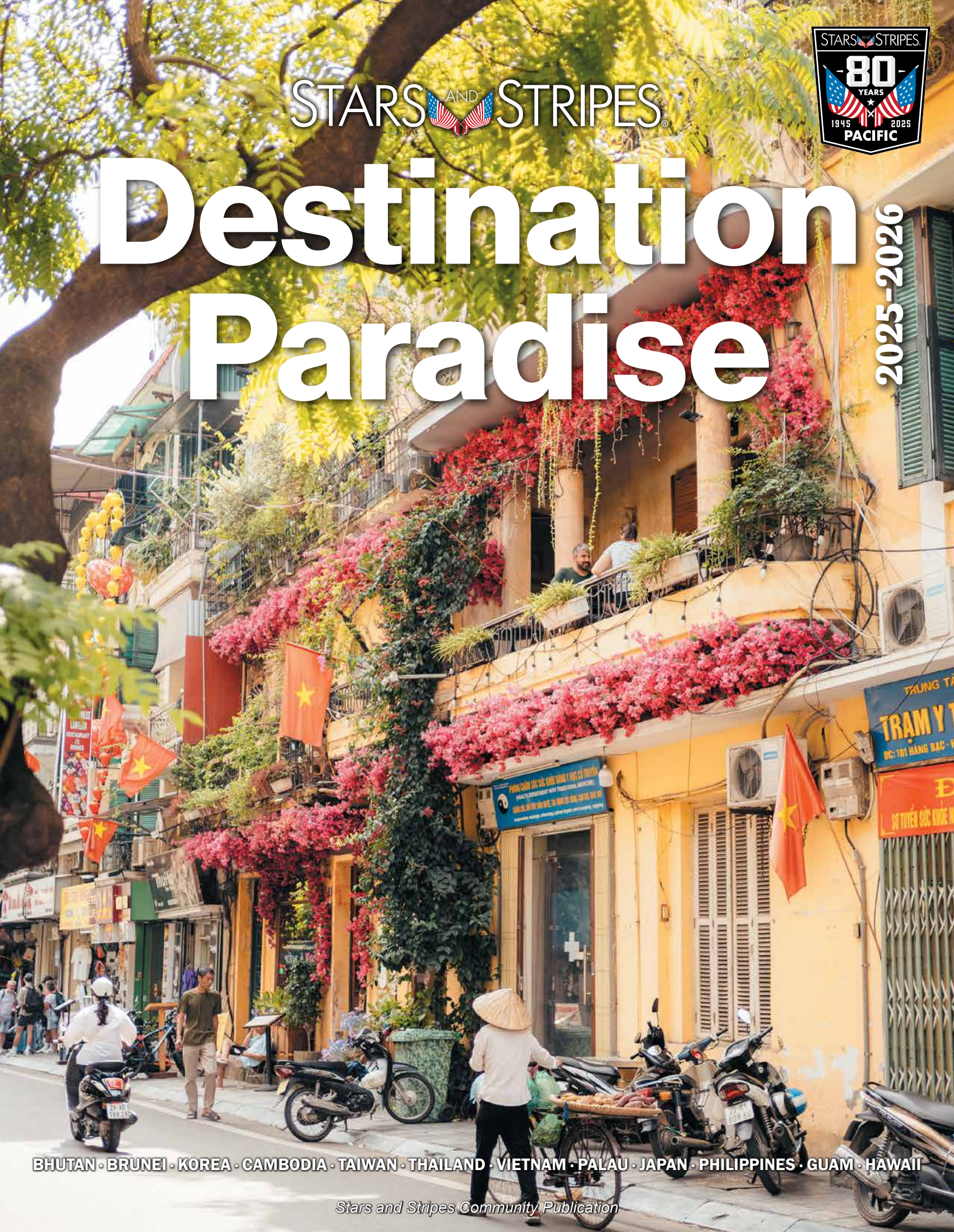


STARS AND STRIPES®



2025-2026

Destination Paradise



BHUTAN • BRUNEI • KOREA • CAMBODIA • TAIWAN • THAILAND • VIETNAM • PALAU • JAPAN • PHILIPPINES • GUAM • HAWAII

Stars and Stripes Community Publication



ADVENTURE is calling

SkiJapan.com has been crafting unforgettable ski adventures in Japan since 1996, and now we're proud to serve those who serve.

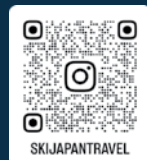
As a full-service ski operator based in the heart of Japan's most iconic resorts, we'll take care of everything so when it's time for R&R, all you have to do is show up and shred.

- ✓ Airport transfers
- ✓ Vacation rentals of apartments, condos, chalets & hotels
- ✓ Lift passes arranged in advance
- ✓ Activity booking for off-mountain action
- ✓ English-speaking ski school for all levels & KIDS CLUB
- ✓ Premium gear rentals & retail
- ✓ World-class ski concierge & guiding with Platinum Pro
- ✓ Book now, pay later

Scan our QR code and book now!



☎ (+81) 136 22 4611
✉ holidays@skijapan.com
🌐 www.SkiJapan.com





UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
GLOBAL CAMPUS | ASIA

FIND YOUR NEXT SUCCESS **AT UMGC ASIA**

University of Maryland Global Campus was founded to bring a respected state university education to working adults like you. With frequent start dates, convenient online and hybrid courses, and a variety of programs in Asia, we are committed to giving you an education to help you build the career and life you've always imagined.

Register to attend a no-cost webinar at asia.umgc.edu/webinars or scan the QR code. If you apply for admission within 30 days of attending an Intro to UMGC Asia or Graduate Programs webinar, your \$50 application fee will be waived!



Destination Paradise

2025-2026



DESTINATION PARADISE STAFF

Denisse Rauda
EDITOR

Yosuke Tsuji
LAYOUT DESIGNER

Max D. Lederer Jr.
PUBLISHER

Laura Law
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

Lt. Col. Lucas G. Crouch
COMMANDER

John Albaugh
CHIEF OF STAFF

Scott Foley
REVENUE DIRECTOR

Chris Verigan
ENGAGEMENT DIRECTOR

Marie Woods
PUBLISHING AND MEDIA DESIGN DIRECTOR

Chris Carlson
PUBLISHING AND MEDIA DESIGN MANAGER

Eric Lee
REVENUE MANAGER

Enrique "Rick" W. Villanueva Jr.
JAPAN AREA MANAGER

Kentaro Shimura
PRODUCTION MANAGER

Rie Miyoshi
ENGAGEMENT MANAGER

MULTIMEDIA CONSULTANTS

Max Genao **Doug Johnson**
Hans Simpson **Chae Pang Yi**
Benjamin Yoo **Gianni Youn**
Robert Zuckerman

SALES SUPPORT

Naoko Asato **Tomoyo Hoshino**
Yeseul Kim **Dong Ju Lee**
Noro Yoko **Yusuke Sato**
Saori Tamanaha **Toshie Yoshimizu**

GRAPHIC DESIGNERS

Kayoko Shimoda **Kazumi Hasegawa**
Mamoru Inoue **Yukiyo Oda**
Yuko Okazaki **Yurika Usui**

Destination Paradise 2025-26 is an exclusive Stars and Stripes advertising supplement for members of the U.S. military community serving overseas. The content herein is unofficial and is not to be considered as the official views of, or endorsed by, Stars and Stripes, the U.S. government, or the Department of Defense. The advertising in this publication does not constitute endorsement by Stars and Stripes of the products or services advertised. All rights reserved. Cover and contents may not be reproduced in whole or in part without prior written permission.

Email: Rauda.Denisse@stripes.com with questions or comments. To subscribe to Stars and Stripes, email: SSPcirculation@stripes.com.
Mailing address: OPC 706 BOX 7, APO AP 96301-9001



FACEBOOK



INSTAGRAM

Cover photo - Erin Henderson took this gorgeous shot during her trip to Vietnam.

Background photo - Alvin DeWalt shared this shot from his fabulous trip to Bhutan.

Bhutan	6	Breathtaking Bhutan
Brunei	9	Tiny Asian nation of big promises
Korea	14	Warming up to Jeju Island
Cambodia	18	Visiting Cambodia with toddlers
Taiwan	23	Touring Taipei on spring break
Thailand	28	Family fun in northern Thailand
	31	A morning break in Bangkok
Vietnam	32	4 top spots in Vietnam
Palau	36	Palau hidden gem of Western Pacific
Japan	38	Grapes in Yamanashi

Kid's Paradise

Palau	20	Dive into fun
Japan	20	Yummy food, fun amusement parks
Hawaii	21	Beautiful beaches, tasty food
Philippines	21	Massive mall, tasty food
Thailand	22	Bonding with elephants and kayaking
Guam	22	Cool pools, great food

"People don't take trips, trips take people."

- John Steinbeck

Over the last 10 years, I've had the privilege of exploring parts of the world that as a kid growing up in Texas, I could never have imagined. I've kayaked the mangroves of Ishigaki, huffed and puffed my way up and back down the Mars-like terrain of Mt. Fuji, admired the palatial Taj Mahal up close, clung to dear life on the back of a tuk-tuk in Phuket and even floated high above the edge of the earth over Oahu. I've devoured countless bahn mi and drank copious cups of coffee in Hanoi and Da Nang, mastered the KTX in South Korea, dipped in the stunning waters off Guam and navigated the point-and-signal method of ordering dim sum on the fly in Hong Kong.

