

BEST TIMES TO VISIT SOUTHEAST ASIA

by Toni Neubauer

COUNTRY	Spring (MAR.-MAY)	Summer (JUNE-AUG.)	Fall (SEPT.-NOV.)	Winter (DEC.-FEB.)
<p>VIETNAM</p> <p>Boasting coastline of 2,020 miles and mountains that rise as high as 10,308', Vietnam can be divided into several parts – The Red River Delta, The North/Northwest, Highlands, the Central Highlands, the Coastal Lowlands, and the Mekong Delta.</p> <p>Although Vietnam has primarily a monsoon-influenced tropical climate, there are variations depending on where you travel at different times. Diverse topography, a span of more than 15 degrees of latitude and the location bordering the South China Sea – all lead to varying regional climatic conditions.</p>	<p>Do be prepared for rain, even though Mar. is relatively dry throughout the country. Temperatures are getting hot in the south and central coast, while in the north and highlands, temperature is pleasant.</p> <p>By late Apr. and May, the south is seriously hot and humid, and any rain is a relief.</p> <p>Spring holidays include Apr. 30, the liberation of The South and May 19, Ho Chi Minh's birthday.</p>	<p>Summer in the south is hot, humid and often rainy. Locals seek relief at beaches, but foreign tourism is down.</p> <p>The central coast tends to be hot and dry, but you can experience serious floods and typhoons.</p> <p>The north will also have heavy rains and heat but is blessed with ocean winds.</p> <p>A few summer holidays are Family Day on June 28 and Remembrance Day on July 27.</p>	<p>Fall in Vietnam, as in the States, is typhoon (hurricane) time in the south and central coast. Serious floods are not uncommon and can disrupt travel. The north is somewhat better, but still experiences raging storms that can interfere with Halong boat trips and general travel.</p> <p>By late Nov., temperatures cool down and there is less precipitation, but one never knows.</p> <p>In Fall, Sept. 2 is National Day, Oct. 10 is Capital Liberation Day and Oct. 20 is Vietnamese Women's Day.</p>	<p>Overall, winter is the time to visit Vietnam, particularly the south and central coast. It is the driest time of year and the most temperate weather.</p> <p>The north, however, can be damp and chill so be prepared. If you are visiting Halong or the hill tribes of the north be sure to bring jackets. Most likely, you will not want to swim in the bay. Kayaking can be fun, but stay warm.</p> <p>Tet generally occurs in Jan. or Feb., but is a lunar festival and varies from year to year. In 2020, Tet is Jan. 25.</p> <p>Feb. 3 is the Day of Foundation of the Communist Party of Vietnam.</p>

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<p>INDONESIA</p> <p>With more than 17,500 islands somehow molded into a single nation, Indonesia displays no end of natural and cultural diversity. From the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Borobudur to Komodo National Park to multicolored volcanic lakes, Indonesia offers a myriad of possibilities.</p> <p>Being a tropical country with a fairly even climate all year around, the weather is divided into two seasons: wet and dry. And depending on the island of interest, the weather could be different.</p>	<p>Generally speaking, the dry season is May-Sept. and the rainy season from Oct-Apr. We can suggest visiting the country between May and September. During this period, the downpours last a couple of hours, rather than all day.</p> <p>The best months for diving off the coast of Bali or Komodo National Park is Apr-Sept. You can run into rough seas in Jan-Feb.</p> <p>Java is best visited May-Sept, when the days are hot, dry and sunny.</p> <p>On Flores Island, plan to travel between Apr-Sept for lots of sunshine and blue skies.</p>	<p>From June-Sept. expect the “East Monsoon,” which generally brings dry weather.</p> <p>If you’re looking to visit Bali, plan on a visit between May-Sept and Bali’s wet season from Oct-Mar. Depending on where you are on an island, can also affect the weather.</p> <p>Sulawesi can see different weather across the island, but you can expect the driest months on the northern region to be between Jul-Oct, but some rain Jun-Jul.</p>	<p>Rainy season in Java runs from Nov.-Mar, and East Java experiences less rainfall than the western region.</p> <p>On Sumatra, the dryer months are Apr-Oct, but watch out for Nov-Mar., when the rains could start up again.</p> <p>General rule of thumb: much of the country is in the “wet season” from Nov-Apr.</p>	<p>From Dec-Mar, you can expect a lot of rain during the “West Monsoon.” The heaviest rainfall season is usually Dec-Jan.</p> <p>Expect prices to skyrocket over the Christmas and New Year season.</p>
<p>MYANMAR</p> <p>The 4th largest country in Asia and largest mainland country in Southeast Asia, Myanmar boasts more than 135 different ethnic groups. The landscape rises from sea level white sand beaches to 19,295’ Hkakabo Razi at the base of the Himalayas.</p>	<p>Mar. and Apr., although still part of Myanmar’s dry season, and May, the beginning of the wet season, are among the hottest of the year with temperatures often exceeding 100 degrees.</p> <p>Hill stations, the higher altitudes of the north and lake areas are cooler than the lowlands.</p>	<p>Summer in Myanmar is hot and rainy, even up in Himalayan foothills. You might escape the rains in the Bagan-Mandalay area until Aug., but you can be sure the temperatures is roasting hot. Sadly, though, even in the hot rainy days, most Myanmar beaches are closed, so there is no relief.</p>	<p>Sept. is still part of the rainy season, with hot weather throughout the country, but the rains taper off in Oct.</p> <p>Nov. marks the beginning of the cooler, dry season, with temperatures between 68 and 74 degrees. You may well need a light wrap in the evenings.</p> <p>This is also the season of festivals. Oct. is the famous Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda Festival in Inle.</p>	<p>Winter is high season for tourists and the best weather of the year. The only thing to watch is river levels. The farther you are from the rainy season, the lower the water is, so boats have to go slowly.</p> <p>Festivals to think of include the tribal Kachin and Manaw Festival in Myitkyina and Putao. Also in Jan. is the Ananda Festival in Bagan.</p>

