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Round the World - Spice and Rice Route

Adventure



Relaxation



Culture



Trip Name: Round the World - Spice and Rice Route **Trip Code:** QSEA **Duration:** From 1 year

Trip Highlights

- Immerse yourself in Indian culture, volunteer and see the Taj Mahal!
- Explore Thai culture and it's islands, beaches and temples
- Enjoy the frenetic energy of Ho Chi Minh City
- Help Vietnamese Children build happy memories of their childhoods
- Get off the beaten track in China and visit places tourists can't usually go



Overview

See the wonders of the travel world including the Taj Mahal, a variety of beautiful Thai islands, the world famous Halong Bay and the Great Wall of China.

As you travel through the wide expanses of India, Thailand & Vietnam and China, you'll have the opportunity to live and work with local people on volunteer projects and observe a different way of life along the way. Discover the range of culture, wildlife and amazing landscapes of Asia. And remember, this itinerary is totally flexible so feel free to mix and match our trips to suit you.

Destination Info

Asia- the worlds largest and most populous continent with a population of over 4 billion people! Steeped in history and culture and jam-packed with buzzing cities, futuristic buildings, majestic temples, World Heritage Sites and some of the world's most beautiful coastline.

The Republic of India - second most populous country in the world and former British colony. All of the world's

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major religions put in an appearance here, the best represented being Hindu (hence the many 'sacred' cows causing traffic jams in the capital, New Delhi!) as well as Muslims, Christians and Buddhists. The hustle and bustle is virtually constant, but there are always peaceful, spiritual spots that you can escape to easily.

Itinerary



[India Experience](#) - 4 weeks

If you're looking to infuse your travels full of adventure, culture, great food and discovery then India's the place! Full to the brim of fantastic activity, our India Experience trip is perfect for those who fancy seeing the 'real India' whilst exploring and volunteering through different regions of the country.

Although it's almost impossible for us to pick out highlights of our fantastic four week trip, we have become rather attached to our camel safaris in the Thar desert (including a night under the stars in a tented camp), the visit to the Taj Mahal, trekking in Rishikesh and the conclusion week in the beautiful Goa!

Fancy something different? Check out our other [India trips](#)



[Thailand Experience](#) – 4 weeks

Experience adventure travel in Thailand with all the best bits packed into just four weeks! You'll spend a full month

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getting to know Asia, Thailand, Thai food, Thai people and Thai landscapes!

We'll take you to some of the best tourist spots in unspoilt Kanchanaburi and Sangklaburi and you'll have a few days to get involved with worthwhile volunteer work or get a taste for adventure whilst trekking.

To round off your ultimate Thailand experience, the trip will end with an obligatory week hanging out on the beach on the island of Koh Pha Ngan. Well someone's got to do it!

[Thailand Scuba Diving Course](#) – 1 week

Experience some of the best diving in Asia and go home with a PADI qualification. This course offers proper training from fully accredited leaders and is a great way to see another side of the country and explore it's vast and beautiful underwater world.



[Vietnam Experience](#) – 4 weeks

Vietnam is rich in culture and history and this tour has crammed in all of the best sights and activities the country has to offer. The fun will begin in the capital city, Hanoi, where you'll explore Ninh Binh, Tam Coc and Dinh Cac, followed by a trekking adventure in Cuc Phuong National Park. Your final week will be spent at the breathtaking Halong Bay where you'll be cruising amongst the limestone karsts and relaxing on the beach after a busy four weeks. This is definitely an adventure tour to remember!

[Vietnam Childcare volunteers](#) - 2 weeks

If you want to make a difference to the lives of disadvantaged children on your travels then this is the project for you. You'll be heading to the buzzing Ho Chi Minh and getting stuck into one of our childcare projects. You could be teaching English, getting creative and helping out with arts and crafts or simply being on hand to dish out extra

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hugs! This is a great way to get to know a country as you'll be staying in a family run hotel, giving you a real insight into the culture and experiencing Vietnamese hospitality.



[China Ultimate Adventure](#)- 4 weeks

This incredible circular tour of China gives you an unforgettable view of the real China. The volume and variety of experiences included on the itinerary make this trip quite unique. You'll see all of China's unmissable attractions such as the Great Wall, Terracotta Army and the loveable pandas, but you'll also go off the beaten track to places tourists rarely get to visit, such as a rural farm in the QinLing Mountains. On top of this you'll get the chance to do some volunteering at an orphanage or a soup kitchen for homeless people.

This trip aims to provide you with a safe, interesting, hassle free and unforgettable experience during your epic 5,458km journey in the Middle Kingdom!

Accommodation

You will be staying in a variety of accommodation during your trip. These will range from hostels and guesthouses to hotels, beach resorts and home-stays.

Meals

Depending on your choice of countries and experiences, some meals may be included but it will vary from place to place and project to project. Please refer to specific programme information to find out what's included.

What's Included

- Flights from London – India – Thailand – Vietnam - China - London
- India Experience
- Thailand Experience
- Thailand Scuba Diving Course
- Vietnam Experience
- Vietnam volunteer project
- China Experience



What's Not Included

- Travel insurance
- Extra activities not on itinerary
- Visas



Minimum Age

Minimum 18 years, maximum decided on potential participants health.

FAQs

1. **Could I change one of the programmes listed to an alternative programme that Real Gap offers instead?**
Yes, that's fine we have a selection on our web site for each location for you to choose from.
2. **How flexible can Real Gap be about the duration of trips? Can I spend longer in Thailand as I would like to visit friends there?**
Yes, you can tailor make the trip to suit yourself and add in time for independent travel as well - this is your trip after all!
3. **How much additional money should I take for the trip?**
We recommend that you allow £50 to £75 per week and take a credit card just in case; you will find that you will spend different amounts in each country you visit as the cost of living can vary quite dramatically. It's always better to budget for more than you think you will need.
4. **When's the best time to go?**
Whenever really, although March onwards is good to get the warmer weather in India and Thailand but take warmer clothing for the time in Vietnam if you travel at this time.
5. **Can I add a different destination to my flights so I can visit family in Australia?**
Yes, that would be fine.

