity of spirit is second to none.

### Getting out of the city

A national holiday gave us the opportunity to swap the busy capital for the countryside with a trip to the sleepy town of Battambang. Going cross-country with kids can be arduous, and I have plenty of friends that who opt for the 'flop and drop' philosophy on holiday, but there's no reason to stay still in Cambodia. The roads are developed, and with private cars and air-conditioned coaches we found getting around stress-free. Battambang is so laidback it's horizontal, and with little traffic and well-preserved French colonial architecture a walking tour is a must. But nicknamed the 'rice bowl' of Cambodia, we wanted



to see beyond the city's parameters.

A leisurely bike ride took us on a flat path flanked by green rice paddies on each side and shaded by intermittent thickets of trees. Workers in the fields glanced up, smiling at us with toothy grins, and as we passed through villages, curious families appeared for friendly chats as kids circled around their legs making shy conversation. Everyone speaks a high level of English in Cambodia, from market-sellers and tuk tuk drivers, to hotel staff and local guides, but it's not always necessary; my kids are soon running around with the local children - it seems that playing transcends language barriers.

Ambling on to a food market, we



dance routines. The fearless juggled flaming torches, and as each flare

snorkel and dive, or trek in pristine jungle... but we came to relax. Situated on the Gulf of Thailand, the sea is blissfully warm, but it's also shallow as far as the eye can see so the kids paddled safely as the waves gently lapped the shore. While they ambled around on the sand, I took to a hammock strung between two palm trees, book in hand. When we yearned for a bit of adventure, we sought out a beachfront café for a lunch of fresh seafood before resuming a lazy afternoon in the hammock.

### Coming home

Now back in the UK, there are many things we miss – primarily the sunshine on those

## "The hospitality of the Khmer people (and their absolute love of all children) saw my kids making friends with just about everyone"

were presented with some unique entertainment: fish squirmed in buckets; chickens clucked at our feet; people perched on little red stools above pallets of exotic produce, or sat cross-legged on the floor to weave unruly strands of rattan into baskets. I was fascinated, but all of this just happened to be at my kids' height. They were at the heart of the action.

The only thing missing was a delicacy we'd spotted in Phnom Penh; amidst the colour and hubbub of a market there, we spied creepy-crawlies as you've never seen them – fried tarantulas piled high on round silver plates. They are definitely an acquired taste, but my son gave it a go as a baby. Who says kids are fussy eaters?

### Unexpected evening entertainment

We earmarked the evening for the Phare Circus show; it seemed to be a thing of legend but I had no idea what to expect. Would there be clowns? High wires maybe? Please, no animals. We took our seats in the big top.

The lights went up, live music began and a group of young performers entertained the crowd with a whirlwind of acrobatic mastery. They bounced around the stage doing backflips, handstands and cartwheels, as well as performing traditional (and perfectly choreographed)

cascaded through the air, every avid face in the audience was illuminated.

Not only was it hands-down the most amazing, and unexpected, show that I have ever seen, it's also all in aid of a good cause. I found out that the organisation is a social enterprise – each of the performers are from disadvantaged backgrounds, and any profits are used to train them and other young people. As the show came to an end we felt a collective pang of sadness, but it certainly wasn't the last time we saw one of their shows.

### Going south to the seaside

Cambodia's beautiful south coast is only a few hours from Phnom Penh, so at weekends we would go in search of the sea (and relaxation), packing a bucket and spade to spend disconnected days on one of its pristine beaches - a world away from our home in the capital. We would often stay in Sihanoukville, a lively coastal city with plenty of resorts that remains relatively under the radar in comparison to the coasts of neighbouring countries Thailand and Vietnam.

As lovely as the quieter beaches are here though, nothing compares with Koh Rong Samloem. This island is only a 45-minute boat journey from the mainland and has a coastline of empty white stretches of sand. You can kayak,

beaches, and a community who treated our kids as their own. We travelled cross-country, tried new (often unusual) food and made more friends than we could have imagined. But our kids were too young to try everything: we didn't kayak through the submerged forests and floating villages of Tonlé Sap Lake, go horse-riding through rural countryside, or stand-up paddleboard along the winding Preaek Teuk Chhu River. They were too young to track gibbons and bathe with elephants in Monduliri, soar through the Angkor Park jungle canopy on zip-lines, whizz along tributaries and waterways in Prek Toal, or zip along local roads and the countryside on the back of a Vespa. Even with everything we did in three years, we could do so much more. All the more reason to go back for a holiday – I'm not sure that any other country will ever come close.



*Chris is Senior Southeast Asia Product Executive in our Bristol office.*



**DO IT:** Take the brood to Cambodia on our Family Cambodia Fully Tailored Journey, from £1,400pp for 12 nights (exc. intl. flights). Call our Cambodia experts on 0117 244 3464 or visit [bit.ly/East-Family-Cambodia](http://bit.ly/East-Family-Cambodia) to find out more.