I'm creating memories, sometimes with friends, sometimes with family, but always with myself. These are the invisible treasures I carry with me, which I'm reminded of every time I drag out my poor, battered suitcase for another trip to somewhere amazing.

I know I'm not alone. The pages of this magazine are filled with tales from fellow travelers whose trips have taken them to extraordinary places.

This magazine is dedicated to the adventures we've had and those yet to come.

Destination Paradise is our love letter to exploring new places, to letting the trip take us on a journey to learn about others, and in turn, about ourselves.

Every page will transport you to places across the Pacific. Imagine yourself sitting across from Alvin DeWalt as he retells of his 19-day excursion through the stunning corners of Bhutan. And join Marcos

Azuna and his family on an adventure to Taipei on Page 23.

Even the little ones have tales to tell. Read recommendations from DODEA students from Guam on Pages 20-22.

The stories of wanderlust and excitement are all by fellow colleagues, neighbors and, maybe even friends who, just like you, are enjoying their duty stations in the Pacific.

Are you ready to join us? Then, this is the magazine for you!

And when you're done, don't forget to check out our community papers and websites - japan.stripes.com, okinawa.stripes.com, guam.stripes.com and korea.stripes.com. These are fountains of information, including culture stories, restaurant reviews and the latest happenings on and off base.

Join us at Stars and Stripes Pacific on Facebook and on Instagram @starsandstripespacific for more stories, helpful videos and fun contests.

Have a travel tale you want to share with us? We love hearing from our readers and want to include you in future issues of Destination Paradise! This magazine, our community papers and websites are for you! So, reach out and I promise we'll get right back to you.

We can't wait to share your story! Safe travels!

Denisse Rauda
Publishing and Media Design Editor
Stars and Stripes

Welcome to SASEBO Town!



Only a 10 minute walk from main Sasebo Naval Base gate, Sanka-cho and Yonka-cho machi covered shopping streets. The streets are connected and feature an indoor atmosphere while being outside, stretching for almost 1,000 meters. There are many shops in the surrounding area, including restaurants, grocery stores, specialty stores, and cinemas with events held throughout the year. Please visit us and enjoy a leisureable time. We look forward to seeing you there!

1 CHIORI AN - Thai Food and Sushi

8-12, Tokiwa-cho

Lunch: 12:00~14:00. Dinner 16:00~20:00.

Closed. Sunday/Monday.

We do To go / uber eats .

Thai food and American Style Sushi .



2 Heart Plaza Sasebo

7-15, Tokiwa-cho

We are a Camera Shop that can print your digital images from your digital camera or various media on the spot! We are also a specialty store for electronic products including SONY. Our friendly, courteous staff are waiting for you!



3 SASEBO Burger BigMan

89-1, Miyaji-cho

Founded in 1970, Big Man is a long-established Sasebo Burger restaurant in the newly renovated Sasebo Central Park Food Court. Pets are allowed so enjoy our delicious Hamburgers in the park.



4 Specialty Shop- YY Boueki

2F, 7-14, Shimanose-cho

We sell figurines, miscellaneous goods, Pokemon cards, used records, cat goods, and hold Hollywood actors, anime song events. Thanks to all of you, we will be celebrating our 42nd Anniversary on August 1st this year 🎉 so please come and visit our store!



5 SHOBIDO

9-8, Shimanose-cho

We feature fine watches, jewelry, and lighters for that special gift or for yourself. Need to fix something? From small to big repairs, we can repair your watch, jewelry, and change that battery in your favorite timepiece, come see us for trouble free service.



6 KAWASHIMO Music Shop

4-20, Motoshima-cho

A specialty store for piano, guitars, ukuleles, and keyboards. We have a wide range of products at affordable prices. Our Japanese-made unique guitar picks, straps, and drumsticks are very popular items for music lovers to musicians. We look forward to seeing you soon!



7 NAGATA JEWELRY

3-19, Kamikyo - machi

We are specializing in fashion and bridal jewelry including engagement rings and wedding bands. We have many varieties of high - quality jewelry. We always welcome all customers with courtesy and "first-class service."



8 CoWorks24 Sasebo

6-21, Kamikyo-machi

Experience Sasebo's premier indoor golf — open 24/7! CoWorks24 offers a private A/C room with a TRACKMAN simulator and 400+ world-famous courses in stunning high graphics - **First visit: ¥3,300/hr | 3-Pass: ¥9,900 | For up to 4 people!



9 Yakiniku YAMI-ICHI Sasebo

1-25, Yamagata-cho

Our restaurant is a yakiniku restaurant featuring charcoal grilled meats that you cook at your table. We also have a wide variety of all-you-can-eat & all-you-can-drink English electronic menus at your table that make ordering quick and easy.



10 Jazz spot - EASEL

2F, 3-1, Shimokyo-machi

A long-established jazz bar that has been in business for over 53 years. Enjoy jazz music with drinks in our casual atmosphere with a wide variety each month. Check our schedule for live performances and music by our staff.



“I may have been attracted by Bhutan’s majestic scenery, but the hospitality of its people made the greatest impression. Everywhere I went, I met people filled with warmth and inner peace. They were as eager to get know me, as I was to know them.”

Breathtaking Bhutan

Story and photos by
ALVIN DEWALT

MY PARADISE
Bhutan



Have you ever heard of the Kingdom of Bhutan? It is a mysterious land and, for me, that is one of its attractions. Its mystery can be traced to its isolation, both geographically and culturally.

I’ve dreamt of traveling to Bhutan for many years. Then, last summer, Dear Wife encouraged me to make the dream come true.

So, I began researching, reading articles and watching videos. The more I learned about Bhutan, the stronger my desire to visit grew. I read an old National Geographic Magazine article headlined “Bhutan’s Enlightened Experiment” and went on to state: “Guided by a novel idea, the tiny Buddhist kingdom tries to join the modern world without losing its soul.” Huh, a country concerned about its soul?

I discovered that government policy discouraged visitors all the way up until the 1970’s. At that time, conditions in Bhutan were pretty backward, a populace undereducated, an underdeveloped infrastructure, economic stagnation and outdated healthcare.

King Jigme Singye Wangchuck came to power in 1972 and recognized that his people needed help to adjust to the modern world. Since then, his successors have worked hard to improve the lives of the people.

Today, citizens enjoy free healthcare, free education, agriculture support, social welfare programs and unemployment compensation. If someone cannot get proper medical treatment in Bhutan, the government arranges for hospitalization in India. I met students on the plane flying home to Bhutan. The government gave them scholarships to study nursing in Thailand.

English is taught in every school. Almost everyone speaks English very well, in addition to their native language and local dialects.

King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, the current ruler, is building a new, modern city in

the south, complete with a new airport. The city is being planned, in part, to help Bhutan keep its young people in the country. It is designed to be ecologically based, integrating the natural world with the community.

Months of planning

My journey to the Kingdom of Bhutan began a full seven months before I set foot in the country. I had written to three of the top-rated Bhutanese travel companies asking for a personalized itinerary of about two weeks.

Festivals are held primarily in the spring and fall and are a must-see for any visit. The large festivals are held in Paro and the capital, Thimphu.

Smaller, local celebrations are held all over Bhutan. I asked for an itinerary that would include the unfurling of the holy scroll on the last day of the Paro Tshechu. I also wanted a few half-day hikes in the high mountains and remote forests.

All three travel agencies replied with very nice itineraries.

However, Tshering Dorji with Bhutan Scenic Tours, wrote a plan that best suited my personality.

Over the next few months Tshering and I exchanged quite a few emails. He recommended a few books and videos, which really helped me better prepare for the visit. He encouraged me to learn as much as possible and to make changes in the itinerary to meet my needs. After learning a bit more about Bhutan, Tshering and I extended the trip to a whopping 19 days. I am so glad we did so.

For one addition, I learned we were going to be near Talo during their annual Tshechu. Now, Talo is a small community, way up a winding mountain road. It was a real community event. So, we added Talo, and it turned out to be most enjoyable.

Getting there part of fun

Getting to Bhutan is part of the fun. There are no direct flights. Drukair (Royal Bhutan Airlines), the national carrier, and Bhutan Airlines, a more recent private company, are the only airlines that service Bhutan internationally. Flights from Asia are limited to Thailand, Singapore and India. Due to the high mountainous landing and takeoff, only a few specially trained pilots are licensed to fly to Paro, the only international airport.

During major festivals, flights and hotels can be fully booked, so good planning is a must. Overtourism is not a concern in Bhutan. They hope for 300,000 tourists a year, but after the pandemic, in 2023, only around 130,000 tourists visited and many were from nearby India.

Bhutan strongly believes in sustainable tourism. Currently, there is a \$100 a day fee that is used in preservation of its pristine environment, rich culture and heritage. If you are considering a visit, don't let the fee discourage you. My entire stay in Bhutan, cost less than \$350 a day and that included almost all expenses - hotels, meals, tips, a full-time guide and driver.

By the way, a guide and driver are required for almost any stay in Bhutan. You really need a professional driver for the winding mountain roads. There is road work everywhere as the government has made it a priority to improve the transportation system. Guides make sure you have a memorable visit, one in which you learn Bhutan's rich history and culture on a personal basis.

Land of wonder

Bhutan is truly a land of wonder. I spent my days hiking through pristine forests, going to impressive ancient temples, visiting unique cultural sites, and getting to know the people of Bhutan living their everyday lives. Three of the nights were spent in home visits with local families. One was a respected yak herder, a legend in his community. A two-night stay on a potato farm in a remote local area gave me the opportunity to experience a stay in a traditional and ancient farmhouse. The husband was away serving in the army and the wife ran the farm. Her daughter teaches at the elementary school and the grandmother watches over the daughter's newborn.