Police Check

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This trip requires a Police Check to be carried out - please contact us for further information on how to do this.

Support & Advice

Your safety is paramount which is why all our programs have been visited and assessments have been conducted to ensure any major risks have been minimized.

In addition, you will have access to a 24 hour emergency contact number so you can contact one of our staff at any time should you need to. In addition our overseas partners and coordinators are on hand in-country to assist you.

Financial Security

We know that the last thing you want to worry about when you're planning your trip of a lifetime is whether your money is in safe hands. As a leading global gap year provider it's our job to make sure your finances are secure, so when you book with us you can be confident that we do just that.

Real Gap Experience is part of TUI Travel Plc, one of the largest travel organisations in the world, and these days in the travel industry, large means secure.

Insurance

Whether you're traveling for two weeks or two years, trekking the Amazon in Ecuador or on safari in Africa, insurance is an essential part of your adventure and will help you enjoy your travels, secure in the knowledge that you have the protection you need. In fact, everyone traveling with us must have adequate cover before their trip begins.

Of course you are free to buy insurance from any provider, however at Real Gap Experience, we have partnered with World Nomads to offer policies that have been specifically designed to meet the needs of global travel. If you think you're already covered by an existing policy, such as those offered by credit card providers, check the policy wording very carefully to ensure it covers you for your Real Gap Experience.

For more information on travel insurance please contact us to speak to one of our travel advisors.

Money Matters

China

In China the currency is the Renminbi Yuan (RMB or CNY, symbol ¥), which is subdivided into 10 Jiao which is in turn equal to 10 Fen. Coins come in denominations of 1 Jiao, 1 and 5 Yuan and 1, 2 and 5 Fen. Notes come in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 20, 50 and 100 Yuan.

Credit cards such as Visa, MasterCard, AmEx can be used at upmarket hotels, restaurants, supermarkets and department stores. ATMs that accept credit cards are mainly in large cities at branches of the Bank of China and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, though a fee may be charged.

Meal, Inexpensive Restaurant 3.23 \$

Domestic Beer (0.5 litre draught) 1.28 \$

Coke/Pepsi (0.33 litre bottle) 0.52 \$

Water (0.33 litre bottle) 0.28 \$

(Prices quoted in US Dollar)

India

Also denoted as 'Rs' the Indian rupee is the official currency of India. The rupee is divided into 100 subunits called paise (p) but single paise coins are rarely used or found in circulation. Coins are available in denominations of 5, 10, 20, 25 and 50 paise and 1, 2 and 5 rupee coins are also available. Rupee notes come in denominations of 10, 20, 50, 100, 500 and 1000 but note that the larger notes are difficult to change outside banks. The rupee is tied to a number of currencies.

ATMs can be found in most major cities and towns but carrying cash and traveller's cheques is recommended as power cuts can leave ATMs unavailable. All major travellers cheques are widely accepted but US dollar and Pounds sterling are the most popular.

Please note that passports will always be needed when changing currency or travellers cheques.

You'll find your money goes a pretty long way if you purchase local foods and drinks.

Meal, Inexpensive Restaurant 2.25 \$

Domestic Beer (0.5 litre draught) 1.65 \$

Coke/Pepsi (0.33 litre bottle) 0.42 \$

Water (0.33 litre bottle) 0.27 \$

(Prices quoted in US Dollars)

Thailand

The unit of currency in Thailand is the Baht (THB; symbol). There are 100 Satang to the Baht and coins come in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 25 and 50 Satang or 1, 2, 5 and 10B. Paper bills come in 20B (green), 50B (blue), 100B (red), 500B (purple) and 1000B (beige).

US Dollars are the other most widely accepted currency and credit cards can be used for a fee in most large cities or at resort hotels but are not often accepted by small locally run businesses. ATMs are found in all major cities and almost all provincial banks.

Meal, Inexpensive Restaurant around \$3

Domestic beer (from a local store) \$2

Domestic beer (at a restaurant) \$3

Coke/Pepsi (0.33 litre bottle) \$0.53

Water (1.5 litre bottle) \$0.5

(Prices quoted in US Dollar)

Vietnam

The official currency is the Vietnam Dong (VND). Coins come in denominations of 200, 500, 1000, 2000 and 5000 Dong. Banknotes in the following values: VND 20,000, 10,000, 500,000, 50,000, 100,000 and 200,000, which exist both in the new polymer form and the old normal paper notes, these should be accepted by most businesses.

Credit cards and the US dollar are accepted in most major cities and tourist centres, though smaller businesses will usually only accept VND in cash. ATMs are only accessible in cities (you are unlikely to find ATMs in rural areas) but only give VND at around a 3% transactional fee.

Meal, Inexpensive Restaurant 3.96 \$
Domestic Beer (0.5 litre draught) 0.97 \$
Coke/Pepsi (0.33 litre bottle) 0.41 \$
Water (0.33 litre bottle) 0.31 \$

(Prices quoted in US Dollar)

Round the world

Passports and Visas

China

You will require a visa to enter China and you should consult your relevant embassy to ensure you can secure one. Once you have booked your trip you will be provided with further instructions and supporting documents to obtain the correct visa.

Passports and visas are the responsibility of the individual traveller. The visa requirements for your trip vary depending on where you are from and where you are going. As a general rule most countries expect that you will have at least 6 months' validity on your passport beyond your intended stay. It is your responsibility to have the correct personal documents and to obtain your own visa, if one is necessary, and you should consult the relevant embassy.

