I was having breakfast with a few Flight Centre friends and as usual, we were chatting about our next travel plans. Soon, our breakfast had extended to lunch as we talked non-stop about our upcoming trips; all of us simply bubbled over with travel tips, ideas and recommendations for near enough every city under the sun! That’s when the idea of creating our very own “content-driven” magazine came about. We all love talking about travel… So why not create a FREE Flight Centre magazine where we could share with everyone our holiday experiences and suggestions? Now that dream has become a reality – and hopefully, this quarterly magazine will inspire you on what to do or where to go on your next trip. If you have any questions or suggestions, feel free to get in touch with me – I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Hello!

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Where do you wanna go?
Thai Feasting: Koh Samui Dining Guide
by Cecilia Yee

Pristine beaches, stunning resorts, a crazy party scene and of course, amazing food... it’s no wonder people flock to Koh Samui to escape reality and this popular spot in the Gulf of Thailand really is the perfect weekend beach getaway.

Those looking to hit the reset button can find wellness retreats galore to unplug and recharge, whilst hungry foodies definitely won’t run out of options either. Whether you’re after authentic local eats (who doesn’t love Thai food?), creative fusion cuisine or sophisticated Sunday brunches, Koh Samui has it all. Here are my top five picks:

» Dining on the Rocks
Experience haute cuisine perched atop terraced decks overlooking the Gulf at Dining On The Rocks. This award-winning restaurant in Six Senses Samui (which I highly recommend for accommodation in Koh Samui) serves inventive cuisine using the freshest vegetables and produce from the resort’s own gardens.

» Stacked
The signature restaurant at the trendy OZO Chaweng Samui hotel, Stacked serves up American comfort food favourites like burgers, steaks and chicken wings. Combine that with a pumping atmosphere thanks to live music nights and exciting sporting events shown on TV, and Stacked is the perfect spot for a casual dining experience.

» Barracuda Restaurant
Recently relocated to The Wharf in Bophut, Barracuda Restaurant offers modern cuisine with a twist – Mediterranean with a touch of Thai. Some notable dishes include basil-infused yellow fin tuna bedded on roasted pineapple, Thai asparagus and soy-ginger vinaigrette and lamb on carrot puree, grilled zucchini and roasted herb sauce... Get in our belly!

» Nikkie Beach Koh Samui
Indulge in one of the best Sunday brunches on the island at Nikki Beach. Located on the west side of Koh Samui on Lipa Noi, this is the place to be and be seen. Their weekly “Amazing Sunday Brunch” has become legendary throughout the island as an indulgent afternoon of music, sunshine, bubbles and delicious food – cheers to that!

» Kob Thai Restaurant
A hidden gem located on Lamai Beach, Kob Thai is one of the best Thai restaurants in Koh Samui. Chill out with friends in this open-air venue and try the tasty steamed snapper or curry crab, then end the meal on a sweet note with mango and sticky rice. This is a great spot to experience the ultimate Thai beach holiday.

» Barracuda Restaurant
Experience haute cuisine perched atop terraced decks overlooking the Gulf at Dining On The Rocks. This award-winning restaurant in Six Senses Samui (which I highly recommend for accommodation in Koh Samui) serves inventive cuisine using the freshest vegetables and produce from the resort’s own gardens.
It might be one of the world’s smallest nations, but the Maldives has countless marvels to offer to visitors. Situated in the Indian Ocean, this archipelago is made up of 26 atolls featuring some of the best diving sites in the world. Renowned for its abundant white sand beaches and warm waters, a tour around the Maldives is the very definition of an idyllic escape – whether you end up captivated by its deep azure oceans, colourful coral reefs, ring-like islets, schools of tropical fish beneath the water’s surface... or all of the above! All this also looks absolutely stunning when observed from the air, so be sure to check with your Maldives travel guide for more information about helicopter tours to truly enjoy the sparkling islands from the sky.

Both Cathay Pacific and Hong Kong Airlines now operate direct flights to Male; however, the late-night arrival times almost always mean an overnight stay in the city if you need a seaplane to access your resort. Instead, it’s worth opting for the Maldives own ‘Mega Maldives’ international airline, which operates four direct flights per week from Hong Kong. These flights land in Male in the early afternoon, so make sure you secure a window seat to be able to see the wonderful view from above – after all, this is exactly what you’ve come to the Maldives for!
We sent three of our consultants to explore the Maldives – here’s how they fared at three very different, but equally stunning, Male resorts.

» Conrad Maldives
By Claudia Yuen
The Conrad Maldives consists of two islands connected by a 500m footbridge; with the seaplane docking-platform in the middle of the bridge. The smaller island has water villas of several different categories whilst the main island consists of both retreat and all-beach villas.

We were assigned to the smaller island; as soon as we landed, we were taken by tradition dhoni boat from the docking platform to the island’s main reception area. Guests can also call for a buggy to travel between the two islands; personally, I preferred to do the walk myself especially during the night when, with the footbridge as the daily lift, you can enjoy a nearly un-adulterated view of the starry skies.

With 150 units, 500 staff, 12 food and beverage venues, a kids club and two spas situated on both islands, Conrad Maldives is a pretty comprehensive resort for families and couples alike. Oh, and did I mention ITHAA Undersea Restaurant (its famous underwater restaurant) and UFAA by Jerome Liang (the only Chinese restaurant in any Maldivian resort) too?

When it comes to relaxation, Conrad Maldives has got you covered with The Spa Retreat on the main island and The Over-Water Spa on the smaller island, with each venue providing different types of treatment. The Spa Retreat offers guests an extensive range of treatments such as acupuncture, nutrition and classic beauty treatments featuring a holistic approach. Meanwhile, The Over-Water Spa pampers its guests based on the Dhulhe colour rituals, which are centred round the body’s chakra system to draw a balance between your physical, emotional and spiritual states of mind.

There are also many activities to enjoy like snorkelling big game fishing, night fishing, watching a film under the stars or even picnicking on a deserted island – but my favourite had to be the sunset cruise. Not only can you enjoy a gorgeous sunset with your loved ones over a glass of champagne, but if you’re lucky you may catch sight of some dolphins too. And of course, the clear water itself is indeed hard to resist; many guests (myself included) could spend an entire morning simply reading on the beach, reading and enjoying the moment.

Many people say Maldives is a once-in-a-lifetime destination but I’m afraid I disagree – simply because I think it’s a destination that should be visited over and over again! It’s a place that not only helps you relax and recharge, but also allows you to appreciate the beauty of Mother Nature at her best.

» Maalifushi by COMO
By Kirsten Hill
I stayed at Maalifushi by COMO, a stunning property located in the Thaa Atoll. Once you arrive at the resort, it’s a short walk down the wooden walkway to reception – and don’t forget to keep an eye out for the resident black tip reef shark which circles in the shallow waters!