Hotels are modern and clean and the food delicious. Lots of local fresh vegetables! Service was impeccable with lots of caring and smiles.

Today, visitors are warmly welcomed, not only by the government, but also by its people. Still, relatively few tourists visit Bhutan. In my almost three weeks in Bhutan, until the time of a major festival, I rarely saw another. And, most were Europeans, very few Americans.

Talo festival

A highlight of the trip was the Talo festival. We arrived early at 7 a.m. and received blessings from the temple lama. You see, these festivals are true religious celebrations with the early events concentrating on spirituality. Later on, there are dances and song.

Speakin' Dzongkha

Hello: **Kuzuzangpola**
 Thank you: **Kadrinchhey**
 No thank you: **Me Zhu**
 Please eat/drink: **Zhey!**
 It is delicious: **Zhimbay**
 What is your name?: **Na gi tshen gachi mo?**
 My name is: **Nge gi ming**
 Where are you from?: **Chhoe gatey ley mo?**
 I am from....: **Nga.... ley ein**
 Goodbye!: **Log jaygay!**

There were only a few other foreigners in attendance. They arrived in a bus in the late morning, stayed maybe an hour and left. I felt fortunate that my guide, Lekden, arranged for us to come early enough to participate more fully in the festival.

Families brought lunches and shared them with me. Little children would come up to me, speaking perfect English and welcome me. The lively clowns included me in their randy antics, handing me the relic inspired by the Divine Madman. I felt a part of the celebration, not just an observer.

By the way, the "relics" of the Divine Madman are everywhere. I am too shy to explain fully the antics of the Divine Madman. Look him up online and you will gain a surprising insight into the unique magic of Bhutan!

I strongly recommend that you visit Bhutan during a festival. The large one in Paro was most impressive, but the smaller

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8



①The iconic Tiger's Nest Temple at 10,240 feet. ②Traditional Bhutanese folk songs depict stories, Buddhist teachings and morals. ③Dance of the Lord of Judgement, a hunter's soul judged by the Lord of Death. ④The dog from the Raksha Maccham, the Dance of the Lord of Death. ⑤Talo Festival: I was invited to honor the Divine Madman. ⑥Ugyen Homestay Haa Valley. ⑦Choki Traditional Art School Thimpu. ⑧Young monks at Gangtey Ngenlung Gela Lhakhang Buddhist Temple. ⑨Holy Lama Khenchen Pema Sherab blesses me.



10Thimphu Dzong illumination. Fortress and Temple built in 1631. 11Bhutan Scouts Association are dedicated to serving Bhutan. 12Yaks are everywhere in the high-altitude mountains. 13Traditional practice for drying cheese. 14Young monks at Gangtey Ngenlung Gela Lhakhang Buddhist Temple. 15Three teens curious about the world outside of Bhutan.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

Tshechu in Talo connected me more closely with the local people.

Incredible people, hospitality

Now is a good time to tell you about Lekden, the guide, and Tashi, the driver. Tshering and I planned the trip, but it was up to Lekden and Tashi to make it happen.

Lekden is the reason that I was able to feel a part of celebration at Talo. Lekden connected me with the people of Bhutan, so that I was not always the observer. I am a retired educator. Lekden arranged for me to observe students at two traditional arts schools.

He encouraged me when I helped a student shop clerk in Thimphu with her English homework while I was shopping for traditional bags. He also arranged for me to meet with the three teen children of a hotel owner. Those kids had so many questions and we spent over two hours discussing life in Bhutan and the world.

He waited patiently as I stopped and caught my breath-over and over again. He encouraged me along the way, always reminding me to stop and drink water. He was much too easily impressed by my hiking level and added additional hikes. As a result, I look back now and am a wee bit proud. We made the round-trip to Tiger's Nest and back in just over three and a half hours. Wow, so speedy!

Lekden is a walking Bhutanese encyclopedia. I learned so much about Bhutan's rich history, traditional culture and devout people, not just by hearing, but by experiencing.

And Tashi, yes, a driver, but much more. The roads in Bhutan are scary and can be treacherous. Tashi navigated the curves with caution and seemed to know where every bump in the road was located, steering expertly around them. He also looked after me, picking up my dropped wallet as I left the car, keeping me supplied

with water and making sure I did not leave anything behind.

I may have been attracted by Bhutan's majestic scenery, but the hospitality of its people made the greatest impression. Everywhere I went, I met people filled with warmth and inner peace. They were as eager to get know me, as I was to know them. Its people are as majestic as its impressive landscapes.

About the author

Alvin DeWalt is a Navy veteran and retired DODEA teacher. He has lived in Japan since 1999. Although he is 72 years old, he still leads an active life.

Read more from Alvin



Plan your trip



Bhutan Scenic Tours



Lonely Planet



Bhutan Travel



Nomads Unveiled

Festivals links



abto.org.bt/festivals



thirdrockadventures.com



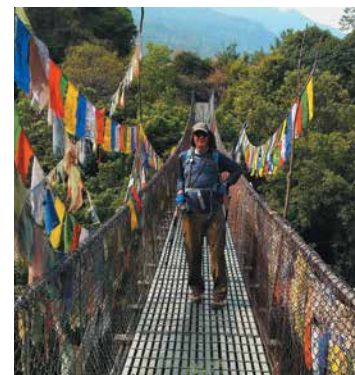
Assoc. of Bhutanese Tour Operators

Helpful videos to watch before visiting

- Learning a few words in the native language really brings a smile. Jam Jam teaches basic phrases.



- A must-see Anthony Bourdain Parts Unknown Bhutan adventure, wild and crazy!



Books

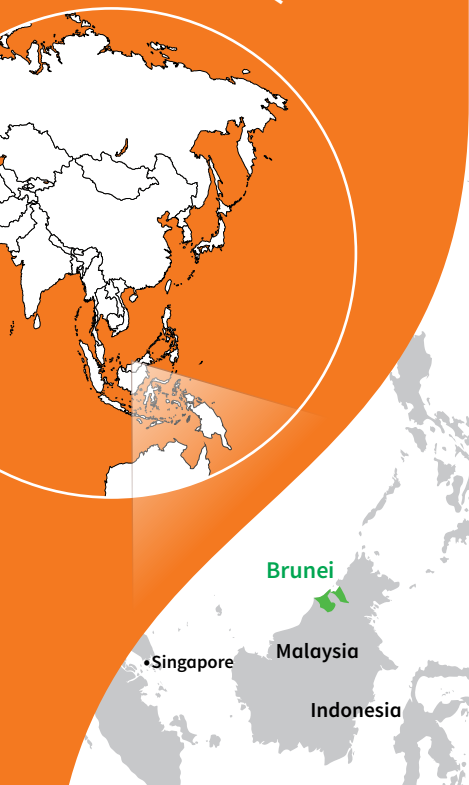
- Culture Smart: "An insight into the country's history, values, customs, and age-old traditions" by Karma Choden and Dorji Wangchuk
- "Treasures of The Thunder Dragon: A Portrait of Bhutan" by Bhutan's Queen Mother, Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck
- "Beyond the Sky and the Earth: A Journey into Bhutan" by Jamie Zeppa
- "Married to Bhutan" by Linda Leaming

“The bungalows have no Wi-Fi, PCs, Internet, TVs, radios — nothing to distract you from nature and ultimately getting an uninterrupted good night’s sleep. That’s the selling point. This unnerved my wife, come nightfall a web-surfing junkie.”

Brunei: Tiny Asian nation of big promises

Story and photos by
RON ROMAN

MY PARADISE
Brunei



In early spring my Better Half (Yeon Hee) and I, along with her brother and his wife, decided to take a Seoul-based tour-guided trip to the tiny Royal Kingdom of Brunei on the northern coastline of the island of Borneo. It’s a Muslim nation. We arrived during Ramadan, the Muslim Holy Month, though that didn’t totally restrict most sightseeing activities. Of the 20-plus countries I’ve been to in the Far East alone, it was one of 10 or so remaining to check off on my to-do bucket list.

Before going further, of my 45 countries and territories visited worldwide, let me state unequivocally Brunei has the most difficult visa-entry protocol to navigate. Seemingly endless hoops to jump in and out of, all in tiny print on smart-phone screens and then to be confirmed with your PC email address or smart phone, if your eyes can still survive the strain. Took me an hour and 15 minutes. If you can wade through this quagmire, though, your trip will definitely be worthwhile.

We left Incheon International Airport late at night arriving at Brunei International Airport around 3 a.m. and met our Korean tour guide (“Huny”) and local driver, plus six others in our group, and went straight to the Higher Hotel. Not a bad place to stay, if you don’t mind getting stuck in the elevator (I did while racing to the toilet!) or working out in the mini-gym where equipment was sparse and a good portion malfunctioning. But, overall, food and sleeping accommodations were decent enough.

Late in the morning we checked out and ate lunch at a local Chinese restaurant. (During Ramadan in the daytime, Muslims are expected to abstain from food and drink. The facades of restaurants may be covered so to appear closed.) We chowed down on an ordinary outlay of Chinese cuisine and washed it down with hot tea. But beer boozers beware: Brunei is a teetotalling country. No beer guzzling allowed. No liquor stores of any kind, tobacco distributors, and few

tattoo parlors, none prominently advertised. It’s not Saudi Arabia, let alone Afghanistan, but culturally conservative nonetheless. In fact, I didn’t see a single cigarette butt anywhere. Also note men’s shorts are prohibited when visiting mosques. Wear long pants, guys. Got it?