India

All UK passport holders must apply for a visa before travelling to India. All other nationalities should consult their relevant embassy.

Once you have booked your trip you will be provided with further instructions and any necessary supporting documents to obtain the correct visa. Passports and visas are the responsibility of the individual traveller. The visa requirements for your trip vary depending on where you are from and where you are going. As a general rule most countries expect that you will have at least 6 months' validity on your passport beyond your intended stay. It is your responsibility to have the correct personal documents and to obtain your own visa, if one is necessary.

Thailand

You should ensure that you have a full passport that is valid for 6 months beyond the intended length of stay. It is

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your responsibility to have the correct personal documents and to obtain your own visa, if one is necessary, in accordance with the regulations of the country you are to visit. The information provided below is to help you with that process. We are not responsible for the actions of local immigration and customs officials, whether at points of entry or otherwise, and any subsequent effects.

Citizens of the UK, the USA, Ireland, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand and most European countries do not require a visa for stays of less than 30 days. For stays of between 31 and 60 days you can obtain a 60-day tourist visa for a fee from a Thai embassy or consulate before you travel. For stays of up to 90 days, you can extend the 60-day visa for a further 30 days while you are in the country, for a fee.

Visa courier service

For those of you who would prefer to use a specialist visa service to help you obtain the right visa for your travels, we have teamed up with VisaCentral, to offer you specialist assistance and advice - making preparations for your trip easier and more straight forward.

Click on [VisaCentral](#) to find out more about their services and prices.

Vietnam

You should ensure that you have a full passport that is valid for 6 months beyond the intended length of stay. It is your responsibility to have the correct personal documents and to obtain your own visa, if one is necessary, in accordance with the regulations of the country you are to visit. The information provided below is to help you with that process. We are not responsible for the actions of local immigration and customs officials, whether at points of entry or otherwise, and any subsequent effects.

Most visitors to Vietnam will need a visa with the exception of nationals of Denmark, Finland and Sweden who do not require a visa for stays of less than 15 days. The most common visa is the Tourist Visa, which can be purchased for stays of up to 30 days or 3 months and is available for both single and multiple entries.

More information please contact your nearest Vietnamese embassy.

Round the world

Cultural Considerations

China

China is becoming more and more liberal all the time, so, especially in the major urban areas, you do not need to dress too conservatively. Bear in mind that you will get stared at, even more so if you go out and about in something outlandish!

This may happen, more so in rural areas and you might even find yourself being asked for a photo! This is not meant in a hostile manner and although it may be annoying, just try to ignore it or feel flattered that they are taking such an interest in you.

Looking scruffy will not go down well, especially in restaurants and hotel check-ins. The best way to gain respect is

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to make an effort with your appearance.

Spitting is not considered to be anti-social in China. It may seem disgusting, but there isn't really anything you can do except ignore it- they probably think we are disgusting for something we do that we think is completely normal. Anyway, you'll get used to it... eventually!

“Saving Face” is an important concept in China which is based on social standings; so pointing out things negatively and criticising will cause immense humiliation for the person on the receiving end. It also means that getting stressed and shouting at someone will get you absolutely nowhere. If you need to be negative towards someone, make sure that you do it in a polite but firm manner, to keep embarrassment to a minimum.

When visiting markets and street vendors you will need to bargain for the item you wish to purchase. Generally when the vendor spots you are a foreigner the price will shoot up, so try offering a price about 70% lower and work from there. Don't get too aggressive and treat it as a bit of fun- you're only going to be arguing over pennies! This is also the vendor's living so paying that little bit extra will make a greater difference to them than it will to you.

Religion

Many religions are represented in China but generally the most popular are Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Chinese Folk religions, ancestor veneration and the worship of localised deities. Muslims, Jews and Christians also have a small representation.

Smoking, Alcohol

Smoking and drinking is acceptable in China and readily available. However, please respect other people. Smoking is not permissible in volunteer apartments or the host families' homes. Drinking is only permissible in moderation and must not impact upon any volunteer work you undertake. While we want you to have fun in your free time, antisocial behaviour will not be tolerated.

Bathroom Facilities

You will experience a range of different shower and toilet facilities. Unless you are staying in a hotel you will rarely have hot water. The cool water takes a little getting used to but I'm sure you'll find it refreshing after a hot and humid day. Toilets will be a combination of western and Asian. Remember to put all toilet tissue in the bin provided and not in the toilet.

Whilst on excursions you will notice that many places do not have a western toilet and will have a typical Asian toilet; again this is all part of the Asian culture. Also, many places do not have soap in the bathrooms. It is a good idea to take a small bottle of soap gel and keep it in your day bag. This is an antibacterial gel that you don't need to rinse off. These are available in chemists in the travel section.

India

Greetings

The traditional Indian greeting is to make pranaam, which involves folding your hands together in a prayer gesture in front of your chest, but without bowing. The standard Indian greeting “namaste” or “namaskar” can accompany this gesture and this combination can be used to say hello and goodbye. Female volunteers are encouraged to make pranaam to both women and men, as occasionally some Indian men use the Western tradition of handshaking as a way of making inappropriate physical contact with women. Refusing a man’s outstretched hand while making the pranaam gesture is not only appropriate but in some cases it will gain you considerable respect. Male volunteers, however, should feel comfortable in shaking hands with Indian men.

Clothing

Indians dress far more conservatively than we do here in the West. Dressing in accordance with Indian custom is one of the most effective ways to show respect to the local culture and help to eradicate certain stereotypes about Westerners that previous holidaymakers have introduced. In India clothing is not about expressing individuality but expressing group identity, such as status and religious traditions. Female Indian clothing helps to reflect and define the idea of Indian femininity. Therefore, it is best to dress in light clothes that cover your shoulders and your knees; it will prevent any unwanted attention and will protect you from the Indian sun.