The great thing about Maalifushi by COMO is that its island is larger than most, hence it offers more facilities and even the opportunity to rent out a bicycle to get around. The accommodation ranges from beach villas to over-water villas with their own private plunge pools (ideal for couples). I stayed in an over-water suite with my own private pool overlooked by the thatched sala – a great place to view the sunrise!

Of the three restaurants at the resort, my favourite was Madu – an all-day dining venue with themed dinners facing the central pool. Breakfast is served here daily; you can choose between the normal menu and the healthier “COMO Shambhala” one. Whilst waiting for your main course, feel free to feast on fresh fruit, bread and homemade yoghurt at the buffet section. For dinner, we tried a Maldivian feast – curries, naan bread, rice, fresh tuna and lobster, fish, sambal and homegrown vegetables – all whilst enjoying the local Maldivian drum show.

The Maldives is truly a place where you can forget about your worries and appreciate life the way it should be. Welcome to paradise!

» Cocoa Island by COMO
Despite the fact that it’s in the middle of the Indian Oceans, the Maldives is actually not that far out of reach. No longer an exclusive destination of the ultra-rich, a stay in the Maldives offers what I like to call affordable luxury. Roughly 50% of Maldivians are in the hospitality industry and this has obviously become one of the key pillars the country’s economy; tourism very much drives its continued improvement and development – and travellers looking for the perfect getaway are the ones reaping the rewards.

We stayed at Cocoa Island by COMO, which is roughly 40 minutes by speedboat from the airport. Prior to boarding our speedboat, we were offered the option of ordering some late-night meals so that we could quell our hunger as soon as we had checked in at the resort – a thoughtful touch that made us feel very privileged indeed.

Cocoa Island by COMO is a relatively exclusive small island resort with 33 units in total, with four different types of over-water villa to choose from. Most of the villas are inspired by tradition dhoni boats, the wood-curved vessels used by local fishermen; it’s also worth noting that each unit has its own private terrace with direct access to the magnificent Maldivian sea! Meanwhile, the high staff-to-guest ratio guarantees great service... plus I’m a huge fan of the resort’s own brand of amenities, COMO Shambhala!

People say the Maldives is a slice of paradise – and based on my visit, I couldn’t agree more. I woke up around 7.30am local time to take photos of the beautiful morning sunrise; breakfast by the beach here is practically a standard offering rather than an add-on extra, and dining under such a clear blue sky was an unforgettable experience.

The problem with all holidays is that they are always too short – and our wonderful stay at Cocoa Island by COMO was no exception! As they say, parting is such sweet sorrow... but that’s life right?
Summer is upon us... but the big question is, where do you want to go? Let us inspire you as we take you to the USA, Cuba, and Vietnam, or try one of the top destinations recommended by our friends at G Adventures.

The world truly is your oyster!

We often think we know a place through what we see in the movies, on TV or through advertising. But experiencing a place strictly through the media is never a substitute for actually being there.

With its world-renowned arts and entertainment, natural beauty and loads of history, this really is the land of diversity and it’s no wonder that the USA remains one of the most visited countries on the planet.

Here we look at the top 10 American experiences you need to add to your travel list. But be aware, one visit to the States will never be enough!
BE A LOCAL IN CENTRAL PARK
Located in the heart of Manhattan, Central Park is a destination onto itself. You’ll feel like a local in no time as you stroll along its picturesque footpaths. Better yet, hire a bicycle and ride the winding trails as you pass historic sculptures and scenic waterways with stunning city backdrops.

THE GRAND CANYON
For a natural landmark to be visible from space, it has to be BIG, so it’s certainly no exaggeration to call this immense attraction, the Grand Canyon. The sheer size of this natural wonder is eclipsed only by its beauty, and nothing can really prepare a person for the astonishment factor when laying eyes on the canyon for the first time.

CIVIL WAR BATTLEFIELDS
The American Civil War of the 1860s was a seminal moment in American history. At war’s end, the country was reunited and slavery was forever abolished, but at great cost. There are many historic battlefields that pay homage to this history, from Gettysburg and Antietam, to the smaller, but equally hard fought campaigns in places such as Franklin, Tennessee.

SEE A BALL GAME
Americans are mad about sports. Few industries or businesses can generate the excitement and revenue that a sports franchise can, but after more than a century, baseball remains one of the most popular games. Some stadiums date back to the early 1900’s such as Wrigley Field in Chicago and Fenway Park in Boston - both opened in 1912 - with Dodgers Stadium holding up to 56,000 fans.

THE MONUMENTS AND MUSEUMS OF WASHINGTON D.C.
Rich in culture and history, there’s no better place in which to experience the American story than in Washington D.C. World renowned museums, famous landmarks and imposing Romanesque buildings all provide a unique glimpse into U.S. history and its government. And the best part, almost every museum and monument is free.
CHICAGO ARCHITECTURE TOUR
Did you know that Chicago is the birthplace of the modern skyscraper? The Home Insurance Building was constructed in 1884 and is considered to be the world’s first skyscraper. The Chicago Architecture Foundation River Cruise takes you on a fascinating journey through the heart of the city’s magnificent downtown as the boat winds along the great Chicago River.

DINE AND WINE IN NAPA VALLEY
Known around the world for its rolling hills and fertile lands, the Napa Valley produces some of the world’s best wines. Follow the many hillside trails as you visit cellar doors for a wine tasting and behind-the-scenes winery tours. Not into wine? Napa is foodie’s dream too. From cellar doors to oven doors, the natural beauty coupled with fine wines and scrumptious food is simply too much to ignore.

THEME PARKS
Who doesn’t want to visit a place known to be the ‘happiest place on earth’? While Disneyland is one of the most visited tourist destinations in the world, America plays host to countless theme parks across the country. Five of the top ten tallest roller coasters are located in America, and each of them will have you twisting and turning at dizzying heights. Try one of the many Six Flags parks, Cedar Point, Universal Studios, Dells Water Park and Knotts Berry Farm to name a few.

RIDE THE 42 BRIDGES TO KEY WEST
You could fly from Miami to Key West in just 45 minutes. But if you enjoy a leisurely sightseeing drive, this great American road trip stretches over 42 bridges on its way to Key West. At 7 miles long, the longest bridge on the way to Key West, was an engineering feat. Watch the sea colour change from deep blue and emerald green to aquamarine in just a short space of time on this impressive seaside drive.
Music, mojitos, time-warped towns and gleaming Caribbean beaches. Cecilia Yee waxes lyrical about her solo trip from Havana to Trinidad.

Cecilia Yee waxes lyrical about her solo trip from Havana to Trinidad.

Reporting from Cuba

Reality hit hard when I arrived in Havana. English-speaking locals were hard to find.

The dual currency system confused me: tourists are expected to pay more (using Cuban Convertible Peso) than the locals (using National Cuban Peso). People came up to talk, and I didn’t have a clue whether they were touts trying to rip me off or if they were genuinely interested in meeting a foreigner, perhaps for the first time. I remember asking myself, ‘What were you thinking coming here by yourself?’ But my initial trepidation slowly turned into a hunger for adventure and a heartfelt love for the country.