Man meets nature  
Tangled trees at Ta Prohm



[ FAMILY TRAVEL ]



Beside the seaside  
Beach days in Koh Rong Samloem







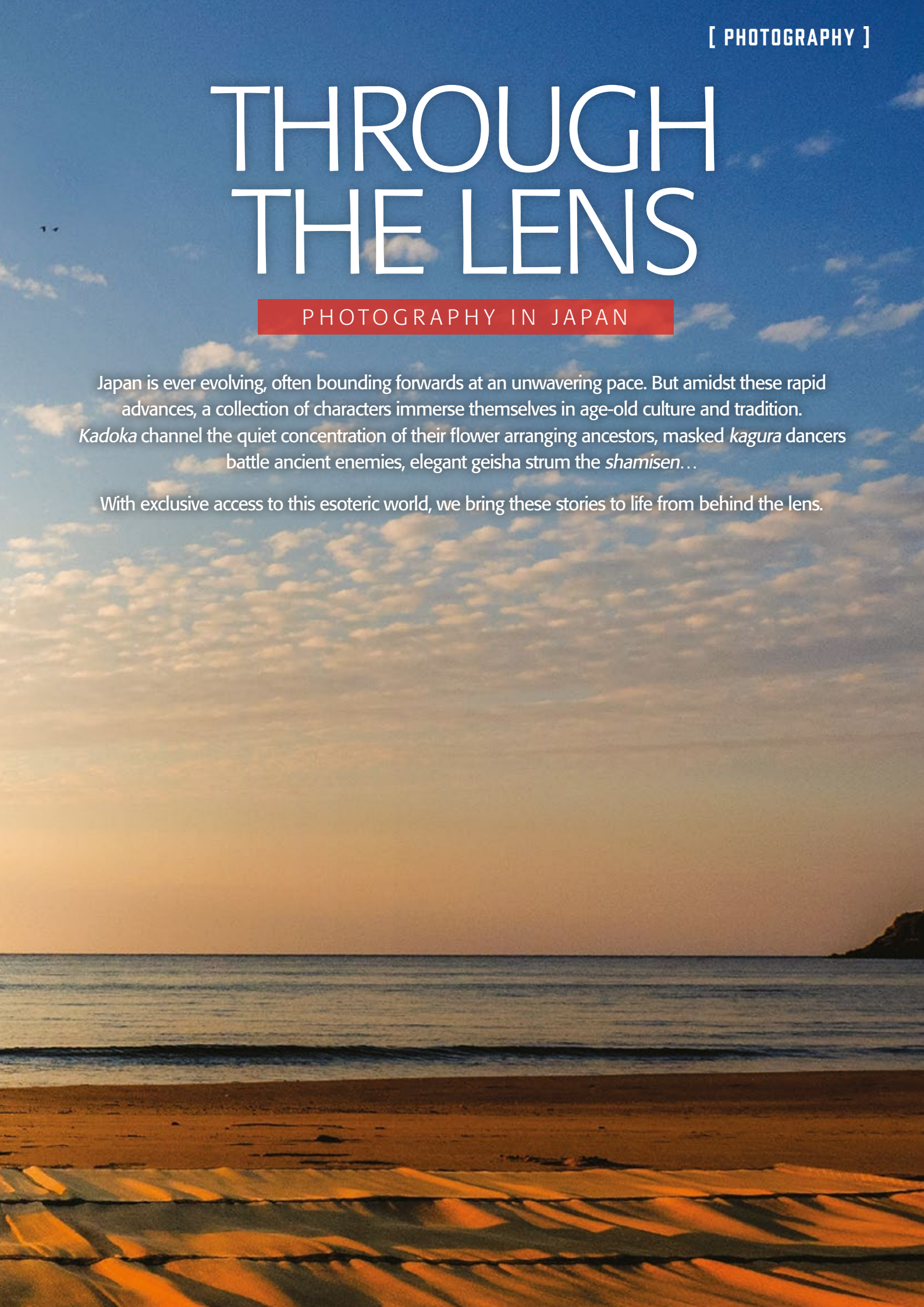


# THROUGH THE LENS

PHOTOGRAPHY IN JAPAN

Japan is ever evolving, often bounding forwards at an unwavering pace. But amidst these rapid advances, a collection of characters immerse themselves in age-old culture and tradition. *Kadoka* channel the quiet concentration of their flower arranging ancestors, masked *kagura* dancers battle ancient enemies, elegant geisha strum the *shamisen*...

With exclusive access to this esoteric world, we bring these stories to life from behind the lens.







#### **LANTERN FESTIVAL,** Norman Blaikie

Our visit to Matsue coincided with the annual 'Water lantern festival'. Beside one of these displays was an illuminated wall where I noticed two women with an umbrella; we asked if they would mind us taking their picture and they were happy to oblige. It was the last night of the festival and within a few minutes the lanterns were being packed up.



#### **OLD HANDS,** Gaynor Robson

Joge is a fascinating village northeast of Hiroshima, dating back to the Edo period. The faces of this delightful, and very welcoming old couple were filled with character and I knew they had been through a lot together over the years. When he slipped his weathered hand in hers and she gave it a comforting little squeeze I knew that was the photo I really wanted. I quickly reframed and pressed the button.



#### **LUNCHTIME IN OSAKA,** Norman Blaikie

Osaka was our last destination and much of the time was spent wandering around interesting places in the city. A number of cafés in the covered laneways were open; these are clearly where locals can eat cheaply, and were very inviting. I was fortunate that the cook happened to look up at the right moment - his engagement makes the image.