Smoking, Alcohol

Smoking and drinking is acceptable in India and readily available. However, please respect other people. Smoking is not permissible in volunteer apartments or the host families’ homes. Drinking is only permissible in moderation and must not impact upon any volunteer work you undertake. While we want you to have fun in your free time, antisocial behaviour will not be tolerated.

Bathroom Facilities

You will experience a range of different shower and toilet facilities. Unless you are staying in a hotel you will rarely have hot water. The cool water takes a little getting used to but I’m sure you’ll find it refreshing after a hot and humid day. Toilets will be a combination of western and Asian. Remember to put all toilet tissue in the bin provided and not in the toilet.

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Thailand

Whilst parts of Thailand are developing very quickly and Bangkok can feel more modern than many Western cities, much of the country is still very poor and people have challenging lives. The accommodation you will be staying in is very basic and you will not have the luxuries that you may have in this country. Please respect that this is the way locals live and take the opportunity to experience this new way of life. The friendly people, the great atmosphere and beautiful location will more than make up for this. Most travellers enjoy this change in lifestyle. It is

very healthy, refreshing and opens your mind to a new world.

Religion

Religion is an important part of Thai day-to-day life and the main religion is Buddhism. Around 4% of the country are Muslim (largely concentrated in the far south of the country) and there is a small Christian population.

Clothing

Note to all regarding clothes: Thailand is a very conservative country and, away from the beaches, people generally like to dress as smartly as possible and, even in rural areas you will see that most people are very conscious of being in clean and conservative clothes. Although no-one expects you to wear a suit and tie, and when at your project old t-shirts and shorts/jeans are totally appropriate, please do remember to cover up and try not to show too much flesh.

Boys – please note that wandering around without wearing a shirt/t-shirt is frowned upon (away from the beach) and in urban areas can draw the attention of the police.

Girls – please try not to expose too much flesh. Try to avoid t-shirts that expose too much and don't wear short shorts.

NOTE: When visiting a temple you are expected to cover up. Wear trousers or skirts and cover your shoulders, midriff and back.

There are plenty of opportunities to sunbathe and swim whilst in Thailand, so remember to take your bikini, swimsuit, swimming shorts etc. Flip-flops are the easiest and coolest footwear to take with you. Whenever you enter houses, temples, or home stays you will need to remove your shoes and leave them at the door. This will soon become habit and you won't even realise you are doing it. Remember to take some trainers with you as well for the outdoor activities.

There are many opportunities to buy cheap clothes from markets. These are cool, cheap and ideal for the climate and social norms.

Smoking, Alcohol and Drugs

Smoking and drinking is acceptable in Thailand and readily available. However, please respect other people. Smoking is not permissible in volunteer apartments or the host families' homes. Drinking is only permissible in moderation and must not impact upon any volunteer work you undertake. While we want you to have fun in your free time, antisocial behaviour will not be tolerated.

It is absolutely forbidden to carry drugs into Thailand. Being caught in possession of drugs can lead to at least a prison sentence and a hefty fine if you are lucky but remember there is still a very real threat of the death penalty for carrying drugs in Thailand. Always keep an eye on your luggage while travelling. Never bring anyone else's luggage through customs.

Bathroom Facilities

You will experience a range of different shower and toilet facilities. Unless you are staying in a hotel you will rarely have hot water. The cool water takes a little getting used to but we are sure you'll find it refreshing after a hot and humid day. Toilets will be a combination of western and Asian. Remember to put all toilet tissue in the bin provided and not in the toilet.

You'll find that many places don't have soap or toilet/tissue paper in the bathrooms. Without going into too much detail, that's what the water can be used for (as well as flushing) or often a small water spray pipe next to the toilet. It can be useful to carry a small bottle of antibacterial gel for washing hands and small packets of tissues.

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Vietnam

You will find most Vietnamese people to be very polite and sensitive, with a casual and friendly manner. They tend to be very close to their families. The Vietnamese tend to be very traditional and conservative in their way of life, and as you are stepping into their land it is appropriate to behave in a respectful way towards them.

Clothing

A note to girls, regarding clothes: You will be staying in area where it can be considered impolite to wear the incorrect clothing. Whilst in Hanoi you can pretty much wear what you like within reason. However when travelling around you should wear long trousers or skirts. T-shirts should cover your shoulders and not be too fitted. Vest tops are inappropriate. Wearing appropriate clothing also applies to men, it is best to dress conservatively when unsure.

Flip-flops are the easiest and coolest footwear to take with you. Whenever you enter houses, temples or home stays you will need to remove your shoes and leave them at the door. This will soon become habit and you won't even realise you are doing it. Remember to take some trainers with you as well for the outdoor activities.

If you are taking part on the teaching option of this project please note that clothes need to cover your shoulders, mid-drift and back. So make sure your tops are quite long.

Smoking, Alcohol

Smoking and drinking is acceptable in Vietnam and readily available. However, please respect other people. Smoking is not permissible in volunteer apartments or the host families' homes. Drinking is only permissible in moderation and must not impact upon any volunteer work you undertake. While we want you to have fun in your free time, antisocial behaviour will not be tolerated.

Bathroom Facilities

You will experience a range of different shower and toilet facilities. Unless you are staying in a hotel you will rarely have hot water. The cool water takes a little getting used to but I'm sure you'll find it refreshing after a hot and humid day. Toilets will be a combination of western and Asian. Remember to put all toilet tissue in the bin provided and not in the toilet.

Whist on excursions you will notice that many places do not have a western toilet and will have a typical Asian toilet; again this is all part of the Vietnamese culture. Also, many places do not have soap in the bathrooms. It is a good idea to take a small bottle of soap gel and keep it in your day bag. This is an antibacterial gel that you don't need to rinse off. These are available in chemists in the travel section.