Five-star hotel

We would be on our way to the five-star, palatial Brunei Empire Hotel, the number one hotel in the country, according to Huny, and one of the finest in Asia, if not the world. From outside the entrance to the reception desk of the atrium, you’ll see a huge chandelier. Continue inside and you’ll walk into a magnificent marvel of classic Islamic architecture blended with towering modern Western-style white columns with gold-gilded tapestry sitting atop gleaming marble floors. Look straight up. The rotunda inside the atrium resembles the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol. Walk out the main atrium and you’ll see multiple “mini- hotels” five stories high throughout the complex.

The complex grounds look like an oversized golf course, perhaps because it has one designed by golf great Jack Nicklaus. Inside the expansive spread of individual hotels are beautifully decorated and brilliantly colored rooms. A copy of the Muslim Quran complete with an English translation remains in every room. The copy in my room was about the most exquisitely formatted and elaborately designed book I ever saw. One thing, though: It’s best not to visit during Ramadan. Some places may be shuttered, activities limited.

In the afternoon, we wandered around the complex, eventually deciding on canoeing in the huge outdoor swimming pool followed by a cool dip. It was soon time for dinner at a nearby Thai restaurant, then back to our hotel to sleep, though not before discovering a personalized Welcome Note from the Empire Hotel manager

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

① Resting on a bench at the shopping plaza downtown with a Mosque in the distance. ② Kayaking in the hotel’s outdoor pool.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

in our room. Nice.

There was time for a quick workout after breakfast the following day at the complex gym, the first full-fledged hotel gym I had ever set foot in — anywhere. After a quick box lunch, this would end our stay at this magnificent hotel.

Monkeys and crocs

We boarded our van for a little hike in Tasek Lama Recreational Park. Lots of fidgeting, spastic monkeys running wild amidst the famous timbaran tree, about 30 feet high, alongside water gum trees. A relaxing park to hike in with cool air and verdant vegetation.

Next up was Gadong Market, ordinarily open at night, but because of Ramadan, now only open for business during the day. Lots of cheap drinks and dishes, but not to be consumed on premises during daytime in honor of Ramadan. And plenty of cats, fat and pregnant, lying lazily on the floor. My wife, a kind-hearted soul, couldn't resist buying fish to feed them. The locals stared and smiled. (Though you may see an occasional dog, Muslims generally don't like them: Islamic scripture. Caveat: There are exceptions, especially among Muslims living in non-Muslim countries.)

Now it would be a long ride by Brunei standards — you can drive across the

entire country in about two hours — to Tembrurong Island (“Land of the Birds”) for overnight “glamping” at The Abode, a recreational resort overhanging the crocodile-infested Labu River. Over-the-river-bank bungalows erected atop concrete columns are reached by walking over steel docks. If you're a nature lover, this even beats a night at the luxurious Empire Brunei. Just don't expect to swim!

After unpacking, we set out for a covered boat ride in a slight drizzle. Tree-hugging monkeys were the main attraction; crocs were on coffee break. Low-hanging clouds mixed with lingering fog in the distant sunset. Then time for dinner at the open-air Sunset Lounge, also erected over the river, while taking in a gentle breeze wafting off the riverbed. Then another riverboat ride, but in pitch darkness in search of fireflies. Not many, yet we did spy a lonely crocodile eyeing us from ashore, detected by the gleam of his eye reflected by the captain's flashlight.

The bungalows have no Wi-Fi, PCs, Internet, TVs, radios — nothing to distract you from nature and ultimately getting an uninterrupted good night's sleep. That's the selling point. This unnerved my wife, come nightfall a web-surfing junkie.

The day broke clear and peaceful. There's something about waking up to find yourself atop a balcony over water's edge and looking out over a sleepy river, hardly moving. Even the birds were silent. The wife reminded me to wear long pants because we'd be visiting a mosque. When I zipped up the pants, I could feel I had already packed on a few pounds. Then everyone was served breakfast outdoors on their bungalow balcony. It was eerily silent. Used to living amidst the jingle jangle of greater Seoul, it felt like dining in a morgue. Takes time for the nerves to unjangle, hmm? Felt weird, yet good, to be tech-free.

Museum and speedboat

It was showtime once again. Everyone hopped in the van, and we were on our way back to the Empire Brunei to pick up a couple who decided to stay an extra night. Then it was another drive for a Korean

lunch, but first a stopover to feed wild monkeys at a nearby park.

No regular tour would be complete without a visit to a major museum. That was next up with a stop at the Royal Regalia Museum. Take off your shoes first. The museum is dedicated to illustrating the history of all Brunei sultans dating to 1363 A.D. The current sultan (the 29th) was coronated in 1967 while barely out of his teens. The museum is truly remarkable with beautiful and brilliant artwork, artifacts and architecture. Too much to detail here; it's deserving of another article. Take my word for it. If you lack for time, put this place on the top of your itinerary.

Next up: a quick speedboat ride on the Brunei River. What was particularly interesting was to see the sheer number of rundown and decrepit wooden fishermen's homes placed on stilts over the riverside. Hundreds. (Though Brunei is decently affluent.) Our tour guide soon straightened out my negative presumptions. Somewhat. Huny said despite the homes' decrepit veneer, the interiors are updated and nice; he's been inside them. These homes are part of Kampung Ayer (Water Town), the biggest water village in the world, and a place now designated by the government as some sort of historic landmark.

Upon getting off, we took a break across the street at an outdoor shopping plaza. Though a weekday afternoon in a congested urban area, it was all but deserted. I sat down on a bench to jot a few notes for this article. The nearby mosque's loudspeakers blared, beckoning the faithful to prayers. It was the Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque (SOAS for short), second largest in-country, named after the 28th sultan, yet currently closed to non-Muslim visitors during Ramadan.

Sultans and mosque

Next up: a lucky moment. We stopped by the gates of the sultan's palace (Istana Nural Iman), the largest residential palace in the world with 1,788 rooms and costing \$1.4 billion, for photos. The gate guard said the sultan would be returning in 10 minutes. And, no, we didn't shake hands,



3 The Omar Ali Saifuddien Mosque in the distance at nightfall. 4 A typical Brunei full-course meal at the Sunset Lounge in The Abode.

5 Inside the Brunei Empire Hotel atrium. 6 On the cottage balcony of The Abode overlooking the Labu River. 7 A vendor at Gadong Market.



⑧ Monkeys frolicking in Tasek Lama Recreational Park. ⑨ Inside the cottage at The Abode.

but I did get a photo of him whizzing by in his black Mercedes G63 wagon, driving solo. He waved to the crowd as the gates opened and swallowed up the vehicle. Huny said he doesn't ride with a chauffeur or bodyguard and his vehicle has no license plate. He owns 7,000 vehicles. And you thought comedian Jay Leno had a big collection?

Onto Jerudong Park, a huge park for raising horses for the royal family: polo grounds, stables, expansive lush green fields complete with golf course and extravagant club house and luxury restaurant. We briefly got off to walk around and pet the horses. A state-of-the-art cancer center is located nearby.

We were on our way to share what would

be our final meal for the trip: nothing especial this time, only a standard fare of traditional Brunei cuisine, and to make our way to the Jame' Asr Hassanil Bolkiah ("JAMI") Mosque, named after the current sultan. With everything lit up at night, you can walk the marbled-tiled grounds with their bubbling water fountains dotting the palatial grounds and look skyward at its gold-gilded domes and towering minarets gleaming under the starlight. The Grand Mosque is the largest in the country; its architectural design is one of the most magnificent in the world. It's truly the capstone event of any trip to the country.

Lastly, we went on another river walk, this one in the dead of night. The walkway was all lit up and offered a great view of the

About the author



As Associate Professor of English and Humanities, Ron Roman taught with the University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC-Asia) from 1996 until retiring in 2020. He has written extensive travel, academic, and political articles for regional, national, and international publications. His alternate-history apocalyptic doomsday thriller *Of Ashes and Dust* (Histria Books/2022) was a 2023 Finalist for the Chanticleer International Book Award (CIBA) Global Thrillers category and his poetry collection (*A Poetic Rhapsody of the Soul*) is scheduled to be published by Windtree Press in late 2025.

SOAS Mosque in the distance. We followed up with one last, quick pit stop at Starbucks for a black tea latte — and then it was off to the airport to say good-bye to Brunei, the tiny Asian nation of Big Promises.

Affordable Prices! We buy our meat directly from the Sasebo Meat Market. Homemade "Shige's Sauce" Prepared Daily!

- Nagasaki WAGYU Designated Restaurant
- All you can Drink & Eat Menu Available
- Child Friendly
- English Menu
- Large Wine Selection



Shipmates Program Member



Established in 1966, a local favorite for over 50 years.

長崎和牛指定店

牛味処 愛山亭
AIZAN-TEI

YAKINIKU & Buffet
AIZAN-TEI Restaurant
Open Hours: (Enter Restaurant by 21:00)
Daily 11:30 - 21:00
(Tuesday 17:00 - 21:00)
We close at 24:00!



Happy Hour On 1130~1830, Drinks 50% OFF!