#### **MARUYAMA GARDEN,** Jim Weatherill



#### **INDEPENDENT THINKER,** Gaynor Robson

As we arrived at the steps of the Heian Jingu Shrine in Kyoto, the obligatory school excursion photo was in progress. All of the students were obediently lined up in their neat uniforms, shiny shoes and dark socks. Somehow, all I could see was the girl in the middle of the front row wearing white socks! Was she a privileged senior student, an independent thinker, a rebel?

#### **PREVIOUS SPREAD: KAGURA DANCER,** Jim Weatherill **RIGHT: KIMONO AND LEAF,** Norman Blaikie









**GENBEI YAMAGUCHI: FAMOUS KIMONO AND OBI MAKER, Norman Blaikie**

While in Kyoto we visited the studio of Japan's leading kimono and obi maker and were able to photograph him with some of his prize-winning creations. Genbei-san descends from a long line of samurai and, even in his advancing years, undertakes dangerous activities to experience his physical limits. He can present with a stern expression but also has a great sense of humour and a warm personality. He was a very generous host.



**STREET PHOTOGRAPHY, Jim Weatherill**

**DO IT:** For more information about photography tours, contact our Japan travel experts on 0117 244 3463.



**GATEWAYS TO HEAVEN, Norman Blaikie**

An early morning visit to the Fushimi Inari shrine allowed us to photograph the famous red gates before the crowds arrived.





# TOP 4 REASONS: To go on a small group tour

Mark Fujishige is based in Gifu Prefecture but leads tours across the length and breadth of Japan

Group tours = travelling with training wheels? If your passport is positively overflowing with stamps, you might think that a group tour with a bunch of strangers is just that. Before I became a tour leader, I was guilty of feeling exactly the same. I hadn't ever been, or even considered going, on a group tour. It can seem a bit risky to take a well-earned and long-awaited holiday with a group of strangers. But on my first group tour, it didn't take long for me to realise that it is one of the most fulfilling, and downright fun, ways to travel. "Why?" I hear you ask sceptically. Let me count the ways.

## 1 THE TOUR LEADER

I know I *am* a tour leader, but I can't emphasise enough how much easier it is to plan a stress-free holiday with someone on-hand who is very familiar with the country. While we can't know everything, having lived and travelled in Japan for many years we have racked up a fair few insider tips. Miso ice cream? I wouldn't recommend it, unless you like very salty caramel with chunks of fermented bean and a decent hint of "funky". See? Invaluable knowledge. We can also pull strings for access to unforgettable experiences (such as a private meeting with a geisha), and we speak the language; deciphering that menu just became a whole lot easier.

## 2 SAVE YOURSELF TIME

As the saying goes, "time is money". After travelling halfway across the world you should be out and about taking it all in; rather than poring over maps and trying to translate timetables, knowing that at the end of this meticulous planning you might have made the wrong choice. We can also make the impossible possible. It's true! Imagine that you're on a mountaintop and you suddenly remember a long-harboured dream to see a Ferris wheel that appeared in a Manic Street Preachers video. It's 200km away and you leave from Tokyo in 24 hours. Someone made that happen (yes, it was me).

## 3 FOOD TASTES BETTER WITH FRIENDS

Solo dining in Japan is completely acceptable, but when I'm travelling solo I miss conversations over dinner and breaking bread with friends. Take *izakaya* for example; these informal Japanese taverns serve lots of tapas-style mini-dishes, how will you try everything by yourself? Confident folks may strike up a conversation with a stranger, or make a beeline towards another lone traveller, but on a group tour the sake flows freely, you can try a little bit of everything, and spend a few hours regaling the day's adventures.

## 4 FIRSTS ARE BETTER WHEN SHARED

There's nothing quite like marvelling at the view from the Tokyo Skytree, tucking into that first huge bowl of ramen, or facing your fear of the mic and truly setting "Fire To The Rain" at karaoke. All things that are definitely not as much fun on your own. On the first evening of the tour you will be strangers, but by the time you say "*sayonara*" you might just have a friend for life. That same one you dared to try the miso ice cream...

**DO IT:** *Small group tour dates for 2019 have just been released. Call our Japan experts on 0117 244 3463 to find out more.*



A photograph of two women standing in front of ancient stone columns in Bagan. The woman on the left is wearing a teal short-sleeved shirt and a long, patterned skirt. The woman on the right is wearing a pink short-sleeved shirt and a long, patterned skirt. They are both smiling and looking towards the right. The background shows large, weathered stone columns and a wall with some peeling plaster.

*Temple tales from*

# BAGAN

WORDS AND PICTURES BY **DAVID LOVEJOY**

**DAVID LOVEJOY TRAVELS DOWN DUSTY TRACKS TO  
EXPLORE THE PAGODAS OF THIS ANCIENT CITY.**





***“This bygone capital, now called Bagan, held my gaze until all light was wrung from the sky.”***

catch my breath. Despite having only just arrived by boat on the Irrawaddy, I couldn't wait. After clambering up a nearly thousand-year-old temple, I get my first glimpse of a sweeping vista where two thousand stupas pierce the horizon. This bygone capital, now called Bagan, held my gaze until all light was wrung from the sky.