Round the world

Vaccinations & Health

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Travel health can often be something people forget about before going away, but a little preparation and knowledge can go a long way to help you stay fit and healthy while abroad. The risks to your health whilst travelling will vary depending on your general health and the type of activities you are going to be partaking in and the length of your stay.

Since we are not medically qualified, it is recommended that you consult with your Doctor or a recognised Travel Medical Advisory Service who will assess your particular health risks before recommending vaccines and/or anti-malarial tablets and advising you on what precautions you should take.

Safety

China

As in most countries there are people who try to take advantage of tourists. The following advice is intended to help you keep safe:

- Always keep your personal items such as passport, money and camera with you and in a safe place. You can buy mini padlocks to prevent people from going into your day sack without your permission
- Always walk around in groups
- Never go out alone after dark
- Stick with the escorted trips. If you do go out in the evening unescorted, you do so at your own risk. Please tell the co-ordinators where you are going and what time you will be back.
- Please do not get into fights or arguments with locals. We cannot guarantee your safety and it could provoke future attacks on other travellers
- Please do not leave your drinks unattended and do not accept drinks from strangers

ATM Theft

It is very likely that you will need to withdraw cash at some point during your travels. Please be cautious when withdrawing money from an ATM and ensure that you are vigilant of other people near the ATM, especially those that offer unsolicited assistance if your card is detained. It has been recognised that individuals are operating unlawful withdrawals by placing 'traps' in ATMs whereby personal bank cards are being detained, causing the victim to believe their card transaction has not been completed, and leaving their bank card in the ATM which is then later retrieved by the thief.

If your card is confiscated or you are concerned that your card has been tampered with, please report immediately to the bank or cancel your card.

This information is not intended to scare you. Unfortunately, bad things can happen, as they can do in any country and we want you to be prepared. We want you to stay safe and have a good time.

The majority of the locals are friendly, warm and hospitable people who love meeting our travellers. Please be friendly, respectful and stay aware and you will have a great time.

India

India is not a particularly dangerous place for foreigners, but as in any strange setting, safety requires a certain

degree of attention and thoughtfulness. Because Westerners are known to carry money and valuables, pickpockets and petty thieves often target them. Especially when riding trains and buses or walking in public areas, be sure to keep a close eye on your possessions. When in transit, money, documents and other small important items should be kept on you, preferably in a pouch or money belt, as opposed to in bags or purses. Valuable technology like cameras should be carried in small bags that can be kept close at hand at all times. Remember to photocopy all your documents (insurance, passport, traveller's checks etc), and keep them in a different place than the originals. If you have credit cards, be sure to keep a copy of the information and the customer service number in case they are lost or stolen.

Various scamsters and low-level con men also target travellers in India. If you are ever in doubt about the trustworthiness of someone that is offering you assistance or services, it is best to walk away. Travellers generally stay away from the truly dangerous and violent places in India, so you need not be worried that refusing assistance or attention will result in a dangerous or unpleasant reaction. When refusing potentially shady offers, be polite but firm.

Certain areas of India are popular with Indian tourists and Indian men will often go on holiday together to escape the confines of their home lives. These men are often interested in watching Western women who behave and dress very differently to the women they are familiar with. Female volunteers occasionally experience unwanted attention.

We advise that you check your government's advice before travelling abroad. For UK, American and Australian customers please see the relevant links below;

UK: www.fco.gov.uk

USA: www.travel.state.gov

Australia: www.smartraveller.gov.au

The FCO have updated their information to recommend the following for female travellers visiting India;

"Women travellers should exercise caution when travelling in India even if they are travelling in a group. Women should use caution when travelling in India. Reported cases of sexual assault against women and young girls are increasing; recent sexual attacks against female visitors in tourist areas and cities show that foreign women are also at risk. British women have been the victims of sexual assault in Goa, Delhi, Bangalore and Rajasthan and women travellers often receive unwanted attention in the form of verbal and physical harassment by individuals or groups of men. If you are a woman travelling in India you should respect local dress codes and customs and avoid isolated areas, including beaches, when alone at any time of day. Avoid travelling alone on public transport, or in taxis or auto-rickshaws, especially at night. If you have to use a taxi, get them from hotel taxi ranks and use pre-paid taxis at airports."

ATM Theft

It is very likely that you will need to withdraw cash at some point during your travels. Please be cautious when withdrawing money from an ATM and ensure that you are vigilant of other people near the ATM, especially those that offer unsolicited assistance if your card is detained. It has been recognised that individuals are operating

unlawful withdrawals by placing 'traps' in ATMs whereby personal bank cards are being detained, causing the victim to believe their card transaction has not been completed, and leaving their bank card in the ATM which is then later retrieved by the thief.

If your card is confiscated or you are concerned that your card has been tampered with, please report immediately to the bank or cancel your card.

Thailand

As in most countries there are people who try to take advantage of tourists. The following advice is intended to help you keep safe:

- Always keep your personal items such as passport, money and camera with you and in a safe place. You can buy mini padlocks to prevent people from going into your day sack without your permission.
- Always walk around in groups, never go off with strangers and people that you have only just met
- Never go out alone after dark
- Stick with the escorted trips. If you do go out in the evening unescorted, you do so at your own risk. Please tell the co-ordinator or your home-stay family where you are going, what time you will be back and ensure you sign the release from.
- Please do not get into fights, or arguments with local Thais. We cannot guarantee your safety and it could provoke future attacks on other travellers
- As in this country there have been reports of drinks being spiked on the islands. Please do not leave your drinks unattended and do not accept drinks from strangers.
- Most importantly of all, if you wouldn't do whilst your at home, then don't do it whilst you are away!