Commander Fleet Activities Sasebo
0956-25-2764
Credit cards accepted





Where your Music Journey starts
Guam's one stop source
for all musical instruments
and audio equipment





671-647-6895
Local veteran-owned business
<https://americanmusicguam.com>

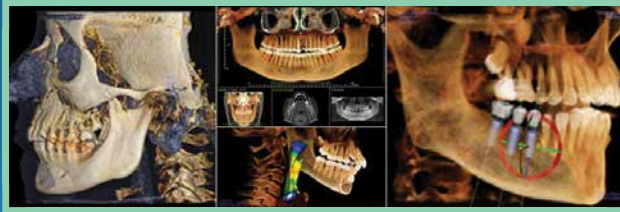




FUTURE SMILES ORTHODONTICS

As Guam's newest, most advanced and friendly orthodontic practice, Future Smiles Orthodontics is here to serve you and your family! Our team carries over 70 years of combined experience.

we accept military insurances like TriCare United Concordia



Guam's first and only i-CAT technology



www.futuresmilesortho.com

All children aged 7 and older should be seen by a board certified orthodontist.



www.futuresmilesortho.com

643 Chalan San Antonio Ste 104 Tamuning, GU 96913(671)648-9888



GUAM'S MOST MODERN CLINIC



FUTURE SMILES ORTHODONTICS



*we accept military insurances
like TriCare United Concordia*

DR. PAUL, BOARD CERTIFIED ORTHODONTIST

Future Smiles Orthodontics strives to serve you and your family's orthodontic needs. Dr. Paul's team practices the latest orthodontic procedures in a fun, friendly, family-oriented environment. As a local high school graduate, U.S. military veteran and the only orthodontist on island to have practiced several successful years in the U.S. Mainland (Los Angeles, Beverly Hills and Sonoma County, CA), Dr. Paul is an understanding and skillful practitioner ready to meet your needs. He also has taught graduate orthodontic students at UC San Francisco and other programs.



Dr. Paul works closely with your dentist to provide efficient treatment with optimum results!

Visit us at Future Smiles Orthodontics for a peaceful, comfortable experience where patients can feel at ease while receiving excellent care. We serve children, teens and adults!

All children aged 7 and older should be seen by a board certified orthodontist.



www.futuresmilesortho.com

643 Chalan San Antonio Ste 104 Tamuning, GU 96913(671)648-9888

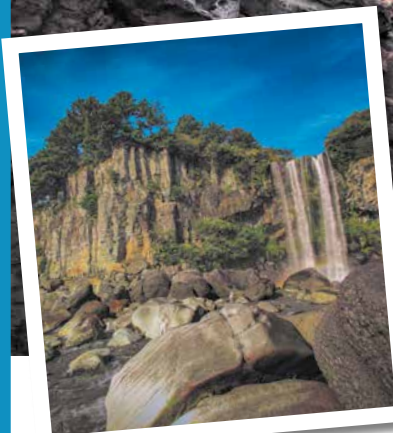
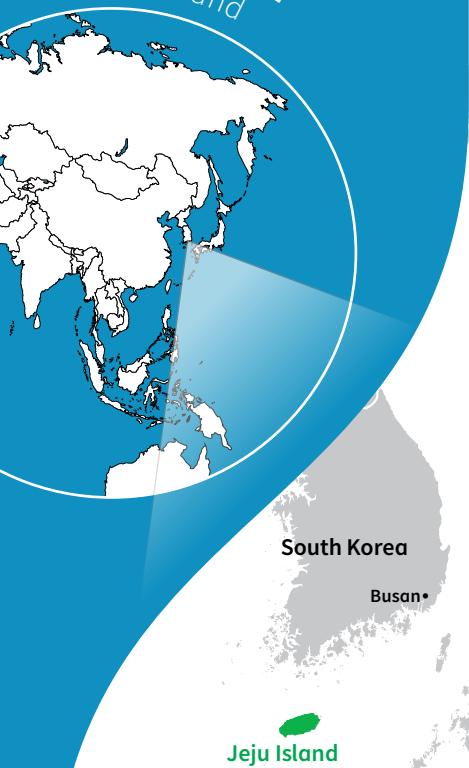


“I was so hellbent on climbing the tallest mountain in South Korea that I flew to Jeju with only a few weeks left on my 365-day assignment to Osan Air Base.”

Warming up to Jeju Island

Story and photos by
KYLE HANEY

MY PARADISE
Jeju Island



If winter on Jeju Island felt like wandering through a dreamscape wrapped in silence and frost, then summer on Jeju is the exact opposite—vibrant, alive, and bursting with color. The sea glimmers under the blazing sun, the air is thick with the scent of tangerine blossoms, and the whole island hums with life. I first visited Jeju in the dead of winter, bundled up in fleece as I failed to summit Mt. Hallasan thanks to a wicked snowstorm that turned me away. But on my second trip — this time in early May — I not only summited but also discovered a different side of the island as well. A side that felt more like the island everyone kept referring to as the “Hawaii of Korea.” So, if you are wondering what to do on Jeju Island when the sun is out and the island is glowing, then read on!

Hike Mt. Hallasan

When I attempted to summit Hallasan in the winter, snow and ice stopped me in my tracks. I was only able to reach the Samgakbong Shelter before being forced to turn around. However, when I revisited Jeju in May, I did so with unfinished business and this time, I made it to the top!

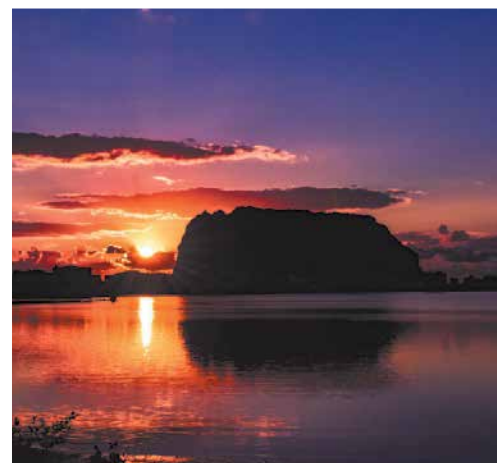
I was so hellbent on climbing the tallest mountain in South Korea that I flew to Jeju with only a few weeks left on my 365-day assignment to Osan Air Base. I was scheduled to PCS to Germany in June, and I knew my window of opportunity was closing fast. So, without hesitation, I booked a roundtrip ticket to Jeju over Memorial Day Weekend with one goal: summit the 1,947-meter-tall Mt. Hallasan. Call it a weird badge of honor, but climbing to a

country’s highest point was on my bucket list for some reason.

Starting early in the morning, I took the Seongpanak Trail, a steady 9.6-kilometer climb through shaded forest paths and volcanic rock steps. Summer wildflowers poked through the greenery and the mist broke just in time to reveal breathtaking views over Jeju’s rolling hills and coastline.

Reaching the summit at Baengnokdam Crater felt like walking on another planet — a vast, sunken bowl surrounded by jagged ridgelines, with clouds swirling just below.

After a quiet lunch at the top, I descended via the Gwaneumsa Trail. Winding past lava tubes and deep valleys felt like something out of Jurassic Park. The round trip took about 7.5 hours. This is a must for anyone asking what to do on Jeju Island in summer.



Visit Seongsan Ilchulbong at sunrise

Seongsan Ilchulbong offers some of the best photography on Jeju Island. This UNESCO-listed tuff cone is famous for its sunrise views, and yes, it is worth the 4:30 a.m. wake-up call. In the summer, the early light casts golden rays over the sea and the fields of green that ripple all the way to the ocean. As a bonus, consider hiking to the top of Seongsan Ilchulbong once you've finished soaking in the views from below! The hike to the top is short but steep — about 20 minutes — and the view is unbeatable. Fishing boats bob on the water below and the air smells faintly of salt and wet grass. After I descended, I wandered down a nearby staircase to the beach and caught a haenyeo (female diver) performance. These women are well into their sixties or seventies and dive without oxygen tanks, emerging with baskets full of fresh sea urchins and abalone. Truly amazing!

Swim at Jungmun Saekdal Beach

Jeju beaches come alive in the summer and Jungmun Saekdal is the crown jewel. The sand here is darker and coarser, but the water is clear and perfect for swimming. Unlike Hyeopjae Beach, which is also popular and stunningly turquoise, Jungmun feels more tucked away. The towering cliffs on either side and strong waves attract local surfers of all skill levels!

I spent a few hours relaxing here, alternating between the warm sun and the chilly ocean. Kids built sandcastles, couples posed for selfies near the water and I sipped a cold Makgeolli from a beachside vendor. If you are looking for what to do on Jeju Island during a hot summer afternoon, this is the place to be. It felt like peak summer in the best way — relaxing, warm and just chaotic enough to keep things interesting.

Take a ferry

Originally, I had planned to soak up the sun at Hyeopjae Beach. But, as the weather turned sour, I was forced to consider another option. Driving along the coast in search of inspiration, I stopped to photograph Mt. Sanbang. That is when a curious thought struck me: just how far south could I go in South Korea? A quick search revealed that there was an island even farther south than Jeju's tip: Marado Island.

Turns out, the Gapado-Marado Ferry Service will take you to the island of Marado, officially placing you in the southernmost part of South Korea. I bought a round-trip ticket for 21,000 won and within the hour, I was on my way! This

naturally formed island had such beautiful characteristics.

As we neared the dock, I was mesmerized by the towering rock pillars holding Marado above the sea, their jagged edges shaped by lava and centuries of erosion. Between the pillars were sea caves carved by relentless waves slapping against the shore — a dramatic welcome.