Waking up early the next morning I sip coffee from the veranda of my bedroom as the sun rises, slowly casting light on this ancient city. Where to start?

#### **Escape the crowds**

Bagan's spectacular archaeological site dates back to the 11th and 13th centuries when the Pagan Kingdom unified a group of regions to form an empire; the result of

which closely resembles modern-day Burma. It's played an important role since in the country's fledgling tourism scene. Visitors flock here every day, but with two thousand temples and plains that stretch for miles in every direction, it's large enough to be experienced in near solitude. I meet up with an expert guide, a prodigiously well-read local with invaluable insights who knows the site back to front - I'm in safe hands. We decide to cover as much of the area as we can by going down dirt paths less travelled on an e-bike. These have more in common with an electric motorbike than a trusty pushbike, but with only two gears they needn't raise your blood pressure. The appeal, aside from the obvious “whoosh” factor, is an absence of smog and noise. I silently zipped through fresh air





**Getting perspective**  
More than 2,000 ancient  
pagodas remain in Bagan



and past secret temples, with the freedom to hop off and explore a pagoda whenever I wanted.

#### **Temple secrets**

As we dart from temple to temple, hidden secrets wait for us in each one. A visit to the revered Ananda Temple belongs on every itinerary and my guide brings the history of this golden-topped pagoda to life. Inside, he points out an optical illusion on the enormous gilded statue of Buddha; the face scowls towards the nobility's seating area in the foreground, but begins to smile as you move further back, where it would be observed by those of lower social status. According to legend, the

architects of Ananda Temple were put to death to ensure no other temple could ever rival its perfect glory. Yikes.

#### **Pace yourself**

Most of the resorts in Bagan have a pool; ideal respite from the midday humidity. You must pace yourself - less is definitely more in the land of temples. I made time for a long lunch, icy drinks and a lazy dip (it's a hard life) before heading back out.

Readying myself to cover more of this hallowed ground, I ponder my transport. It is possible to swap your

e-bike for horse and cart in the afternoon if you so wish - they look great in photographs and you might feel the breeze in your hair. But after my hearty lunch, I'm not sure I can handle the bumpy ride and opt for inflatable tyres and an animal-free journey. Bagan's not short of

inspiration for your photo album after all.

The sun's rays begin ramping up, so I brace myself for the cavernous depths of some of the larger temples. While they are free from ultraviolet rays, they do have a lot in common with an oven - don't forget your fan. It was so worth braving the heat to see frescoes depicting all stages of life, and young monks dashing hither and thither like fairies.

#### **Burmese society**

I'm struck by the number of smartly-robed young monks here, but my guide explains that for many families it's the best (or only) way to ensure that their child receives food and

***"As we dart from temple to temple, hidden secrets wait for us in each one."***





education. It seems surprising that a country rich in gems and natural resources, and enviably situated betwixt India and China, would have one of the widest income gaps on earth. Unfortunately, most of the wealth is hoarded by an elite few with ties to the former military government.

Their absolute rule ended less than a decade ago and, with a firm grip around the nation's purse strings the effects on society are still widespread. Financial hardship isn't their only legacy; this was once one of the most highly educated societies in Southeast Asia, but under their rule academic pursuits were no longer encouraged.

Presumably an ignorant populace is easier to control.

There is hope though - my guide grew up during these dark times and didn't let anything hold him back. Just as a plant breaks rock, the driven audacity of youth is hard to suppress. Sustainable tourism provides opportunities for guides and community businesses alike to redress the balance of power. In light of the current political situation in Burma, this can only be a good thing.

#### The future of Bagan

Crude repairs carried out by the former government have supposedly rendered this magnificent site 'inauthentic', so unlike other ancient

manmade sites, such as Angkor Wat, Bagan isn't recognised by UNESCO. As more tourists travel here though, Bagan will have a fighting chance of being protected. My advice would be to visit sooner rather than later.



*David Lovejoy is a senior tour leader based in Japan. He is often busy travelling around Asia, but home for him is in Yokohama.*

**DO IT:** David will be leading small group tours to Burma in 2018. Call our Burma experts on 0117 244 3465 or visit [bit.ly/East-Burma-Tours](http://bit.ly/East-Burma-Tours) to find out more.

### Burma Essentials

**CAPITAL CITY:** Naypyidaw

**MAIN RELIGION:** Theravada Buddhism

**POPULATION:** 54 million

**LANGUAGE:** Burmese

**TIME:** GMT + 6.5 hours

**GETTING THERE:** Flight time from London to Yangon: 13h 25 min with at least one stop.

**WHEN TO GO:** With temperate days and cooler evenings, the winter season between November and February is the best time to go.

**VISAS:** UK citizens will need a visa to enter Burma, get an evisa via <http://evisa.moip.gov.mm>.

**CURRENCY:** Myanmar kyat (MMK). £1 – approx. 1,750 MMK. USD is the most popular form of currency accepted for conversion to kyat. This can only be done at official banks and currency exchange offices, not through hotels and other tourist services.





east meets...

# DAVID BADDIEL



The comedian, television presenter, novelist, and playwright, gives us the lowdown on his recent family trip to Japan.