This information is not intended to scare you. Unfortunately, bad things can happen, as they can do in any country and we want you to be prepared. We want you to stay safe and have a good time.

We would like to add that the majority of the locals are friendly, warm and hospitable people who love meeting our travellers. Please be friendly, respectful and stay aware and you will have a great time.

We advise that you check your government's advice before travelling abroad. For UK, American and Australian customers please see the relevant links below;

UK: www.fco.gov.uk

USA: www.travel.state.gov

Australia: www.smartraveller.gov.au

ATM Theft

It is very likely that you will need to withdraw cash at some point during your travels. Please be cautious when withdrawing money from an ATM and ensure that you are vigilant of other people near the ATM, especially those that offer unsolicited assistance if your card is detained. It has been recognised that individuals are operating unlawful withdrawals by placing 'traps' in ATMs whereby personal bank cards are being detained, causing the victim to believe their card transaction has not been completed, and leaving their bank card in the ATM which is then later retrieved by the thief.

If your card is confiscated or you are concerned that your card has been tampered with, please report immediately to the bank or cancel your card.

Thailand Terrorist Threat

Round the World - Spice and Rice Route

Thailand is one of the most popular destinations for visitors to Southeast Asia. Most visitors enjoy a trouble-free stay. However, Thailand does have a history of political instability and has experienced a number of military coups since 1932. The political future of the country remains uncertain, though the situation remains stable.

Over the past 3-4 years there have been a number of political demonstrations in Bangkok and some other urban areas. Tensions rise and fall but other than in 2010, most protests are usually peaceful and Thais still go out of their way to be hospitable to visitors. However, it's always advisable to avoid large gatherings and listen to the advice of the team in country

Vietnam

As in most countries, there are people in Vietnam who like to take advantage of tourists. So please take the following advice to help keep you safe:

- Always keep your personal items such as passport, money and camera with you or in a safe place. You can buy mini padlocks to prevent people from going into your daypack without your permission.
- Always walk around in groups
- Never go out alone after dark
- Stick with the escorted trips. If you do go out in the evening unescorted, you do so at your own risk. Please tell the co-ordinators where you are going and what time you will be back.

This information is not intended to scare you. Unfortunately bad things can happen like they do in this country and we want you to be prepared. At the end of the day, we want you to stay safe and have a good time.

The majority of the locals are friendly, warm and hospitable people who love meeting foreign travellers. So please be friendly, respectable and stay aware and you will have a great time.

We advise that you check your government's advice before travelling abroad. For UK, American and Australian customers please see the relevant links below;

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If your card is confiscated or you are concerned that your card has been tampered with, please report immediately

to the bank or cancel your card.

Traffic

Traffic in Vietnam is very chaotic! Be very careful with the road traffic, even after a few days and be careful not to be too confident. Traffic moves on the right, although drivers frequently cross to the left to pass or turn and motorcycles and bicycles often travel (illegally) against the flow of traffic. Horns are used constantly often for no apparent reason and sudden stops by motorcycles and bicycles make driving a particular hazard.

Round the world

Language Guide

China

Mandarin is spoken by about 70% of the population, but Cantonese is also an official language. As it is such a huge country, China also has hundreds and hundreds of different dialects.

We suggest you obtain a Lonely Planet or language guide for the destination(s) you are travelling to.

Hello! - *Ni hao!*

Nice to see you! - *Hin gow shing jian dow ni!*

Goodbye/See you - *Zai jian*

What's your name? - *Ni jiao shen me ming zi?*

Who is he? - *Ta shi shui?*

How old are you? - *Ni dwo da le?*

Where is....., please? - *Qing wen....., jai nar?*

Please kindly send/drive me to X - *Qing song wo dow X..*

How much is that bag? - *Na gur bow dwo shao qian?*

I'll take this one - *Je ge wo yow le*

Thank you - *Xie xie*

You're welcome - *Bu ker chi/bu yong xie*

I'm sorry - *Dui bu qi*

That's all right - *Mei guan shi*

One - *Yee*

Two - *Er*

Three - *San*

Four - *Si*

Five - *Woo*

Six - *Liu*

Seven - *Qi*

Eight - *Ba*

Nine - *Jiu*

Ten - *Shi*

India

Here are some useful phrases in Hindi to remember when you get to India. We also suggest you obtain a Lonely Planet or language guide for the destination(s) you are travelling to.

Round the World - Spice and Rice Route

Hello/Goodbye - *Namaste*
 Thank you very much - *Bahut bahut shukriya*
 Thank You - *Dhanyavad*
 Yes - *Haan (ha)*
 No - *Nahi*
 So you speak English? - *Kya aap angrezi samajhte hain?*
 What is your name? - *Aapka naam kya hai?*
 My name is... - *Mera naam ... hai*
 How are you? - *Aap kaise hain?*
 Fine, and you? - *Bas ap sunaiye?*
 Nice to meet you - *Aapse milkar khushii huyii*
 Do you understand? - *Kya ap samjhi*
 I don't understand - *Main samjha nahi*

Thailand

Here are some useful phrases to remember when you get to Thailand. We also suggest you obtain a Lonely Planet or language guide for the destination(s) you are travelling to.

Hello (Male speaker) - *sawatdee krup*
 Hello (Female speaker) - *sawatdee kaa*
 How are you? - *sabai dee reu*
 Thank you - *kop koon*
 I can't speak Thai - *phoot Thai mai dai*
 I don't understand - *mai kao chai*
 Do you understand? - *kao chai mai*
 Where is the rest room? - *hong nam yoo tee nai*
 How much does this cost? - *nee tao-rai*
 What is this? - *nee aria*
 Good-bye - *la gon*
 Sorry/Excuse me - *kor thoad*
 The bill please - *Gep taang*

Vietnam

Here are some useful words and phrases. We also suggest you obtain a Lonely Planet or language guide for the destination(s) you are travelling to.