For two full weeks, I travelled all over Cuba. I met amazing people, saw incredible sights, experienced a colourful culture and basically disconnected from the rest of the world.

What’s happening in Havana

Picture the capital, Havana, the quintessential Cuba. Remember that the country has been largely cut off from the outside world since the communist revolutionaries took power in 1959. In any given alley, there are old ladies people-watching from crumbing Spanish-colonial balconies, kids playing soccer, dogs barking, women salsa dancing, men shuffling dominos and bands playing. It’s busy and it’s loud; it’s a sensory overload.

In Habana Vieja (Old Havana), a UNESCO World Heritage Site known as ‘Cuba in a time warp’, I spent hours walking around, dodging the 1950s vintage cars, admiring the glorious mix of Baroque and Neoclassical architecture, and listening to the ever-present hum of Latino music. Habana Vieja is exotic and mysterious, and to me hugely romantic.

The best way to get your bearings is to familiarise yourself with the main plazas. In Plaza de la Catedral, you’ll find one of the city’s most iconic structures, Catedral de San Cristóbal. Dominated by two unequal towers and framed by a theatrical Baroque facade, this incredible cathedral was described by Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier [1904 to 1980] as ‘music set in stone’. Just around the corner in Plaza de Armas, the Palacio de los Capitanes Generales is another majestic Baroque building. Home to the City Museum since 1968, artifacts on show vividly document Havana’s rollercoaster history. Plaza de San Francisco, meanwhile, is home to the 16th-century Basilica and Monastery of...
Saint Francis of Assisi – now a museum and concert hall. Inside, there is a glass statue of Jesus given to former Cuban president Fidel Castro by Mother Teresa.

All in all, it took me three blissful days to get to know Habana Vieja. Covering just 4 square kilometres, it’s not huge, but there are so many enticing little pockets of culture to check out. Aside from the awesome sites, the thrill is simply to wander the cobbled streets where vendors sell pre-1960 books, musicians serenade you, kids play and Latino music blares. Seen thus, at face value, it’s impossible to truly appreciate the poverty that is endured by many modern-day Cubans.

Centro Habana, home to the Capitolio Nacional (government headquarters), is another district worth exploring, and a real find for me was Barrio Chino, the local Chinatown. Visit Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes for contemporary art, and Museo Nacional de la Revolución for exhibits devoted to the Cuban Revolution [1953 to 1959] that saw the advent of communist rule. Opposite the museum, you can board Granma, the yacht that was used to transport 82 revolutionaries (including the Castro brothers and Che Guevara) from Mexico to Cuba in November 1956.

Of course no trip to Havana is complete without a nostalgia-fuelled drink at Hotel Nacional de Cuba, which opened in 1930 when the country was a prime travel destination, long before the 1960 US embargo. Frank Sinatra, Ava Gardner and Marlon Brando were among its early clientele. You’ll also want to drop by La Bodeguita del Medio, a small and noisy joint serving Ernest Hemingway approved Mojitos. But to mingle with the locals, try one of the many bars lining the Malecón, a broad esplanade, which stretches 8 kilometres along the coast from the mouth of Havana Harbour.

**Visiting Viñales and Trinidad**

Heading out from Havana, on the four-hour bus ride to the Valley of Viñales, you take in some of Cuba’s most spectacular vistas, from breath-taking limestone karsts and lush forests, to rich tobacco fields.

Viñales town, said to be Fidel Castro’s favourite place in Cuba, is tiny and quaint. Instead of finding a hotel, stay in a casa particular (private homestay) – boarding with a local family makes the experience so much more authentic. Meals are prepared at an additional cost, and activities can be arranged. During my stay I hiked the valley, toured a tobacco field, and went horseback riding and caving. I also stopped by the Castro-commissioned Mural de la Prehistoria, a valley cliff garishly painted with snails, dinosaurs and a family of cave people – perhaps the weirdest tourist attraction in Cuba.
A six-hour drive on from Vinales, lies my new can’t-get-enough-of destination – Trinidad. This perfectly preserved Spanish-colonial town (another UNESCO World Heritage Site) offers up old-world Cuba in a nutshell, with a little contemporary decadence thrown in.

My first day, I spent in town checking out the cathedrals and museums. Day two, I explored Valle de Los Ingenos, a living monument to Cuban sugar production, and hiked 180 metres up Cerro de la Vigia simply to marvel at the view. For the rest of the week, I took it easy, I dove into the Caribbean and lay on the white sand at Playa Ancón, I salsa danced and partied in a cave at Disco Ayala.

The ‘activity’ I recommend to all visitors to Cuba, whether you are hunkering down in Havana, getting out and about in Vinales or living it up in Trinidad, is an afternoon Mojito break. I spent many happy hours simply sipping and sipping, watching the world go by and listening to Buena Vista Social Club. When it came to it, I had to tear myself away. Two weeks in Cuba is definitely not enough.

Looking for something out-of-the-ordinary? Check out our top five destinations, handpicked by G Adventures as the best of 2015.

Whittling down the list to five was harder than ever this year, so we ended up considering destinations that were notable for a certain quality or offered something special for travellers of certain types. How did we choose them? Perhaps it’s because they’re undeniably up-and-coming. Maybe there is something special in store for them this year. Or perhaps, we just love these places so much we can’t stop talking about them!

So get out your map, block out some time on your calendar, and make this a year for adventure. We promise at least a few of these places to go next will surprise you. From Bogota’s frenetic energy to the weirdly wonderful Reykjavik, here are the must-visit travel destinations of 2015.
If there were ever a country that suffered from a case of seriously bad press, it’s Colombia. It’s not well known by travellers, so the border feels like crossing one of the last frontiers of travel. Colombia is ripe for discovery, and there is a little of everything: green valleys, golden beaches and snow-capped mountains, colonial fortresses and Bogota’s frenetic energy... everything, it seems, except tourists. From intellectual Medellin to Cali’s salsa clubs (birthplace of both Cumbia and Gabriel Garcia Marquez) Colombia is musical and literary in equal measures. Welcoming and hospitable, the spicy, fun-loving Colombians too may surprise you.

And while it is true that travel in Colombia demands some extra awareness, care, and preparation, the extra energy is rewarded a hundredfold.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Bogota, Colombia’s capital, has a lower murder rate than Washington DC, Caracas, Sao Paulo, Mexico City, Panama City, and Rio de Janeiro.

**GETTING THERE**

Witness the revitalization of this welcoming country first-hand, savour the meld of Latin-Caribbean flavours with Colombia’s world-famous cuisine, and climb 1,200 steps to reach the Lost City of Teyuna.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Bhutan’s capital, Thimpu, does not have a single traffic light. When one was installed several years ago, there was such public outcry that it was quickly removed. A traffic officer now controls traffic at the intersection from a small lookout on a roundabout.