## 1. We'll kick off with the big questions – who makes the best café companion: owl, cat, or hedgehog?

Well, I'm a cat man in almost every respect. But I do have four at home, so I basically live in a cat café. Therefore I think I'll have to plump for the novelty of hedgehog. I liked the owl café a lot, but it was less a café, more a sitting room with an owl area...

## 2. What surprises you about Japan?

I'm always surprised by the level of service. I have been before but it seems to have gone up from last time. It's amazing, but can occasionally be constricting; they seem to know everything that you're doing in advance. Changing your dinner plans can send a five-star hotel into meltdown.

## 3. What makes Japan different to anywhere else in the world?

Well that - the level of service. Also, the food. Also, the weirdness. Even though it's obviously very much part of a globalist culture, Japan always feels deeply foreign to a Westerner.

## 4. What was the most Japanese thing you saw?

A woman bowing to a plane.

## 5. What was your tastiest meal?

It's difficult to choose! We had sushi (at what I think is just a chain) at the Tsukiji fish market - it was conveyor belt, but fantastic. Also, the Hoshinoya in Tokyo did us a nine-course meal - there were a few of these - and the chef made a vegan set for my daughter, including wild mushrooms that he'd had picked that morning. It was amazing.

## 6. Describe Tokyo's Robot Restaurant in three words

Legal acid trip.

## 7. What did your kids enjoy the most?

They loved the animal cafés, and my son particularly liked the *onsen*; the one in the Hoshinoya Tokyo is great. I wish we'd gone to some public ones - I did that in 2002 in Tokyo and it was amazing.

## 8. Not many travellers make it to the jungle-clad Iriomote Island, did it feel like a world away from Tokyo?

Yes and no. The weather was nice - which it wasn't anywhere else in the country; typhoon season actually happens there, but thankfully we

missed that. There is also a laidback beach culture which feels quite un-Japanese. The Hoshinoya in contrast is still very Japanese - it's very organised, and there's a lot of bowing.

## 9. What was your favourite place?

I love Kyoto, when you can get away from the crowds. But after coasting on Iriomote, our guide took us back to the car by river instead of road. As we swam back, it was sunny and astonishingly beautiful, so it's a joint favourite.

## 10. Do you have any advice for other travellers to Japan?

Yes. The weather is humid but overcast in August - I prefer spring or autumn instead. And whilst it's brilliant, don't just stay in Tokyo.

**David travelled on an InsideJapan Tours Self-Guided Adventure to Tokyo, Kyoto, Izu Peninsula and the Okinawa islands.**

**DO IT:** To plan a family holiday to Japan, call our experts on 0117 244 3463 or visit [bit.ly/East-InsideJapan-Tours](http://bit.ly/East-InsideJapan-Tours).

 [twitter.com/Baddiel](https://twitter.com/Baddiel)



Insider's guide to...

# New Year in BURMA

We know what you're thinking, New Year has been and gone. Not so in many Southeast Asian countries. While a noisy countdown, hearty cheers and the sweet sounds of *Auld Lang Syne* ring out on 1st January in the West, the celebration of New Year (Thingyan) in Burma takes place between 13th and 16th April with some very different traditions. Less champagne, more water. Lots of water.

**Here's what to know if you find yourself amidst the celebrations.**

## 1 Prepare to get wet

Unless you're elderly, pregnant or a monk, you're fair game for a soaking. Good-natured water fights, believed to wash away the sins of the previous year, are to be had on every street. A fun way to immerse yourself in local culture, and cool down at the same time.



## 2 Keep your goods in a waterproof bag

Invest in a waterproof bag, or leave your phone and camera somewhere safe before you go out. The last thing you want is to lose your travel snaps after an overenthusiastic drenching.



## 3 Expect places to be closed

Most Burmese citizens will get involved in the festivities, so many shops, restaurants, and museums will be closed. Thingyan is a popular festival and transport options can be few and far between, so give us plenty of time to book your accommodation in advance.



## 4 Drink plenty of water

"Water, water, everywhere..." Don't forget to stay hydrated. In all of the excitement it can be easy to forget that water is for drinking too.



## 5 Try a street snack

Give *mont lone ye paw* a go. These sweet dumplings are made from jaggery (cane sugar), rice and coconut, and are traditionally handed out for free during Thingyan.



**DO IT:** For more information about festivals, events, and the best times to visit Japan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Burma, take a look at our brand new When to Travel page: [bit.ly/When-to-Travel](http://bit.ly/When-to-Travel)



# TICKLED PINK:

C H E R R Y   B L O S S O M   A L T E R N A T I V E S



WHEN TO GO: FEBRUARY

In our  
Blooms on the banks of  
Fort Goryokaku in May



Heralding the arrival of spring, and encapsulating the transience of life itself, nothing stirs the Japanese soul quite like the ephemeral cherry blossom. But while the world and her husband descend on Tokyo and Kyoto to catch the blooms in early April, we recommend seeking out some more secluded spots to appreciate this spectacle away from the melee.