Hello - *Xin chao*
 Thank you - *Cam on*
 Sorry - *Xin loi*
 Yes - *Vang*
 No - *Khong*
 I - *Toi*
 You - *Anh (male)/ Chi (female)*
 Good - *tot*
 Bad - *Khong tot*
 How much - *Bao nhieu*
 Too expensive - *Mac qua*

Round the world

Food & Drink

China

Everyone knows Chinese food, or thinks they do anyway! Just like with India you will find that the Chinese food we have here and the actual Chinese cuisine are somewhat different. They also have some slightly strange dishes too if you fancy something a little different – (like chicken's feet and river snails)! Due to China's vast size there are many regional variations, making for an extremely diverse cuisine. Some areas go for subtle flavours whereas others go for very strong, somewhat odd mixtures but all are united in terms of fresh vegetables, rice and noodles. Dim Sum, which means 'little eats' are very popular all over China, made up of buns and pancakes, and dumplings are generally eaten for breakfast! The best place to get authentic Chinese snacks is from small vending stalls on the streets, which are also good for breakfast! Western food is pretty widely available, especially in the more touristy locations. In Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong you'll even be able to get your Starbucks coffee fix!

Of course, the main difference on the Chinese dinner table is chopsticks instead of a knife and fork, but that's only superficial. The real difference is that in the West, you have your own plate of food, while in China the dishes are placed in the middle of the table and everyone shares. If you are being treated to a formal dinner and particularly if the host thinks you're in the country for the first time, he will do the best to give you a taste of many different types of dishes.

The meal usually begins with a set of at least four cold dishes, to be followed by the main courses of hot meat and vegetable dishes. Soup will then be served (unless in Guangdong style restaurants) to be followed by staple food ranging from rice, noodles to dumplings. If you wish to have your rice to go with other dishes, you should say so in good time, for most of the Chinese choose to have the staple food last or have none of them at all.

Perhaps one of the things that surprises a western visitor most is that some of the Chinese hosts like to put food into the plates of their guests. At formal dinners, there are always "public" chopsticks and spoons for this purpose, but some hosts may use their own chopsticks. This is a sign of genuine friendship and politeness. It is always polite to eat the food and if you do not eat it, just leave the food on the plate.

People in China tend to over-order food, as it is embarrassing if all the food is consumed. When you have had enough, just say so. Or you will always overeat!

India

Indian food is incredibly popular in western Europe, but tasting Indian food is a bit different than the stuff produced in the Indian down the road. In this respect the food may take a little getting used to. There are also a few cultural differences that you may need to observe. People in India tend to eat without cutlery, using either their hands or pieces of chapatti. If you are dining with strict Hindus, certain behaviours are considered inappropriate, for example sharing already eaten food and eating directly from the communal bowl.

Traditional Indian cuisine involves the intricate blending of multiple herbs and spices such as ginger, garlic, saffron and cloves. Popular ingredients vary from location to location, from lamb and yoghurt in the Northern regions to seafood in the coastal regions. In the South, more vegetables are used for cooking, along with coconut and curry leaves. In fact, most of the best dishes are vegetarian, especially when you take into account the dominant religious views of India - Hindus do not eat beef and Muslims do not eat pork. In most cases, even if you do order a meat dish, you will not find that much meat actually in it.

Round the World - Spice and Rice Route

What is classed as a curry by western culture encompasses a huge amount of dishes in India, each with its own unique beautifully blended ingredients. You are bound to find something you like. Here are a few tips regarding food and drink:

- Raw food is subject to contamination; avoid salads, uncooked vegetables, and un-pasteurised milk products such as cheese. Fruit should be self-peeled
- Undercooked and raw meat, fish and shellfish may carry intestinal pathogens
- Cooked food that has been allowed to stand for several hours at ambient temperatures should be thoroughly reheated before serving
- Yogurt and curd are naturally safe if kept in hygienic conditions, but be careful that they contain no water, as yogurt is often diluted with water in India
- The safest food is either well cooked and hot or personally peeled fruit
- As you will generally be eating without silverware, washing your hands thoroughly before all meals is absolutely imperative.

Choosing the proper beverages is as important as choosing the proper food. In a climate like India's, regular hydration is essential, however, many beverages can be dangerous to your health. The following suggestions will help you safely quench your thirst:

- Tap water is only safe if boiled; filters and purification tablets are not 100% effective. In all cases bottled water is by far the best option. Fruit juice and ice made with un-boiled water should also be considered unsafe
- When buying bottled water, stick whenever possible to known brands and make sure the bottle has an unbroken seal. Bottled water should cost no more than 30 Rupees.
- Hot beverages like coffee and tea should be boiled fully before consumption
- Though bad for hydration, carbonated beverages (incl. beer) are generally safe
- Try to remain conscious of casual water: dishes and utensils should be thoroughly clean and dry before use; teeth should be brushed with bottled or purified water

Remember to let us know of any dietary requirements before you depart.

Thailand

It's normal in Thailand to eat rice dishes for breakfast and it is all part of the cultural experience. In fact, rice and noodles are served with all meals. The food is gorgeous, with fresh vegetables tasting far better than they do back home. Vegetarians will be happy, as Tofu is widely available as is plenty of fresh fruit. And meat lovers will also be tantalising their taste buds visiting the many local markets where you can buy chicken satay (marinated kebabs), beef kebabs and other types of meat. It is very cheap too. Remember to let us know before you depart if you have any special dietary requirements.

Vietnam

Vietnamese food takes influence from China, India, Thailand and France but also has a very distinct cuisine of its own. Food tends to be light and subtle but with a good amount of flavour thanks to the fact that herbs and seasoning are favoured over sauces. Rice is the staple of the cuisine, though noodles are a tasty alternative, which will accompany meat or fish dishes or a vegetable dish. Fish in general is very popular, probably due to the extremely long coastline.