**GETTING THERE**

Druk Air is currently the only airline which flies into Paro. The flight through the Himalayas makes for a beautiful and very memorable landing into tiny Paro airport.

**BHUTAN:**

Explore the happiest place on Earth

Imagine a country where a land’s worth is measured differently – think Gross National Happiness instead of Gross Domestic Product. Now stop dreaming because you are in the unexplored mountain kingdom of Bhutan. Beauty and wisdom are revealed at each dzong, every gompa and, most incredibly, in the eyes of every smiling Buddhist monk you meet. On gentle treks through remote trails and visits to Paro, Thimpu and Punakha, nature lovers, photographers and cultural junkies will uncover a purity of culture, traditions and kindness.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Thimpu’s capital, Thimpu, does not have a single traffic light. When one was installed several years ago, there was much public outcry that it was quickly removed. A traffic officer now controls traffic at the intersection from a small lookout on a roundabout.

**GETTING THERE**

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**COLOMBIA:**

A country transforming

If there were ever a country that suffered from a case of seriously bad press, it’s Colombia. It’s not well known by travellers, so the border feels like crossing one of the last frontiers of travel. Colombia is ripe for discovery, and there is a little of everything: green valleys, golden beaches and snow-capped mountains, colonial fortresses and Bogota’s frenetic energy... everything, it seems, except tourists. From intellectual Medellin to Cali’s salsa clubs (birthplace of both Cumbia and Gabriel Garcia Marquez) Colombia is musical and literary in equal measures. Welcoming and hospitable, the spicy, fun-loving Colombians too may surprise you.

And while it is true that travel in Colombia demands some extra awareness, care, and preparation, the extra energy is rewarded a hundredfold.
Lying stretched along the equator, steamy and volcanic Indonesia is the world’s largest archipelago, home to over 230 million people. In recent years, “Indo” has had a string of bad luck, from tsunamis to earthquakes, and political instability. Being a country of islands, though, it is by nature regional, and varies greatly from island to island. Lush green rice terraces line mountain sides, jungle animals roam freely, and pristine beaches and lakes abound. Behind the headlines, this mosaic of cultures remains a land of stunning beauty, friendly people, and one of the best values in Asia. Not to mention the language is easy to pick up, and the food is excellent. Selamat jalan (“Bon voyage”)

**DID YOU KNOW?**
Indonesia is huge. Composed of 17,008 islands covering approximately 1,919,440 sq km, it takes over 12 hours of flying time to get from one end of the country (Northern Sumatra) to the other end (West Papua Guineal). So, get ready to reset your watch—Indonesia covers three time zones!

**GETTING THERE**
Discover Javanese culture, travel through beautiful rice terraces, look for Komodo dragons in the wild, and relax on stunning beaches.

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**EGYPT: The kingdom of kingdoms**

Egypt is a country of rugged, harsh beauty mixed with reminders of what was arguably the most impressive ancient civilization history has ever known. The awe-inspiring treasures and stunning landscapes of this country are perfectly complemented by the warmth and hospitality of its people. You can’t travel back in time (at least, not yet), but exploring Egypt is close enough.

**DID YOU KNOW?**
An Egyptian father named his newborn daughter “Facebook” to commemorate the role the world’s most ubiquitous social network played in the 2011 Egyptian revolution. Her full name? Facebook Jamal Ibrahim.

**GETTING THERE**
Embrace the culture and meet remarkable people as you sample some traditional fare in a local village. Feel the buzz of vibrant bazaars in Aswan and Luxor, but still manage to relax and watch life unfold as you sail the Nile in a traditional felucca.

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**INDONESIA: A mosaic of cultures**

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**EGYPT:**

The kingdom of kingdoms
Small on the map and enormous in person, Iceland barely feels like Earth at all. Isolated in the frigid North Atlantic and forged through centuries of volcanic upheaval and tectonic shifting, Iceland is staggering to look at and otherworldly to explore. The outdoors provide all the action you need—towering mountain peaks scratch the sky, massive glaciers scrape the earth, sprawling icefields stretch beyond the horizon, and gorgeous fjords dazzle the eye. And when you’ve had enough, head inside in weirdly wonderful Reykjavík and discover how the people lucky enough to live here full-time live.

**DID YOU KNOW?**
Icelandic telephone directories list Icelanders by first name alphabetically. To reduce the huge amount of ambiguity, directories also list people’s professions.

**GETTING THERE**
Sleep on a sustainable farm in the eastern fjords region, marvel at the largest ice cap in Europe, gape at the Jökulsárlón Glacier Lagoon with seals floating on icebergs, and photograph black-sand beaches and gushing waterfalls around this island nation.

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**ICELAND:**
A Little slice of Valhalla, right here on Earth

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**VIETNAM**
Culturally diverse and naturally exquisitely, overtly friendly and historically rich, the curvaceous country of Vietnam has it all—and then some!
Vietnam has to be one of the most varied, cultured and exciting destinations I’ve ever visited. Its diverse landscapes, humble people and great food truly make this my favourite country in Asia.

Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, is a small city of tree-lined boulevards, lakes, elegant squares and weathered colonial buildings. The city itself remains small, charming and historic; its centre is pretty much an architectural museum piece, with blocks of ochre buildings that retain the air of a provincial 1930s French town. The people of Hanoi are also known for being more reserved – and at the same time more traditionally hospitable – than their southern compatriots.

**WHAT TO SEE**
The main sights here are the Old Quarter, the Mausoleum of Ho Chi Minh, the famous Hanoi Hilton aka “Hao Lo Prison” and the Opera House. There are also plenty of temples to visit – my favourite was the 18th-century Ngoc Son Temple (its name means “jade mountain”), located on an island in Hoan Kiem Lake. One of Hanoi’s most picturesque temples, it features fascinating Vietnamese history displays and giant turtles – including a mummified specimen – inside.

However, much of this city’s charm lies not so much in the official sights, but in the everyday life and energy of the city. Take a walk down one of its busy streets, feel the bustle of pedestrians, try one of the street food stalls and have a look at the boutique shops filled with arts and handicrafts. Every corner here offers something else to see, not to mention the friendly smiles from the locals.

**WHERE TO STAY**
I stayed at the historic Sofitel Legend Metropole hotel, which is best described as the “Raffles” of Hanoi. The historic Metropole wing contains the original French-colonial style rooms, while the new wing is named the Opera and boasts fantastic restaurants, bars and a famous chocolate buffet. Alternatively, the 5-star Intercontinental Westlake is another good choice, located in the north of the city with beautiful views over the largest lake in Hanoi.

**DAY TRIP SUGGESTIONS**
Halong Bay is simply breathtaking. I remember looking at brochures of the place and being wowed… but photos pale in comparison to seeing it in-person! A UNESCO World Heritage site and one of the seven New Wonders of Nature, it’s a must-see spot for your trip. Whilst a day trip from Hanoi to Halong Bay is possible (taking around three hours), I would recommend an overnight or two-night cruise to really make the most of this thrilling destination.