After stepping off the boat, I headed straight for the southern edge of the island. After all, I wanted to see what the southernmost point of South Korea looked like! I didn't have high expectations, but reaching the small geological marker declaring it the southernmost point of South Korea felt oddly significant. I had now stood at both the highest and southernmost points of the country in one trip. Sure, it's a quirky badge of honor, but it's one I'm proud to claim.

Before catching the ferry back, I explored more of the island for an hour or so — circling the Marado Lighthouse, stumbling across Janggunbawi Rock and admiring the wind-swept views from Saladeok Pier. Before long, I boarded the ferry back to the mainland and continued my Jeju vacation. If you're searching for what to do on Jeju Island that's a bit off the beaten path, Marado delivers something unique.

Explore Manjanggul lava tube

Jeju's underground lava tubes are cool (literally and figuratively). In the middle of a scorching afternoon, I ducked into Manjanggul Cave and instantly felt the temperature drop by at least 15 degrees. If it's too hot to hike or you don't feel like



hitting the beach, Manjanggul Cave is your answer.

The cave stretches for over 13 kilometers, though only about a kilometer is open to the public. Walking through the tube, I couldn't help but imagine the molten rivers that once carved out this alien tunnel beneath Jeju's fields. It's dimly lit, damp and awe-inspiring all at the same time! Formed by ancient volcanic eruptions, the walls are covered in strange textures and lava formations. Don't miss the star of the show at the end: the tallest known lava column in the world at over seven meters!

Visit Sanbangguls Temple

No trip to Korea is complete without experiencing at least one of its majestic temples. I chose Sanbangguls Temple because of its unique setting inside a rock cave. It's also one of the top 10 scenic views on Jeju Island.

According to legend, Sanbang Mountain was formed when the peak of Mt. Hallasan was torn off and thrown across the island, creating this rugged, coastal outcrop. Inside

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

**Speakin' Korean**

Good morning: Jo-eun achim-ieyo (좋은 아침이에요)

Let's go hiking: Deungsan-hareo gayo (등산하러 가요)

What a beautiful sunrise! Jeongmal areumdaun ilchul-iya! (정말 아름다운 일출이야!)

Let's take a photo: Sajin jjik-ja (사진 찍자 -informal)/ Sajin-eul jjigeub-sida (사진을 찍읍시다)

I can't wait to do this again: Naneun ppalli igeol tto hago sipeoyo (나는 빨리 이걸 또 하고 싶어요)

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

the Sanbanggulsu Grotto there's a statue of Buddha and a natural spring that trickles from the ceiling. This water is said to be the tears of Sanbangeok, a mythological figure who became a goddess after enduring deep sorrow in the human world.

Outside the cave, a designated floral zone hugs the cliffside and is protected for its rare plant life. The temple grounds themselves are equally impressive. I visited on a misty day and the drizzle added a mystical vibe to the already dramatic views over the coast. The climb up to the grotto was short but steep, but absolutely worth the effort. If you only visit one temple while deciding what to do on Jeju Island, let it be this one.

Pour your own beer

After a long day of hiking or sightseeing, sometimes all you want is a cold beer and a place to relax. Taphouse Stone Island on the western edge of Jeju City quickly became my favorite place to unwind on the island. The interior is full of character; green plants growing everywhere to give the space a fresh, lively feel. But, most importantly, they offer over 20 different tap beers. The coolest part? You pour them yourself! You can sample as many as you



like and only pay for what you pour. A great option if you're curious to try a variety of styles. They also serve some delicious pizzas with quality toppings. This makes Stone Island a great casual hangout, whether you're traveling solo or with friends.

A vibe all its own

Winter may have its magic, but summer on Jeju Island is all about vibrancy. The island pulses with energy—whether you're climbing a mountain, swimming in the sea, or standing under a crashing waterfall. So, what to do on Jeju Island to make the most of it all? Hike, swim, explore, eat and breathe in every second of that summer

buzz before returning to work.

If you do decide to visit, I highly recommend renting a car. Public transit is decent and it's how I got to the Hallasan trailhead, but driving gives you much more freedom. Also, I highly recommend booking your accommodations early. Summer is peak season and for good reason. I'm grateful I got to experience both sides of Jeju. The quiet stillness of winter showed me its soul and the summer showed me its heartbeat.



For more great travel stories by Kyle, check out globetrotterkyle.com

DRAGON HILL LODGE

STARBUCKS **BEST OF THE PACIFIC** 2025 WINNER

BEST MILITARY RESORT

Conveniently located in Seoul on USAG Yongsan



SPACIOUS GUEST ROOMS

Our American style guestrooms and suites make a welcoming home base for all your Seoul searching. Whether it's a short staycation, or a long stay, you will find the best deals for all of our rooms on our website.

DINING & LOUNGE

In many ways, dining at Dragon Hill Lodge is an event itself. Our restaurants and lounge celebrate American favorites with inspired flair, scratch-made quality, craft brews, spirits and exceptional service.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS CENTER

Enjoy complimentary use of the 24-hour POINT Health and Wellness Center. The POINT is outfitted with the latest cardio and strength equipment for a complete workout, locker rooms with steam & dry saunas and jacuzzi.

SERVING THOSE WHO SERVE

Our resort is open to U.S. Military Service Members, Families, Retirees, DoD Civilians, and Purple Heart and Disabled Veterans under the Equal Access Act of 2018. Visit our website for eligibility requirements.

SPECIAL EVENTS

You'll find special holiday events and happenings year-around at Dragon Hill Lodge. You never know what's in store, but you can depend on it being family-friendly fun that doesn't break the bank.



2026 Seoul Escapes

Plan your next vacation with Dragon Hill Lodge

DMZ Tours, Historical Sites, Entertainment, Traditional Market

Vacation Package Includes:

- ☒ 11 Nights in a Standard Room with us
- ☒ Complimentary Breakfast for 2 (gratuity included)
- ☒ Welcome & Farewell Receptions
- ☒ Round-trip Airport Transportation
- ☒ Tours and Friendly English Speaking Guides

**Sponsored non-DoD ID Card Holders are welcomed



Scan the QR Code for all details

www.DragonHillLodge.com

reservations@DragonHillLodge.com

DSN: #315-738-2222

OR #02-790-0016 EXT.1



PIZZA HUT

Atsugi

☎ DSN: 264-4040/Commercial: (046)763-4040

1000-1900 (Delivery 1600-1830)

Offering: Pizza, Personal Pan Pizza, Wings, Pasta, Breadsticks, Dessert and multiple drinks



WingStreet

Yokosuka

Main Street Food Court

1000-2100 (No Delivery)

Offering: Personal Pan Pizza, Wings, Pasta, Breadsticks, Cheese sticks and multiple drinks
(No Large Pizza nor dessert served)

Bayside

☎ DSN: 243-FOOD/Commercial: (046)816-3663

1000-2100 (Delivery 1130-2030)

Offering: Pizza, Personal Pan Pizza, Wings, Pasta, Breadsticks, Dessert and multiple drinks



TACO BELL

Yokosuka

1000-2100 (Drive thru and Dine in)

Offering: Tacos, Burritos, Quesadillas, Salads, Desserts, Tostadas and many other TB promotional items



LIVE MÁS

Atsugi

1000-1900

Offering: Tacos, Burritos, Quesadillas, Salads, Desserts, Tostadas and many other TB promotional items

Sasebo

1000-1900

Offering: Tacos, Burritos, Quesadillas, Salads, Desserts, Tostadas and many other TB promotional items



“Every moment was memorable, from the warmth of the people to the incredible cuisine and the stunning historic architecture that has stood the test of time for centuries.”

Visiting Cambodia with toddlers

Story and photos by
ERIN HENDERSON

MY PARADISE
Cambodia



Angkor Wat had been on our bucket list forever. We had considered combining it with our Vietnam trip earlier in the spring, but with all the stops we had on that trip, we decided to make a separate trip just for Cambodia. We spent four days in Siem Reap exploring Angkor Wat and the surrounding temples with our toddlers.

Through our hotel, Anantara Angkor, we opted to pay a nominal fee to utilize their concierge visa service on arrival (now you can complete this online). We landed and were greeted in customs by a gentleman who handled our visa paperwork while our children ran wild through the newly opened Siem Reap-Angkor International. The airport is a bit farther outside

of Siem Reap than the old location, so our ride to the hotel was about 30 minutes, looking out over green landscapes and grazing cows.

We enjoyed dinner prepared at our hotel (where we ate most of our dinners), accompanied by a wine pairing for each course, on our first evening. After a good night's rest, we set out with our guide, Sreyneang, who took us to Angkor Wat and several other notable temples nearby, including Ta Prohm, which is famous for its old trees that have roots that stand out around the temple and was a filming site for Lara Croft: Tomb Raider.

Angkor Wat is unbelievable in person. Its sheer size and architecture will leave you in awe while you wander this UNESCO World Heritage Site. Angkor is one of Southeast Asia's most important archaeological sites, preserving the capitals of Khmer Empires dating back to the 12th century. Intricate carvings and sculptures are everywhere, with many Buddha statues missing heads. In the 1970s, the Khmer Rouge inflicted mass genocide on the country and stole many antiquities and statues to pay for their arms. However, some of the art had been previously pillaged. It's still so hard to fathom that period in Cambodia's history with such an



Sights visited

- Angkor Wat
- Bayon Temple
- Ta Prohm
- Banteay Samre Temple
- Wat Preah Prom Rath
- Preah Khan Temple
- Local village
- Fair Trade Village in Siem Reap



enormous loss of life. Seeing these ancient works of art desecrated is heartbreaking.