**Ruth Hubbard shares her favourite lesser-known cherry blossom spots.**





🌸 **WHEN TO GO:**  
EARLY TO MID-MAY

### **Fort Goryokaku, Hakodate**

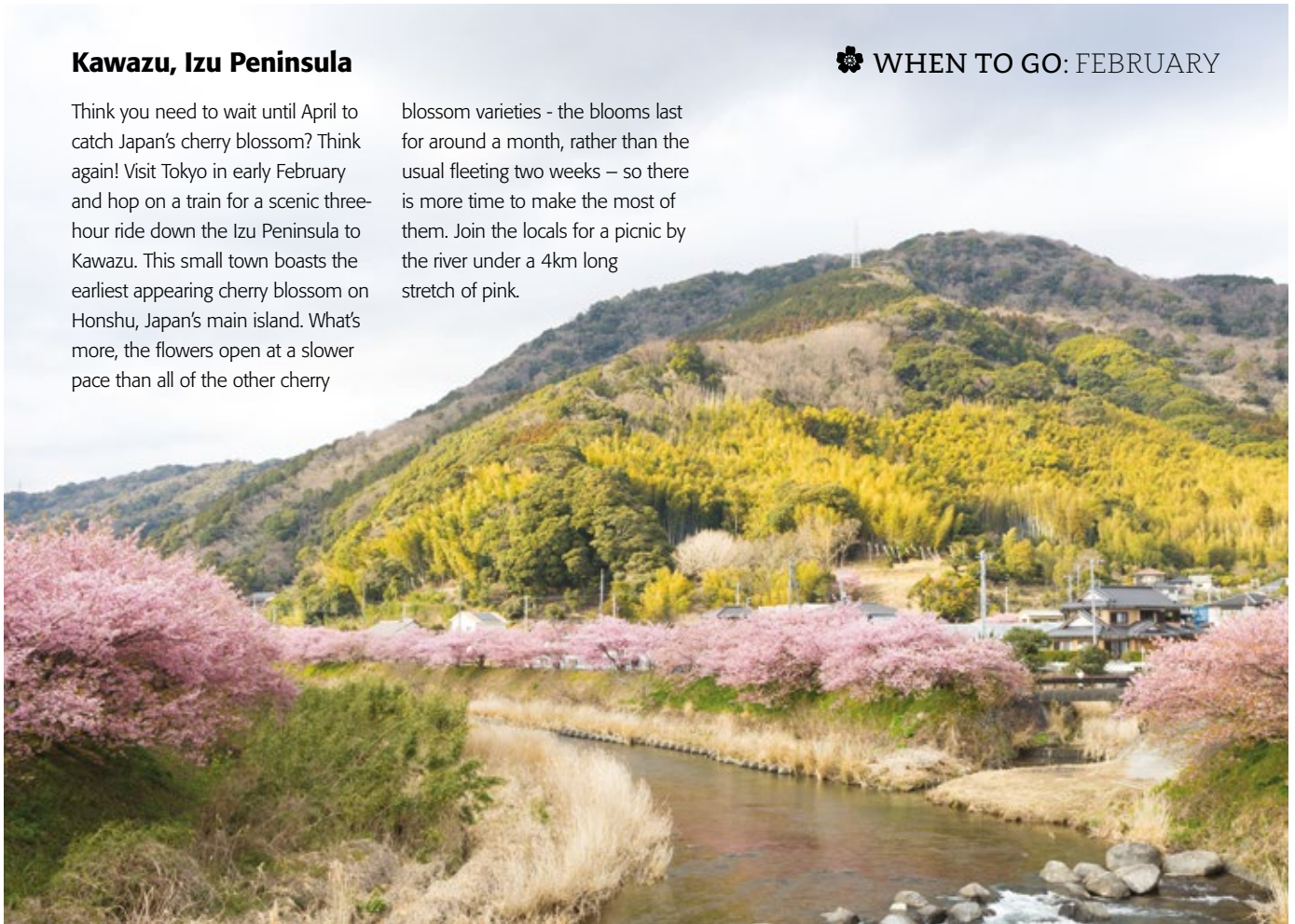
To catch the last of the year's cherry blossom set your sights on Japan's northernmost island, Hokkaido. Here we must bestow Hakodate with the "best cherry blossom as seen from above" award (if such a thing existed). Fort Goryokaku is a massive, star-shaped citadel; it was built in the late 1800s by the Tokugawa shogunate who feared an attack from Western powers. Visit in mid-May to wander the moats lined with gorgeous pink trees. Don't worry, you won't need a helicopter to get an overhead photo, just take the lift 90m up to the top of Goryokaku Tower.

### **Kawazu, Izu Peninsula**

Think you need to wait until April to catch Japan's cherry blossom? Think again! Visit Tokyo in early February and hop on a train for a scenic three-hour ride down the Izu Peninsula to Kawazu. This small town boasts the earliest appearing cherry blossom on Honshu, Japan's main island. What's more, the flowers open at a slower pace than all of the other cherry

blossom varieties - the blooms last for around a month, rather than the usual fleeting two weeks – so there is more time to make the most of them. Join the locals for a picnic by the river under a 4km long stretch of pink.

🌸 **WHEN TO GO: FEBRUARY**





## 🌸 WHEN TO GO: EARLY APRIL

### Megijima Island, Seto Inland Sea

The Japanese archipelago encompasses more than 6,000 islands, so it would be a shame not to indulge in a little island hopping.