The advantage of a cruise in Halong Bay is that you’ll have more time to explore the larger islands with caves and secluded beaches, and see the traditional fishing communities. Cat Ba is the largest island in the archipelago – and what a surprise it was! Half of the island is covered by a National Park, which is home to the highly endangered Cat Ba Langur. The scenery there is stunning, ideal for a short walk or bicycle ride, with coral reefs, mangrove and sea grass beds, lagoons and tropical limestone forests all waiting for you to explore.

Hanoi is also the gateway to the mountainous northwest region of Vietnam that borders China; the town of Sapa in the far northwest is a former French hill station and is well worth a visit. Active travellers with previous climbing experience should note that hiking is very popular here – go forth and conquer Fansipan, the highest mountain in Vietnam at 3143 metres tall, which is accessible all year round. I’d also suggest you see one of its rice fields, visit one of Sapa’s range of markets, and head to one of its many smaller villages – the scenery everywhere is simply stunning.
I’ve been to Vietnam several times now and visited different cities each time; this trip, I decided to hit the Central Coast – which turned out to be my favourite part of Vietnam so far!

It’s also now a lot easier to get to Central Vietnam, with direct flight from Hong Kong to Da Nang. After a 30-minute cab ride from Da Nang airport to Hoi An, I braced myself for the loud music, busy streets and never-ending stream of motorbikes that Vietnam usually offers… but instead was pleasantly surprised to find the town a lot more laidback than the big cities of Hanoi and Saigon.

I rented a bicycle and wandered around the charming old town – a delightful 18th century seaport that is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The old town is a fascinating blend of temples, pagodas, community houses, shrines, clan houses and shops; you will find a plethora of quaint stores, lantern-decorated restaurants and tailor shops along the main streets, which makes for a very charming feel.

**WHAT TO SEE**

The history of Hoi An old town spans over 2,200 years and during that time, Hoi An grew into one of Vietnam’s busiest international seaports. Back in those days, the Japanese and Chinese came each spring, later joined by the Dutch, Portuguese, English and French – and this mélange of cultures meeting in one tiny port has had a real effect upon the local architecture and culture.

One of its most visited sites is the 400-year old Japanese Covered Bridge, a beautiful example of Japanese architecture from the 17th century. Well-preserved traditional merchant houses such as Duc An and Tan Ky are also open for viewing.

**WHERE TO EAT**

There’s more to Vietnam than bowls of pho! Hoi An is considered the culinary capital of the country, with local specialties including cao lau (noodle soup served with bean sprouts, vegetables and pork) and white rose (steamed shrimp dumplings). When you’re ready to feast, head to Morning Glory Restaurant for lunch, then Cargo Club for dessert. Challenge yourself and learn how to cook Vietnamese food by signing up for a class at Red Bridge Cooking School.

**WHERE TO STAY**

Hoi An offers plenty of accommodation choices for all kinds of travellers. There are both traditional colonial-style hotels in the old town, such as Anantara Hoi An Resort, and luxurious properties situated near the beach. I highly recommend The Nam Hai, a stylish 5-star hotel located on the picturesque white sand beach.

**DAY TRIP SUGGESTIONS**

My top suggestion for holidaying in Hoi An? Make sure you hit the beach! Most people go to Cua Dai Beach, which is about 4km northeast of the old town, but I personally recommend An Bang, a more tranquil place to enjoy the sun and sea. It’s about 6km north of the town, or a 20-minute leisurely bike ride from the old town. What makes An Bang special is the sense of community of the people living in the area. There are also a number of beach bars and restaurants offering amazing dishes – look out for Le Banyan and order the chicken stuffed with chorizo, or Soul Kitchen for a fresh seafood barbecue. There’s nothing quite like a delicious meal on a stunning yet quiet beach.

For something more cultural, take a day trip to the imperial city complex of Hue. Depending on the road conditions, you can reach Hue in approximately 90 minutes. Hue is a tranquil city, considered to be Vietnam’s artistic and cultural centre. It is known for its architectural masterpieces, including the imperial citadel, royal palaces, mausoleums and pagodas on the banks of the Perfume River. The complex of royal constructions and traditional monuments built in dreamy, natural landscapes are a marvel not to be missed.
Singapore

With Kids

By Kate Farr

If you're looking for a quick family city break that ticks all the boxes for convenience, then look no further than Singapore. This compact city-state hovers just 140 km above the equator, making for predictably hot and wet weather year-round, but fortunately, the Little Red Dot is jam-packed with plenty of cool corners to catch a quick breather. The Lion City's small size and great transportation makes it the perfect destination for a long weekend getaway from Hong Kong – so here are just a few activities on offer in this South-East Asian family-friendly hotspot.

**Chinatown**
One of Singapore's most iconic districts, the whole of Chinatown is a designated conservation area that's packed full of sights, sounds and snacks that kids will love to explore! The free-to-enter Buddha Tooth Temple and Museum is a good starting point, and the incense, chanting monks and drums will mesmerise as much as the gold-decked décor. Moving just a few minutes further up South Bridge Road, you'll come to the Sri Mariamman Temple. Singapore's oldest Hindu place of worship and home to one of the most striking facades you'll ever come across.

Chinatown's bustling street market occupies Sago Street, offering a dazzling array of silks, wooden carvings, teaware and the obligatory chopstick sets (that most Hong Kongers will probably choose to skip past). For jewellery, including precious jade, head to neighbouring Smith and Pa-goda Streets where you'll also find some excellent tailoring options. There's plenty of nick-nacks for little ones to splurge on, their pocket money on, so stock up on souvenirs.

If you're in need of a bite to eat after all that wandering, a visit to the Maxwell Road Food Centre will definitely hit the spot. This place epitomises Singaporean food court dining, offering wipe-clean tables, self-serve counters and a huge array of freshly cooked dishes, making it an easy option for pleasing picky eaters.

**Singapore River**
The Singapore River cuts right through the city and there are plenty of fun things to see, do and eat along the riverbank. Start your day with cappuccino and croissants at Robertson Quay's Kith Café, where little ones congregate in the small play area outside while dog walkers grab takeout. Swerve the tourist boats and hop aboard a traditional wooden River Taxi to continue your exploration; this bargain bumboat ride will set you back just S$3 when you pay using your EZ Link Card (similar to Hong Kong's Octopus), and offers a gentle start to your day.

Hop off at bustling Boat Quay to grab a spot of lunch in one of the many waterfront restaurants, it's common to find highchairs virtually everywhere in this family-centric city. Then continue downriver to Marina Bay, where you'll find Singapore's famous half-lion, half-fish Merlion Statue just outside the Fullerton Hotel. Another short hop across the water takes you to the Bayfront promenade area near the huge Marina Bay Sands complex, which offers a panoramic view of the city skyline and plenty of space for little legs to let loose.