After a quick nap for the kids and a pool break for the adults, we continued our tour. With each temple, we continued to be amazed at the details of these ancient structures. We returned to our hotel exhausted and ready for dinner. That evening, we dined outdoors at our hotel and were treated to a traditional dance show with another exquisite meal. The food in Cambodia was a highlight for both of us; there was so much flavor and fresh vegetables in everything, and bonus, it wasn't extremely spicy for my sensitive palate.

The next day, we ventured to Banteay Samre Temple and a local village in the morning, then spent the afternoon taking turns using our included spa treatments and relaxing at the pool. On our last day in Siem Reap, I returned to Angkor Wat to

watch the sunrise and then we took a local tuk-tuk driver to explore some of the local sites around Siem Reap. Our favorite was the artisans working at the Fair Trade Village and we picked up a few things to take home with us. If we had more time, I would have loved to see the floating village, which is only accessible by boat. If you are planning a trip to Siem Reap, make sure you check that out!

Though our trip to Cambodia was short, it was undeniably sweet. Every moment was memorable, from the warmth of the people to the incredible cuisine and the stunning historic architecture that has stood the test of time for centuries.

One highlight of our stay was Anantara Angkor — an experience I can 100% recommend (and no, this isn't a sponsored endorsement!). From the moment we checked in to the day we left, the staff provided exceptional service, making our

stay truly memorable. And the food, did I mention the incredible food?!

If you're planning a visit to Cambodia, consider visiting in November or December, when the weather is slightly cooler (though still very warm) — ideal for exploring temples, cities and the countryside without the intense heat. It's the perfect time to experience the country at its best.

About the author

For 15 years, Erin Henderson has been a photographer capturing compelling stories around the world – from travel and food to conservation and military life. She's published internationally and mentors entrepreneurs from her base in Stuttgart, Germany. You can find more of her work at erinhendersonmedia.com.



① Wat Preah Prom Rath. ② Touring Banteay Samre Temple Wat Preah Prom Rath. ③ Wat Preah Prom Rath. ④ Our kids at Angkor Wat. ⑤ Exploring at Wat Preah Prom Rath. ⑥ Local village. ⑦ Buddhists entering Ta Prohm. ⑧ Wat Preah Prom Rath. ⑨ Local woman crafting at a shop in her village. ⑩ Students at Bayon temple Siem Reap. ⑪ Students entering Ta Prohm Temple.



Dive into fun in Palau

By Lars Anderson

Palau is a small island in the Pacific Ocean and it is its own country. For those that like snorkeling, diving and having a lot of fun, then this is a great place to visit. In Palau there are super cool experiences like snorkeling with manta rays, swimming with sharks and visiting museums and local shops.

Snorkeling with manta rays is a truly unique experience. Riding on a boat through beautiful scenery is really cool. The boat takes snorkelers and divers to the German Channel, which was built from 1899-1914. It was constructed to allow large cargo

ships to pass through the inner lagoon to the open ocean. The manta rays like to feed and rest there. They are quite big and really friendly and they glide across the ocean as people snorkel and dive. It is really cool to see them.

Shark City is a great way to see sharks. Riding through the water on a boat to go see sharks right after swimming with manta rays is exciting. Swimming right next to sharks seems scary but it is quite fun. Most of the sharks are black tip reef sharks but there are a few white tips and gray tips.

Walking around the town in Koror

is interesting. There are so many local shops and restaurants. The Palau National Museum is amazing. There are old World War II guns and there is a bai, which is a local hut that the Palau people used to make. The outside has unique painted designs that show ancient stories and legends.

The local shops provide a fun way to experience the island. They sell fresh fruits, souvenirs, local artwork, shells and more. There is a place that makes customized storyboards. A storyboard is a hand-carved block of mahogany. They tell ancient legends and old stories.

Palau is a really nice place to visit, and the people are kind and welcoming. Visit Palau soon!



visiting Japan.

Now moving on to the amusement parks! First, there Disneyland Japan and Disney Sea. There are characters like Minnie, Mickey, Daisy Duck, Donald Duck, Goofy, and even Pluto! There are fireworks that light up the night, impressing everyone! Last, there is Universal Theme Park! There are many rides including the Minions and Harry Potter rides! Amusement parks are awesome for the family to enjoy!

There is a lot of fun things to do in Japan! There are lots of yummy foods in Japan!



Japan's yummy food, fun amusement parks

By Paige Posey

Japan is a nice place to visit. The country has great food, fun arcades and amusement parks. This is why many people enjoy visiting Japan. There are so many delicious foods to try in Japan. There is Ichiban Yakiniku, with all sorts of



foods like chicken, bacon and stoves where people can cook their own food! Convenience stores have pizza buns, KitKats, corn dogs and salads! Then there is Ube Sushi, where food is brought to you by little trains on conveyer belts. Sometimes the food is even inexpensive, but it is always yummy.

Next, there are many awesome arcades! There is Round 1, it is so much fun! There are slides, go karts, and even a bounce house. There are special Kids' Resorts in Japan, too. Grownups can even play with the kids and everyone gets to have fun together. Egu Arcade has so many unique games. There are even tickets and a jackpot game! These awesome arcades are fun to stop by when





Hawaii is a fun island in the Pacific Ocean. It has many beautiful beaches. There are a lot of great tasting foods in Hawaii. The zoo has so many unique animals.

Hawaii is fun because there are so many activities at the beaches. There are big, amazing waves where people

**Hawaii's beautiful beaches,
tasty food**
By Finn Anderson

can surf. The North Shore of Oahu is one of the best places to surf in Hawaii. People can look for shiny shells to collect in the sand as they take a beach walk. There are many snorkel locations to see beautiful fish in the clear water! A walk in the sand during beautiful sunsets is a great

ending to every day.

The food in Hawaii is awesome. The shaved ice is so good! There are many flavors of ice in a paper cone, one of the most popular is banana. Hawaii grows so many pineapples, and they taste super good. Every corner has delicious crepe places to eat. Hawaii also has great ice cream. The top flavor is pineapple.

The Honolulu Zoo has so many unique animals! The best animals are the axolotl and snakes! There are some birds that are not in cages, one of them is the peacock. People would see them at the playground. There are aardvarks, fennec foxes, tigers and the world's largest salamander.

Overall, Hawaii is a fun island in the Pacific Ocean to enjoy. It's great for beach walks, surfing and sunsets. There are so many great tasting foods to try on the island. The zoo has so many unique and friendly animals. Hawaii is definitely a fun trip!

Paradise



**Massive mall,
tasty food in Philippines**
By Naia Duenas

Imagine you are in a massive mall shopping and eating unique food. In the Philippines, there are a lot of fun activities to do. The Philippines is a great place to travel and explore.

The Philippines is known for their big malls. The biggest mall in the world is the Mall of Asia, which is in

Manila. Malls in the Philippines have great things to do. There are restaurants, stores, museums, carnivals, ice skating, bowling, laser tag, archery, and claw machines! There are bakeries, cafés and dessert places.

When you go to the Philippines, there is Filipino food. There is

lumpia, pancit, sinigang, barbecue sticks, adobo and lechon kawali. Lumpia has meat, vegetables, soy sauce and more. Pancit is a kind of noodle that is brown and has a tangy and savory flavor. Sinigang is a sour soup with potato, cabbage, meat and soup. Barbecue sticks are cooked chicken on a long stick. Adobo is chicken with sauce and sometimes boiled eggs. Lechon kawali is a baked pig with a kind of gravy sauce. All these foods are so delicious!

Shopping in malls in Manila is enjoyable because there are so many stores to choose from. There are bookstores, toy shops, clothing boutiques and grocery markets. When you buy goods from stores you use pesos.

The Philippines is an amazing place to visit. There are a lot of fantastic activities to do there.





**Bonding with elephants,
kayaking in Thailand**
By Lars Anderson

Sea kayaking through lagoons, hiking with elephants and tasting unique local food are just a few of the amazing things to do in Thailand. Did you know that they make paper out of elephant poop? Have you ever climbed up a waterfall? There are many exciting locations and activities in Thailand!

The John Gray Sea Kayaking Tour in Phuket goes through lagoons on the Andaman Sea. It is a cool experience. The kayak enters caves that are filled with bats everywhere, eventually opening into a clearing. When the tide is low, there are hundreds of mudskippers and crabs walking across all the mud. Up high, monkeys are climbing on walls of trees all around. Toward the end of the boat ride, krathongs, floating

baskets out of flowers and leaves, are made with the crew. Candles placed in the basket lit

on fire and released onto the water. The tradition is to make a wish, let go of one's hatred and anger and to pay respect to the water spirits. Bioluminescence, an organism that produces a chemical reaction lighting up the water, is visible in the caves from the kayak at night.

In Chiang Mai, hiking alongside elephants on a trail is a unique experience only offered in a few places around the world. Rice and grain balls are made for the elephants and fed to them, along with sugar cane and bananas. Walking alongside the elephants on

the trail is fun but watch out for their poop! In town, they take the dried poop and make it into paper. The paper making process is shown at the Elephant Poopoo Paper Park. At the end of the hike with the elephants there is a waterfall. The water is really cold. There is time to clean and brush them. The elephants spray water. There is a large treehouse nearby where you eat lunch. The views are great, and the treehouse is so big it has multiple rooms.