Take a 20-minute ferry ride from Takamatsu on Shikoku, the smallest of Japan's four main islands, to Megijima. Measuring just 1 by 4km,

this island's 200 inhabitants are outnumbered by cherry blossom trees. When they flower in early April, you can soak up the sight of

pink canopies against a postcard-perfect backdrop of the island-strewn Seto Inland Sea.



## 🌸 WHEN TO GO: EARLY APRIL



### Inuyama Castle, near Nagoya

Just twelve castles remain intact from Japan's feudal age, and all are a good bet for a cherry blossom picnic. Inuyama, built in 1537, is one of the oldest castles after surviving many a natural disaster. It's perched on a small hill that is surrounded by cherry

trees, as is the nearby landscape garden Urakuen. Inuyama is a 45-minute train journey from Nagoya, the home of InsideJapan Tours' Japanese HQ - you may just bump into our staff enjoying a bento lunchbox with a cheeky cup (or two) of sake.

## 🌸 WHEN TO GO: LATE APRIL TO EARLY MAY



### Former samurai district, Kakunodate

Did you think only willow trees could weep? In Kakunodate, cherry trees lament the bygone era of the samurai; gorgeous swoops of pale pink blossoms arch to the ground amid the well-preserved Edo Period architecture. The trees were

transported here from Kyoto and lovingly cultivated by local samurai families, determined to outdo their neighbours with their horticultural prowess. Kakunodate is four hours by train from Tokyo, up in the melancholic north, so the flowers are at their best in early May.



**Ruth Hubbard is the Product Manager for all of our destinations, and is based in our Bristol office.**

**DO IT:** Any of these cherry blossom destinations can be woven into a tailor-made holiday. Call our Japan experts on 0117 244 3463 or visit [bit.ly/East-InsideJapan-Tours](https://bit.ly/East-InsideJapan-Tours) to find out more.





# HONEYMOON IN VIETNAM

We love hearing about where InsideAsia travellers have been exploring.

**This issue:** Megan Lucie Adams heads to Vietnam for her honeymoon.



**M**y husband and I have wanted to visit Asia for a long time, and our honeymoon seemed like the perfect excuse! Having heard lots of wonderful stories from friends who had been to Vietnam, we set our sights on 10 days travelling from the south to the north of the country.

## Taking off

As someone who's not a keen flyer it was a relief to have such a smooth journey, with only one stop in Singapore (which is such a gorgeous airport) before arriving in Ho Chi Minh City. We caught up with a friend who works in the city, before meeting our guide, Thang. He was very helpful and a mine of information about the area - we actually got on so well that we've stayed in touch.

## Charming Hoi An

As we made our way north we stopped off for a few days in Hoi An. With its beautiful old buildings and twinkly lantern festival, this soon

became our favourite place. The town is known for its world-class tailors, so we had clothes made here – a different kind of souvenir! In the evenings we discovered some brilliant restaurants - I love Vietnamese food in England, but the real thing was even more delicious - and after busy days we

**"I was excited to travel around Vietnam, but didn't expect to fall in love with the country as much as I did."**

slept well at the Almanity Spa and Resort. With daily massages and Tai Chi in the afternoon, we left Hoi An feeling calm and happy.

## The caves of Halong Bay

On the north coast, we spent a night on Halong Bay and woke up early to explore the caves. This truly was a once in a lifetime experience. The rain poured, and we experienced lots of thunder and lightning, but it

just added to the atmosphere. I was excited to travel around Vietnam, but didn't expect to fall in love with the country as much as I did.

## Top tips for travelling

If I was to give one piece of advice to those thinking of going, it would be: don't think about it, JUST GO! Other (more practical) advice would be to drink lots of water to stay hydrated in the humidity, respect the beautiful culture, and learn a few phrases to chat to the locals - they really seem to appreciate it. It's the most wonderful country that I've ever visited and I loved every minute. Now it's time to plan our next trip!

**DO IT:** Megan took a fully tailored honeymoon to Vietnam. Call our Vietnam experts on 0117 244 2464 or visit [bit.ly/East-InsideVietnam-Tours](https://bit.ly/East-InsideVietnam-Tours) to find out more.