**Natural Singapore**
Gardens By The Bay offers an enormous 100 hectares of greenery to explore on foot, by shuttle or – if you've brought your own – scooter or bike. There are domes, pavilions and garden spaces, all with their own stunning tropical microclimates to explore and discover. If that's all sounding a little bit educational for a holiday, then the fabulous Far East Organisation Children's Garden is the perfect antidote. There is an excellent rainforest tree house and playground, but the main attraction is the huge water play area, where children can run, splash and make new friends under sprinklers and fountains. Refuel on site at the Children's Garden Café, and be sure to leave room for afters at Bakerzin, a Singaporean dessert specialist.

Get up close and personal with the cute and not-so-cute residents of Singapore's Night Safari. This nocturnal zoo was the first of its kind in the world and focuses on conservation of the various exotic creatures that call this place home, with visitors subject to strict codes of conduct, including strict bans on flash photography and litter dropping. Walk the park in your own time, or hop on board one of the frequent shuttles that take you on a guided tour of the many rare animal species.

Another must-visit green space is the famous Botanic Gardens, which spans three separate districts of the city and offers plenty of kid-friendly fun. There are swings and sculptures dotted throughout the park, along with boardwalks that thread through towering tropical hard-wood trees. Symphony Lake regularly hosts musical performances in its outdoor amphitheatre, and make sure that you plan a pit stop at the Jacob Ballas Children's Garden, where little ones can enjoy wet and dry play areas and learn more about botany through hands-on interactive displays.

**Changi Airport**
Believe it or not, Singapore's international airport is something of a tourist destination in its own right, particularly when travelling with children. Changi boasts a myriad of entertainments for youngsters, including two dedicated soft play zones, three entertainment lounges, four toy shops, a butterfly garden, koi carp pond, kids art station, movie theatre and even a Balinese-themed rooftop swimming pool! All of this stacks up to making Changi an enjoyable last stop on your return journey from Singapore, so make sure you check in for your flight home with plenty of time to spare.
Adrenaline junkies, combine your passion for fitness and travel with a holiday that embraces your active side! FLIGHT CENTRE ACTIVE TRAVEL shares a few of our exhilarating experiences, from climbing Mount Kinabalu in Borneo to running the Phuket Marathon. Are you ready for the challenge?

By Amanda Hageman

After successfully completing the Angkor Wat Half Marathon in December 2013, I decided to set myself a new challenge - to complete the 9th Laguna Phuket International Marathon on 7 June 2014.

I arrived the day before the event to give myself time to prepare and checked into the Angsana Laguna, which is located just five minutes from the start of the race area. The Laguna area is extremely convenient, located only 30 minutes from Phuket International Airport, and offers some of Phuket’s best accommodation, particularly for those travelling with families. With around 6,000 runners descending on the island to take part in the marathon, the Angsana Laguna was well prepared for the sheer volume of guests arriving at the hotel – they’d thoughtfully provided shuttle services to and from the expo centre, which is where participants collect their race packs, buy any last-minute race essentials and take the opportunity to mingle with other runners and race organisers. Race kit in hand, I headed back to the hotel to “carb load” and rest in preparation for the big day!

As Phuket is exceptionally hot at this time of year, the race starts early to beat the midday sun and so, rising at 4am, I made my way to the restaurant for 5am – ensuring I had a hearty breakfast to fuel myself for the challenge ahead. I then took a transfer to the starting line, which had good storage facilities for baggage, along with air-conditioning and plenty of space to stretch and prepare for the race.

And then I was off (with around 5,999 others!). The marathon course winds its way through many surrounding villages, eventually bringing you back to the finish line, which is actually where you first began. Along the way there were plenty of drink and snack stops, along with sponges to dip in cold water to keep us cool along the way – a much-needed addition to combat the day’s exertions.

With the finish line in sight, we were all glad to see various tents had been set up to offer relief in the form of massages to ease our aching muscles, along with plenty of food stands too. After collecting my participation medal, I took the opportunity to watch some of the winners take the podium. The Phuket Marathon sees athletes from throughout Asia competing at every level and age group – with some as young as 70 years old! Nevertheless, one of the most appealing parts of this race is its location. The Laguna area offers many different accommodation types, including boutique hotels, large resorts, private apartments and villas, meaning that you can bring your family to cheer you across the finishing line - and then all enjoy a well-earned holiday in sunny Phuket afterwards!
Climbing Kinabalu

Kota Kinabalu is the capital of Sabah, the modern gateway to Malaysian Borneo and an exciting city of contrasts, in large part due to its ethnic diversity. Nestled against a backdrop of lush tropical hills, the city faces the South China Sea’s luminescent emerald green waters, whilst over 50% of the city’s land remains dense with rainforests that are estimated at over 125 million years old. Renowned for its abundant fresh seafood, friendly people and endless stretches of white sandy beaches, it’s something of a tropical paradise.

Adventurers flock to Kota Kinabalu to climb one of Asia’s most popular peaks, Mount Kinabalu, which is located in Kinabalu Park – Malaysia’s first UNESCO World Heritage Site, established in 1964 to protect the mountain, its plants and wildlife. Standing at 4095 metres high, Mount Kinabalu is not only the highest mountain in Malaysia but also the fifth highest in Southeast Asia, offering stunning sunrise views to those game enough to tackle its slopes.

As fitness buffs, we decided to challenge ourselves to scale Mount Kinabalu – and as our first “proper” climb, this was an exhilarating challenge that made us nervous but excited!

PREPARATION
Fortunately for our preparation, Hong Kong has plenty of challenging trails and hikes that allowed us to train hard in advance; in fact, we did The Twins hike weekly to prepare our legs for the climb! We also went running, did steps at the gym, practiced yoga to help our breathing techniques for combating altitude sickness (we certainly didn’t want to get halfway up and be unable to complete the climb!), and researched past climbers to gain insight into their experiences.

There are two trails that lead to Kinabalu’s peak, also known as Low’s Peak – the popular Timpohon Trail, or the more challenging but also more scenic Mesilau Trail. We decided to go for the first option, a two-day hike with an overnight stop at Laban Rata Rest House, about halfway up the mountain.

As Kota Kinabalu is only three hours’ flight from Hong Kong, with plenty of different carriers offering direct flights, it’s a really convenient destination for a short break. With our flight landing in the afternoon, we spent the rest of the night relaxing and resting in preparation for the strenuous challenge ahead.

DAY ONE
Our trek began bright and early with a pick-up from our hotel for the 90-minute drive to Kinabalu Park headquarters. Here, we met our guide and collected supplies for the hike, including a fruit-and-sandwich lunchbox.

Although the total distance covered on the first day was just 6km, the number of steps along the way, combined with the heat and humidity, meant that we all appreciated the frequent rest breaks. It’s a good idea to bring electrolyte tablets to add to your water, and lightweight energy bars or gels may also come in handy to keep you going.