Fresh seasonings are favoured and food tends to not be too spicy, though you can use the accompanying chillies

to spice it up if you wish and the use of coconut milk makes food extra rich! The most popular and infamous seasoning is nuoc mam, a sauce made from fermenting fish in salt for a long time, whereas the most famous dish are spring rolls, which tend to differ slightly in the North and the South of the country. Cities tend to have better food than remote locations and western tastes are also well catered for, especially in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh.

Round the world

Public Holidays

China

When planning your trip, you should be aware of the major national holidays celebrated throughout the country. However, although businesses and government offices are closed on public holidays, tourist attractions and shops are almost never closed. The main impact on the tourist of these holidays is the increased competition for travel and accommodation from Chinese who use long weekends to get away from the big city.

To view a list of the public holidays for China, please see the link below:

www.timeanddate.com/holidays/china/

India

When planning your trip, you should be aware of the major national holidays celebrated throughout the country. However, although businesses and government offices are closed on public holidays, tourist attractions and shops are almost never closed. The main impact on the tourist of these holidays is the increased competition for travel and accommodation from Indians who use long weekends to get away from the big city.

To view a list of the public holidays for India, please see the link below:

www.timeanddate.com/holidays/india/

Thailand

When planning your trip, you should be aware of the major national holidays celebrated throughout the country. However, although businesses and government offices are closed on public holidays, tourist attractions and shops are almost never closed. The main impact on the tourist of these holidays is the increased competition for travel and accommodation from Thais who use long weekends to get away from the big city.

Vietnam

When planning your trip, you should be aware of the major national holidays celebrated throughout the country. However, although businesses and government offices are closed on public holidays, tourist attractions and shops are almost never closed. The main impact on the tourist of these holidays is the increased competition for travel and accommodation from Vietnamese who use long weekends to get away from the big city.

To view a list of the public holidays for Vietnam, please see the link below:

www.worldtravelguide.net/vietnam/public-holidays

Round the world

Weather

China

The best times to visit China tend to be in the spring, March and April and in the Autumn, September and October in the lower plains, whereas the higher altitude areas are best between June and September. Although daytime temperatures may be reasonable, between 20°C to 30°C, the nights can still be really cold. China is such a vast country that it is worth bearing in mind that northern and southern areas will have completely different climates, so it is best to research the area you are going to, rather than the country as a whole. The south is subtropical with the temperatures in Yunnan ranging from 20°C in the winter to 29°C in the Summer, while Beijing's climate in the north ranges from 1°C to 31°C.

India

India's climate generally has three seasons, which may vary from region to region. The hot season roughly beginning in February in the North and peaking in June can reach up to and above 45 Celsius in some areas, mostly in the centre of the country. You can expect Delhi to have temperatures at the high end of the 30's.

Monsoon season means steady rain for the whole country from the beginning of July. It stays pretty hot, and though it doesn't rain all day, it does generally rain every day. The Monsoon causes muddy conditions at best but serious flooding is also a threat. The cool season is the optimum time to travel in India, as it is not too hot and not too cool. In the winter it does get surprisingly cold in the Northern regions, whereas in the south the temperatures are beautiful.

Thailand

Thailand's equatorial climate remains tropical and warm for most of the year, with the south getting the best of the weather. The monsoon season falls between May and October, bringing warm and humid air and dipping to a minimum of 18°C. This means that Thailand is a great destination at most times of the year, though the best months are between November and February when temperatures are comfortable and rains have slackened off.

Vietnam

Vietnam's climate is varied as the country itself, ranging from tropical heat in the Mekong Delta to chilly, and sometimes snowy, winters in the northern hills. Year round temperatures average at about 25°C, soaring to a balmy 40°C in the south during the dry season. The biggest thing to watch out for are the monsoons, the winter monsoon hits between October and March and gives the north a few months of wet weather. The summer monsoon usually comes in April or May and stays until October, bringing heat and humidity to all areas not sheltered by mountains. This makes the months of April, May or October the best to travel.

Round the world

Time

China

China is 8 hours ahead of GMT

India

India is 5.5 hours ahead of GMT.

Thailand

Round the World - Spice and Rice Route

Thailand is 7 hours ahead of GMT.

Vietnam

Vietnam is 7 hours ahead of GMT.

Round the world

Electricity

China

In China the electric system is 220 Volts and frequency 50 Hertz. Outlets in China generally accept 2 types of plug:

Flat blade plug



or

V-shaped flat prongs



India

Electricity in India uses 240 volts, 50Hz. If your device does not run on these rates, you'll need a voltage converter.

Outlets across India generally accept the following plug types;

Two round pins



or

Three round pins arranged in a triangle



Thailand

The electricity in Thailand is 220 volts and frequency 50 Hertz. Devices that do not accept this voltage will need to be used with an adapter. Outlets in Thailand generally accept 2 types of plug:

Round the World - Spice and Rice Route

Flat blade plug



or

Two round pins



Vietnam

Electricity in Vietnam is generally 220 Volts and frequency 50 Hertz, though outlets with 127 Volts can still be found in some areas. You will need to either bring devices that accept 220 Volts at 50 Hertz or you will need an adapter. Outlets in Vietnam generally accept 3 types of plug:

Flat blade plug



or

Two round pins



or

Two parallel flat pins with ground pin



Round the world

Trip Note Disclaimer

The information contained in this trip note has been compiled with great care and is provided in good faith. Any itinerary featured is correct at time of release. However, our itineraries may change as make improvements that result from travellers' comments, our own research or from time to time as a result of recommended travel advice.

You can rest assured that it is always our goal to provide you with the most rewarding trip and experience ever!



Round the World - Spice and Rice Route

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