**If you've had an adventure with InsideAsia Tours that you'd like to share, get in touch!**

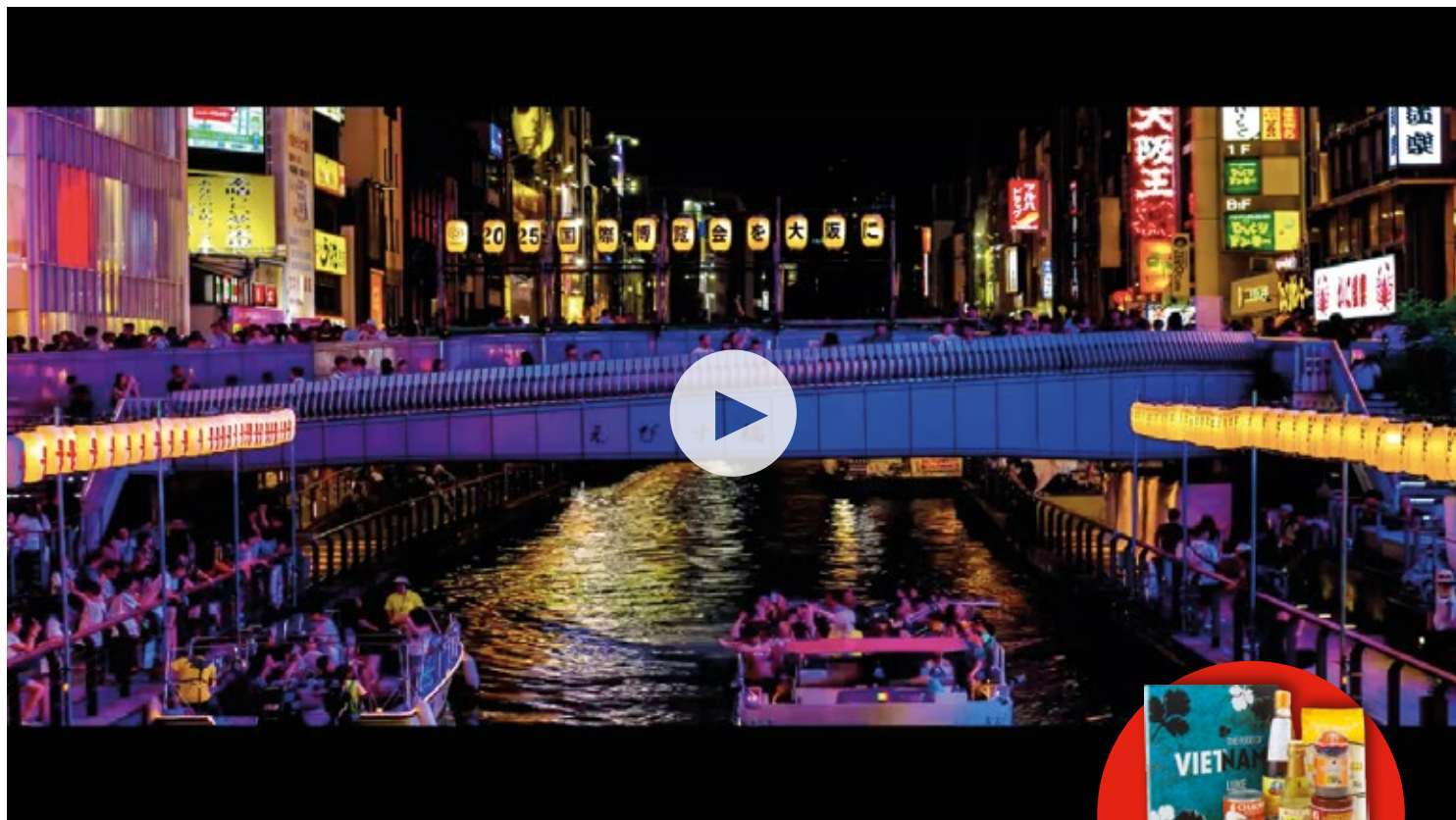




# east COMPETITION

TRAVEL VIDEO WINNER

Huge congratulations to **Owen Evans** for winning a **GoPro HERO5 Session** in our travel video competition. For a good dose of travel inspiration, watch it here [bit.ly/My-Eastern-Adventure](http://bit.ly/My-Eastern-Adventure). Thank you to everyone who entered.



## Photography competition

Our photography competition is back, and this issue's theme is **FOOD**.

### SEND US YOUR FOODIE PHOTOS

Send us your favourite food themed snap from Japan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos or Burma for the chance to **WIN** a Vietnamese cooking set courtesy of Sous Chef (check out their website to get your taste buds tingling: [souschef.co.uk](http://souschef.co.uk))

We're looking forward to seeing your entries (preferably after lunch).

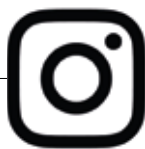


### HOW TO ENTER:

- 1)** Read our terms & conditions. You can find them at: [insideasiatours.com/eastmagazine](http://insideasiatours.com/eastmagazine)
- 2)** Send us a 'food' themed photograph from your travels in Japan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos or Burma. You must have the rights to the photograph.
- 3)** Send it over to [east@insideasiatours.com](mailto:east@insideasiatours.com) by 5pm (GMT) on 1st April 2018. Include your name, address & contact details.

The winner will be revealed in our next issue. We're looking forward to seeing your entries! Any questions? Get in touch – [east@insideasiatours.com](mailto:east@insideasiatours.com).





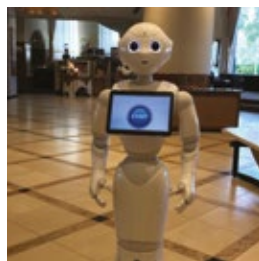
Tag your InsideAsia Tours holiday photos on Instagram with **#insideasiatours** or **#insidejapantours** and we'll share our favourites. Warning: May cause wanderlust.



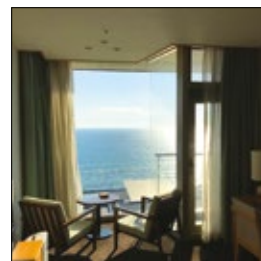
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