It was fascinating watching the landscape change from dense rainforest ferns to scrubby bushes and then rocky plateaus. As the steps got steeper on our ascent, the air got noticeably thinner, and in the early afternoon we reached our overnight stop, Laban Rata (at about 3,200m) where most of us started to feel the effects of the altitude.

Those of our group who had signed up for the Via Ferrata climb the following day then headed for a briefing session at the Pendant Hut, just a few steps away. After that, it was time for a shower, hearty meal and an early night!

DAY TWO
Our wakeup call the next day came at 2am; after getting our gear ready and a quick bite to eat, our guide soon got us moving. The 2km stretch to the summit, starting in pitch darkness and up wooden staircases with just head torches to guide us, was definitely the most challenging part of the hike.

After scaling the staircases, we moved onto the actual rock face itself, where certain sections had us pulling ourselves up with ropes and climbing extremely steep steps in total darkness. Although pretty challenging, with breaks required every few steps, looking up and down the mountain and seeing everyone’s head torches twinkling in the dark was a memorable – and encouraging – sight.

With one last push, we made it to Low’s Peak just in time for a breathtaking sunrise. Watching the day dawn from above the clouds was more than worth the hard work; aim to be ahead of any larger groups of climbers to guarantee a rock to sit on at the top where you can relax the feeling of having conquered the mighty mountain. We couldn’t resist a photo opportunity next to the famous Mount Kinabalu sign before heading back down the mountain, looking out over views of Kinabalu’s famous South Peak.
THE VIA FERRATA
We couldn't linger at the summit too long – those of us doing the Via Ferrata had to gather at a meeting point by a certain time to join the rest of our fellow climbers. The Via Ferrata is a protected climb that's not for the faint-hearted, consisting of steel cables running along the route that help you up the mountain's steep face. Strapped in and ready to go, we headed to a different site to start our “Walk the Tōnq” adventure – a thrilling two-hour climb offering dramatic views of the mountain and its surroundings, all whilst securely fastened to the mountain's side.

After our exhilarating final climb, we made our way back to Laban Rata for a well-earned breakfast before starting our descent. Although far quicker than the ascent, going down also comes with its own challenges! By this point, our legs and joints were tired and sore, meaning the steep steps weren't particularly enjoyable – especially once they got slippery during rainfall.

THE RECOVERY
After two days of climbing, it was time for some well deserved pampering at Shangri-La’s Rasa Ria Resort. This luxurious resort near Kota Kinabalu's city centre was a very welcome contrast to Laban Rata's dormitory accommodation and, set on a wide stretch of beautiful beach with world-class facilities and a wonderful day spa, was the perfect place to rest and recuperate from our adventure.

Unsurprisingly, we woke the day after our climb with very sore legs, making walking painful and attempting stairs nearly impossible. Of course, this also provided the perfect excuse to relax on the beach with a few celebratory rounds of cocktails!

Climbing Kinabalu was one of the biggest challenges we've ever experienced, but it was without a doubt one of the most rewarding – and I'm proud to finally tell people that I conquered a mountain!

Hit the RESET BUTTON at The Farm

Living in Hong Kong means that all five senses are overindulged at the best of times or take a battering at the worst. From the ‘grabbing a quick drink after work’ morphing into an allighter ending in Wanchai to just the general hustle and bustle, pollution and noise; living in the ‘fragrant (or not so fragrant anymore) harbour’ can sometimes be a bit overwhelming for both mind and body.
Health and wellness holidays are becoming increasingly popular amongst Hong Kongers looking to escape and rejuvenate; although retreats have popped up all over Asia in recent years, I decided to try an award-winning old favourite, The Farm at San Benito. Welcoming wellness-seekers from Asia and worldwide for over a decade to its peaceful location just 90 minutes outside of Manila, paradise lies just a cheap two-hour plane journey away.

Arriving in the dead of night to an abundance of lush palm trees and thick foliage was a promising sign that I was a world away from the bright lights and din of central Manila. A refreshing welcome glass of fresh coconut water, served with a warm smile, reassured me even further that I had picked the perfect destination to recharge and restore. With only 32 private villas and suites dotted around 48 hectares of land, (the rest of that lush greenery is used to harvest natural produce at the resort), The Farm offers a private, tranquil and naturally beautiful setting.

There are three main areas that you can focus on during your stay: health, wellness – focusing predominantly on diet and spa treatments – and fitness. It’s definitely advisable to pre-book your medical and spa treatments a couple of weeks in advance to ensure that your first choice of treatments are available. You’ll find, however, that the precise schedule of fitness activities is only confirmed the afternoon before and will be listed on a daily information sheet delivered to each villa.

When it comes to your medical treatments, I strongly recommend that you check exactly what each procedure will involve. I booked in for a liver cleanse – meant as a belated birthday present to my body to atone for the amount of abuse it has suffered over the years! However, this turned out to involve drinking glasses of pure olive oil along with Epsom salts dissolved in water at regular intervals throughout the day, resulting in me being confined to the bathroom or laying on my side in extreme discomfort for at least 24 hours, unable to eat… not exactly what I had in mind!

Although the villas are very comfortable and extremely private, with walled gardens and pathways, I’d advise you to add a couple days to the end of your stay if you plan to undergo a full cleanse and actually experience anything of the retreat beyond your four walls! This is perhaps also not the option for honeymooning couples – collecting green pellets in a sieve from your bodily waste doesn’t make for a particularly romantic time! I would, however, recommend the kidney cleanse, which involved being exfoliated and massaged with loofah. The colonics services on offer are also considerably cheaper than those in Hong Kong and you are guided through the process in a comprehensive and gentle way.

The Farm’s award winning spa treatments are – as you might expect – extremely good, with the majority of their products made naturally from resources grown on site. Add in the different yoga sessions available throughout the day and you are sure to be well on your way to total relaxation.

For those looking to slim down, The Farm offers a detox and weight management programme which consists of a juice diet delivered to your room, along with colon hydrotherapy. There are also numerous fitness activities available that involve a lot of interval and boot camp-style training. Here, results are a given – the Organic Weight Loss Programme guarantees weight loss of one pound per day.

Dedicated carnivores should note that The Farm offers only vegan food and you are generally recommended to adopt a vegan diet five days before your visit to avoid a total shock to your system. However, don’t worry, the cooking is excellent and you can choose from a wide variety of dishes on offer to help you in your quest to get fit and healthy.

… And when else will you get to return from holiday several pounds lighter with glowing skin and shiny coconut-scented hair?
If you’re in need of a quick shot of travel inspiration, look no further than these concise insider edits of five fabulous destinations, courtesy of our in-the-know Flight Centre team. Whether you’re heading north to Shanghai’s bustling Bund, finding yourself Lost in Translation in high-tech Tokyo, eating your way around foodie paradise Kuala Lumpur, alternating hardcore hikes with beachside chilling in Kota Kinabalu or soaking up the culture (while dodging the fog!) in San Francisco, our quick-fire Q&A will give you all the basics for a truly amazing travel experience.