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<p>MYANMAR_(cont.)</p> <p>Myanmar is located in Asia's monsoon region between the Equator and Tropic of Cancer. Generally speaking, there are two major seasons – dry and wet and altitude, as you might expect affects temperatures. Some argue that there are 3 seasons – very hot, rainy and somewhat cooler.</p>	<p>Rains normally start in May, although there may be showers beforehand. Only the plains around Bagan and Mandalay escape the rains, often until very late summer. Mar. features the Shwedagon Pagoda Festival. Then, for fun, in Apr. you can catch the Thingyan Water Festival and get doused by the locals.</p>	<p>Although Sri Lanka is always hot and humid, summer is a relatively dry time to visit anywhere in the country.</p> <p>During July and Aug., join the locals and celebrate the Esala Poya Perahera festival at the Temple of the Tooth or at Kataragama.</p>	<p>November boasts the Fire Balloon Festivals in Taunggyi and Pyin Oo Lwin, and the Shwezigon Pagoda Festival in Bagan and others.</p>	<p>Beginning in Nov. and running through Feb., the <i>Maha</i> or northeast monsoon, affects the northeast part of the country. During these times, it's best to head south towards Colombo, Yale, and Galle.</p> <p>You can join the pilgrims for their annual festivals such as Sri Pada, the Adam's Peak pilgrimage, or Christmas.</p>
<p>CAMBODIA</p> <p>Beyond the world-famous Khmer Ruins, Cambodia remains one of Southeast Asia's undiscovered gems with amazing wildlife and romantic beaches. From Mekong River dolphins to vine-covered jungle temples and elephant sanctuaries, there are endless opportunities.</p> <p>Weather is simple – hot all year round with a rainy season from May to Nov. and a dry season from Nov. to Apr. If you head up to the Cardamon Mountains, weather is a bit cooler, but the area is also rainier.</p>	<p>March is not quite the rainy season, although you might have showers. By April, rains increase and in May, the heat, humidity, and rain make quite a team! Temperatures can vary between 75 and 95 degrees, so be prepared.</p> <p>Along the coast near Kampot and Sihanoukville, temperatures are not quite as hot, but rains can be stronger.</p> <p>April boasts an important holiday – Khmer New Year and May is Visak Bochea Day.</p>	<p>Rain, rain, rain, and watch for flooding!</p>	<p>Sept. is still the rainy season, although it begins to taper off in Oct.</p> <p>Nov. is the start of the best time to visit Cambodia, but beware of possible typhoons. They are rare, but one never knows.</p> <p>If you have not had enough rain, Nov. is time for the water festival, Bon Om Touk. Also in Nov. is Independence Day.</p>	<p>Ah, winter – definitely the high tourist season in the country and the driest, coolest and sunniest time of year. Temperatures range from 70-88, so very comfortable. This is also a good time to lounge on the beach along the coast.</p> <p>Jan. is an exciting month, the time for Chinese New Year.</p>

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<p>LAOS</p> <p>Laos is blessed with enormous ecological bounties, including some of Asia's largest waterfalls and vast stands of primary forest covering a good part of the country. Laos also boasts a 9,249' peak, Boun Neau.</p> <p>Laos is tropical in the plains, subtropical in the mountains and northern regions. Like Cambodia, it is governed by monsoons, including a winter monsoon from Nov. to Feb. that brings good weather and a summer monsoon with rain and humidity from May to mid-Oct. The hottest time of the year is pre-monsoon from Mar. to May.</p>	<p>Spring in Laos is pre-monsoon and the hottest time in the country. During spring, the coolest place to be is the north, near Luang Prabang, where temperatures range between 64 and 93 degrees. Luang Prabang is also one of the drier areas.</p> <p>Vientiane is centrally located and a bit warmer than Luang Prabang, averaging between 75 and 95 degrees.</p> <p>Pakse, located in the south is the hottest part of the country, often boasting temperatures in the 90's.</p> <p>Interestingly, in the northwest, spring can see cyclones that sweep up from the Bay of Bengal. There are also cyclones coming from the South China Sea that bring rain and wind to the country.</p> <p>Mar. is rice festival time, Boun Khoun Khao, near Vientiane. Then, in Apr., join the Lao and celebrate New Year. May is time to celebrate Buddha's birthday.</p>	<p>Rain, rain, rain, and watch for flooding! Note that Luang Prabang is one of the least rainy areas.</p> <p>Summer is also a time of extreme heat so be prepared.</p> <p>As for festivals, the beginning of June is Children's Day. Aug. highlights Boun Haw Khao Padap Din, a time to remember and pay respects to the dead.</p>	<p>As in Cambodia, Sept. is still rainy season, but by mid-Oct., the rains taper off. Late fall is the start of the tourist season. As winter nears, particularly in the north, jackets or sweaters come in handy.</p> <p>Fall is also a period where typhoons and some floods can affect the country.</p> <p>That said, from Nov. through winter is the best time to visit the country.</p> <p>Oct. celebrates the end of Buddhist Lent and in river towns there are boat races.</p> <p>Nov. is the wonderful Boun That Luang celebration at That Luang in Vientiane.</p>	<p>Winter is the height of the tourist season, the driest and sunniest time to explore Laos. A typhoon might occur in early Dec., but generally, weather is good. Up north in Luang Prabang and above, you will likely want a sweater, or even more. In the mountainous areas, temperatures have been known to drop as low as freezing.</p> <p>By Feb., the weather gets warmer and temperatures can rebound up to 95 degrees.</p> <p>Winter festivals include Lao National Day in Dec.</p> <p>Boun Pha Wet honors the Jatakas or lives of Buddha and Magha Puja celebrates Buddha's teachings given to the monks.</p>

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<p>THAILAND</p> <p>Thailand is home to mouth-watering cuisine, hill tribe people, unspoiled beaches, pre-bronze-age ruins, limestone karst islands and nature reserves with spectacular landscapes.</p> <p>Although the beaches of the south have a weather pattern that differs from the rest of the country, generally, Mar. to May is the hot season, May-Oct. is the rainy season and a dry somewhat cool period runs from Nov. to Feb.</p> <p>Along the western border with Myanmar and the northern border with Laos, temperatures can get cool and sometimes cold in winter but are pleasant in other months.</p> <p>In the north, usually between Sep. and Nov. the Pacific typhoons frequently drop the bulk of force over Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, leaving only heavy rain to pour down on Thailand. If the typhoons head south, they can pound down on the southern peninsula.</p>	<p>Spring, Mar. to mid-May and pre-monsoon season is the hottest time to visit Thailand. Bangkok temperatures can reach the 100s during the day and don't really cool off at night.</p> <p>Weather is a bit better in the northern hilltribe area, but still up there in the 90s, although cooler at night.</p> <p>During Mar. and Apr., Phuket experiences little rain, temperatures range from 75-91 or so, and it is a good time to hop down to the beach.</p> <p>Mar. and Apr. are also prime time for visiting Ko Samui and Pattani.</p> <p>Mar. 13th celebrates National Elephant Day and in Apr. is Songkran, the Thai New Year Water Festival.</p> <p>May will celebrate the Coronation of H.M King Maha Vajiralongkorn and the northeast will light up the country with a rocket festival.</p>	<p>Rain, rain, rain, heat, heat, heat and watch for flooding!</p> <p>But...in July and Aug., you can sneak off to the eastern part of the peninsula looking out on the Gulf of Thailand, and twiddle your toes in the sand and the rest of you in the water, as the area is sheltered from cyclones and the worst rains.</p> <p>In the summer, one can celebrate Phuket Yacht race week or a candle festival in Ubon Ratchethani. Aug. or early Sep. is the Hungry Ghost Festival, Por Tor.</p>	<p>Fall, after late Oct., is a good time to head back to Thailand. Yes, you do have to watch for cyclones, but the rains have largely abated. Keep your fingers crossed for good weather and consider exploring the country.</p> <p>Ah, fall...catch the Buffalo Racing Festival in Chonburi in Oct., enjoy Loi Krathong and the Yi Peng Lantern Festival in Chiang Mai or the Elephant Round-Up in Surin in Nov.</p>	<p>Dec., Jan., and Feb. are, without doubt, the best months to visit most of Thailand.</p> <p>Along the southwest coast (Phuket, Krabi, the Similan Islands, Ko Phi Phi, etc.), Dec. to Mar. are the best months.</p> <p>If Ko Samui, Songkhla or Pattani are your destinations, then Jan. to Apr. is prime time.</p> <p>Winter sees many festivals in Thailand. Dec. is the birthday of former King Bhumibol. The 3rd week in Jan. sees an umbrella and craft festival in Chiang Mai. About this time is also the Chinese Lunar New Year.</p>

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<p>THAILAND(cont)</p> <p>Indian Ocean cyclones, although rarer, make landfall often late spring and Oct. to Dec., affect the Andaman Sea area or even continental Thailand.</p> <p>Unlike other parts of Southeast Asia, El Niño brings a drier time from Dec. to Feb. along the Peninsula and hotter weather to the rest of Thailand. La Nina does just the opposite, bringing more rain to the peninsula and even flooding.</p>				