**SHANGHAI**

**WHY SHANGHAI?**
Shanghai is a great example of a city that never sleeps! Rich in Oriental culture but with strong Western flavour, this is the perfect East-meets-West escape.

**WHAT TO DO?**
Take a stroll along The Bund to soak up the amazing views of both historic Puxi and high-rise Pudong. Both are stunning in very different ways!

**WHERE TO EAT?**
The Dining Room is an amazing café that specialises in classic Shanghai snacks like dumplings (don’t miss the moreish xiao long bao), noodles and fresh seafood. You’ll find it in the basement of the L’Avenue mall in Hongqiao district.

**THE CITY AFTER DARK.**
Everyone eventually ends up at Bar Rouge on The Bund! The cocktails are great, the atmosphere is stylish and the view is the best in Shanghai.

**DAY TRIP SUGGESTION.**
Zhouzhuang is the best-preserved water town in Shanghai’s neighbouring city of Suzhou, and is easily accessible by road or rail within an hour or two. The quaint wooden shops, narrow streets and picturesque bridges are a welcome break from Shanghai’s hustle and bustle.

**SECRET TIP.**
Yuyuan Gardens in the Hunagpu district is a spectacular sight during Lantern Festival. Soak up the stunning colourful lanterns and floats, but remember to arrive early to avoid the intense crowds that gather in the afternoons.

**TOKYO**

**WHY TOKYO?**
Tokyo fascinates with its seamless integration of the old and the new in almost all aspects of city life, from dining to culture.

**WHAT TO DO?**
Check out the Daikanyama district for its trendy boutiques and hip cafés. The architectural contrast between the area’s traditional houses and its modern buildings give the area a truly charming feel.

**WHERE TO EAT?**
For an adventure in Japanese cuisine, Sushi Harumi offers an omakase-only menu, meaning that you can sit back and relax while the chef serves you whatever is freshly available on that particular day.

**THE CITY AFTER DARK.**
Forget hitting the clubs and instead head over to Odaiba for a classic Japanese spa experience at the Ooedo Onsen Monogatari – perfect for beating jetlag and getting a great night’s sleep.

**DAY TRIP SUGGESTION.**
Yokohama is just half an hour away from Tokyo, and makes for a great day out. Check out the famous Yokohama Chinatown before marvelling at the underwater life at Hakkeijima Sea Paradise’s spectacular aquarium. Foodies with a love for the quirky should make time to visit “food amusement park” Shin-Yokohama Ramen Museum, and the one-of-a-kind Cup Noodles Museum!

**SECRET TIP.**
Grab a rechargeable SUICA or PASMO card upon arrival at any train station. This is similar to an Octopus card in that you can use it for purchases at convenience stores and almost all train lines and subways in the city.
WHY KOTA KINABALU?
A great location for thrill-seekers and sun-seekers alike, this sleepy getaway beach destination offers almost year-round good weather, great hiking and diving, cheap local beer and delicious food – what more could you possibly want?

WHAT TO DO?
Visit the baby orang-utans at the Shangri-La Rasa Ria Conservation Centre, hike Mount Kinabalu and then recuperate on one of KK’s many beautiful beaches.

WHERE TO EAT?
Head to the seafood wet markets at sunset when all the fishermen are heading back in for the day with their haul. Pick your catch of the day, then see it cooked over charcoal for a delicious – and affordable – dinner. Seafood literally doesn’t get any fresher than this!

THE CITY AFTER DARK.
Kota Kinabalu may not be the most active party town, but the town’s bars are popular with both locals and travellers. Alternatively ditch the bright lights for a hike to the very peak of Mount Kinabalu, where you’ll spend the night camping on the summit and wake up to the most incredible sunrise of your life.

DAY TRIP SUGGESTION.
If you’re not feeling adventurous enough to climb the mountain, Kinabalu Park is the perfect day trip. This UNESCO World Heritage Site covers over 700 square kilometres of rugged tropical greenery and is bursting with indigenous flora and fauna, including rare birds and mammals that only exist within the park’s confines.

SECRET TIP.
If you’re all about the cute and cuddly, a stay at the Shangri-La Rasa Ria offers you unlimited priority access to view the orang-utans, alongside the usual five-star facilities you’d expect.

WHY KUALA LUMPUR?
Malaysia’s bustling capital offers great food, amazing shopping and stunning views just a short flight from Hong Kong.

WHAT TO DO?
Book an early alarm call and take a trip up to the top of the iconic Petronas Towers, which dominates KL’s skyline and offers a panoramic outlook from both the 41st floor sky-bridge and 86th floor viewing deck. Grab breakfast from one of the many hawker street stalls for a taste of local cuisine at a bargain price.

WHERE TO EAT?
Tamariid Hills Kuala Lumpur serves up amazing Thai and Burmese fusion dishes in a gorgeous hilltop location that will have you lingering long after your plates have been cleared.

THE CITY AFTER DARK.
Skybar at the Traders Hotel offers a breathtaking view of the Petronas Towers by night – with a great selection of sundowners too.

DAY TRIP SUGGESTION.
Take a day trip to the famous limestone Batu Caves, one of Hinduism’s most significant shrines outside of India. Marvel at the imposing statues, make friends with the local macaques and then scale 272 steps to enjoy far-reaching views of the surrounding countryside from the top.

SECRET TIP.
A Tower View Room at the Traders Hotel will set you back just a little more than a standard room, but offers some of the best views in town.
**WHY SYDNEY?**
This city is special because you have a metropolitan city that's set right next to the harbour surrounding by water.

**WHAT TO DO?**
Hire a car and head down Highway One to soak up Northern California's beautiful coastline. There's beautiful beaches and rugged scenery lining this picturesque winding road, and splashing out on a convertible will make you feel like you're on a movie set!

**WHERE TO EAT?**
Dine in the dark at Opaque, where your dinner will be served in a complete blackout. This sensory deprivation transforms your whole dining perception and is a real must for those looking for an outside-the-box experience.

**THE CITY AFTER DARK.**
San Francisco is mesmerising when the sun sets, with iconic landmarks around every corner. I love taking a walk around the city and soaking up the atmosphere by night. Fisherman’s Wharf is a great spot for dinner, followed by a ride back into the city up San Francisco's trademark steep slopes on one of the city's famous trams.

**DAY TRIP SUGGESTION.**
Hop on a ferry and head to the infamous Alcatraz prison to see the city views from a less appealing angle! Tickets to this ever-popular attraction tend to book out very quickly, so plan your trip in advance and start your day early.

**SECRET TIP.**
Driving over the Golden Gate Bridge is magical, or for the more active, hire a bike at Golden Gate Park and pedal over to the scenic seaside town of Sausalito. When you arrive on the other side, there are numerous viewpoints that have the most incredible views back over the city. An early start to catch a truly memorable sunrise would be my recommendation.
WE CARE ABOUT DELIVERING AMAZING TRAVEL EXPERIENCES