Thailand has lots of unique, amazing food. The markets have lots to try, like fried scorpion. It is super salty. There are also crepes, which are a favorite. One of the really good food places is CocoMango with a variety of mango and coconut desserts. Cooking class is a great way to learn and try many local foods like pad Thai, spring rolls, curry, tom yum soup and mango sticky rice.

Overall, Thailand has many great things to see and do. There are adventures sea kayaking, hiking with elephants, climbing up a waterfall, and cooking local food. Plus, there are so many unique things to see like mudskippers, monkeys, and bioluminescence!



Kids' Paradise



**Cool pools, great food
in Guam**
By Brynn Badua

Guam is a wonderful place for tourists and locals to visit and there are so many places to experience. There are a lot of things to do on Guam to help keep cool and delicious places to eat.

These places will help you enjoy your time on Guam.

There are many places you can go on Guam to stay cool, including the pools. The pools I like best are ones with water slides! You could go to Onward Water Park and you could also stay there if you are a tourist or are on a staycation. It is a super fun place to swim with lots of water rides. The next fun place you and your family could go visit is Hyatt. It is also a hotel and you could also swim in their swimming pool. Another fun family place is PIC. It has swimming pools and water slides, which are really fun to slide down.

Another fun thing you could do on Guam is eat yummy and delicious food. One place to go out and eat is

at the food trucks. Some types of food they have are barbecue, tacos, fun drinks, funnel cake and more. They are next to Chamorro Village and they are there every Thursday. The lines are always super long, but it is worth it! You could also go to Caliente and try their yummy Mexican food. If you are lucky, there will be available because they are always really busy!

Another fun place you could go and eat is Jamaican Grill. It serves barbecue, ribs, chicken, fish and burgers with sides. It is open for pick up or dine in at the restaurant. Guam is a great place to enjoy food.

Having the opportunity to explore Guam is amazing. You may even come across other fun places on Guam and make many memories.



“We witnessed Taiwan firsthand on our first international trip since arriving to our duty station. The experience was nothing less than spectacular for its rich culture, amazing cuisine and hospitality.”

Touring Taipei on spring break

Story and photos by
MARCOS AZUNA

MY PARADISE
Taipei



When a coworker who had traveled to Taipei for work remarked that the Taiwanese were even more welcoming than the Okinawans, I was in disbelief. I thought, “Who can be more welcoming and family oriented than the Ryukyu people of Okinawa?”

That year was 2022, when our family of six had lived in Okinawa for less than a year and we had a newfound fondness for our home away from home in Japan. Three years later, in April 2025, we witnessed Taiwan culture firsthand on our first international trip since arriving to our duty station. The experience was nothing less than spectacular for its rich culture, amazing cuisine and hospitality. Look no further for your destination paradise and read about our adventures and new discoveries on our family getaway!

Why Taipei?

Inspired by another Destination Paradise article, Taipei had been on my radar for some time. Among many historically significant events in Taiwan's history, Japan colonized Formosa and occupied the island for 50 years, from 1895 to 1945, leaving signs and artifacts that can be seen today. Practically speaking, there isn't an international destination closer in proximity to Okinawa than Taiwan, as it is only an hour and a half from Okinawa by plane.

What's more, an affordable Taipei tour package through an on-base travel agency during spring break made this an attractive offer. Taipei

is just as humid and typhoon prone as Okinawa, so the time of year in early April could not have been better for us to travel. The cool nights and mild days simplified the packing compared to destinations having different climates. The rain is just as prevalent as Okinawa, if not more so.

Neighborhoods and night markets

Based outside of The Riviera Hotel on the north end of central Taipei, Shilin was a natural choice for our first stop. We rode two stops on the MRT rail to the The Shilin Official Residence for a walk on some of the most beautiful gardens in all of Taipei. Aside from the main building of Chiang Kai-Shek that charges a small fee for entry, touring the gardens is free and your time can be scaled from an hour to half a day or more for those who enjoy the floral diversity that Taiwan offers.

While strolling through these magnificent gardens, I imagined being one of Chiang Kai-Shek's special visitors (Richard M. Nixon and Dwight D. Eisenhower are said to have visited) attending a service at Victory Chapel and marveling at the rich and complex Eastern culture. There are ample fishponds, statues and other garden fixtures to entertain children young and older. After working up an appetite, I was proud that our proper planning had put us near our next stop, the Shilin Night Market.

If you only spend one night in Taipei and want to explore new foods, Taiwanese culture and bargain shop, a visit to one of the many night markets scattered throughout the city is a must. The Shilin Night Market ranks among the top amongst international visitors judging by the number of online reviews. We arrived around 5 p.m. on a Wednesday to avoid the heavier crowd, which paid off initially. The scene can be chaotic with tourists meandering through stalls upon stalls of food vendors among a sea of pedestrians and mopeds.

However, the new and interesting culinary delicacies that await are your reward, with each encounter leaving you intrigued for more. My

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23

favorites were a plate of slow roasted King Oyster mushrooms with your choice of seasonings and a strawberry shake from a busy intersection. Many of the vendors give out samples, providing even more opportunities to sample delicious foods.

Beyond Shilin, the historic Dadaocheng neighborhood provided a good contrast to the much more liberal Xaimen neighborhood. Both are on the west side of the city and accustomed to seeing many visitors.

By coincidence we walked into a red brick building near the Xaimen MRT station, only to learn about this well-preserved public market and relic of the Japanese occupation: The Red House. In addition to being a "creative boutique" selling all kinds of products from small businesses, The Red House is a remarkable example of cultural preservation offering creative seminars, guided tours, craft workshops, as well as theatrical performances.

A brief tour of the building was a much welcome reprieve from the international department stores that can be found in Xaimen.

Our hotel (The Riviera Hotel) was just south of the Keelung River, and within walking distance from the Shuangcheng Street Night Market that supplied our tea concoctions, Taiwanese doughnuts and city park for rambunctious kiddos. The Yuanshan MRT station was also 15 minutes from our hotel, giving us the added benefit of discovering unplanned venues and shops. One such venue was the Taipei Expo Farmer's Market, held at the EXPO Dome, where we browsed dozens of various goods suitable for every member of our family.

City tour

National Palace Museum is on par with the Louvre in Paris or the Smithsonian Institution in the U.S. Known as one of the biggest collections of art, including the famed Jadeite Cabbage, which is a beautifully sculpted head of cabbage crafted from jade stone. The one and a half hours allocated for this national treasure is woefully inadequate but provided a good taste for what to expect in the event we return or can make it to the southern branch location in Taibao City.

Limit your visit to a select number of exhibits, or focus on a period that interests you, but make sure to allow time for the impressive gift shop.

The Chaing Kai-Sheck Memorial grounds are beautiful and worth a tour, especially to see the changing of the guard that happens daily. We made a brief but insightful visit to



Banka Lungshan Temple before touring Taipei 101.

Spring flowers in Taipei's central park

A packed city tour fueled my desire for a more relaxed agenda on our free day. A visit to Daan Park in the heart of the city had all the remedies for our travel-weary family on the last full day of the trip. The natural space (and fresh coffee aroma from the café) hits you before you can even step foot outside of the MRT station at this iconic park.

Our first encounter at the park was with a small group that offered us in-line skating lessons at the outdoor skate rink before we could even reach the playground. Despite a light drizzle, the kids got their playground fix while my wife previewed the hydrangeas display in this arboretum that awaited us. Had I not seen various advertisements for the city's Flower Festival that was in full swing, I might have been completely surprised by the scale and detail that went into the flower displays showcased at Daan Park.

Large sculptures, permanent and temporary fixtures of characters (e.g. Taipei's iconic bear) and the like, graced thousands of colorful hydrangeas in this floral exposition that attracted visitors of all ages. Between the fishponds, flocks of herons, turtles, gigantic leaves, musicians, sculptures and squirrels (Okinawa only has mongoose and they're rarely seen), Daan Park provided more than enough to keep the family entertained.

Maybe the best part about this park is its proximity to a Din Tai Fung restaurant, only a short walk from the MRT station and park!

Amazing dumplings

It was our third attempt by the time we ate at a Din Tai Fung, the only restaurant on my agenda for this trip. The Taipei 101 Din Tai Fung had stopped taking new



reservations by the time we arrived and the other location only served takeout customers. Regardless of the location, any Din Tai Fung is bound to have a wait time before you can be seated. After our hour wait, where our kids made friends with a South Korean couple, we finally got to indulge in dumpling delicacies to our hearts' (and stomachs) content.

Unlike the food stalls or local restaurant where one must be familiar enough with the dish to know how to consume it and what toppings to apply, each Din Tai Fung is equipped with signage and knowledgeable staff to guide the uninitiated when it comes to this staple of eastern cuisine. We ordered a nice variety of buns, dumplings and Xiao Long Bao types, including a signature Truffle & Kurobuta Pork favorite, served with tasty sides. The complimentary hot tea, the way the staff prepared the condiments and the delivery of children's bowls and utensils without me having to ask, all contributed to a most delightful culinary experience that is unmatched by other restaurant chains. Even if you don't make it to Taiwan, you can find a Din Tai Fung near you as they are an international chain!

Other foods to explore, or that Taiwan is known for: Stinky Tofu, you either love it or hate it. I don't see how anyone can like the smell, though I finished a whole serving and liked it. Soybean milk and the wide variety of food that accompany the shops where it's sold; the soy milk comes in salty or sweet varieties. The tea culture is just as big as anywhere else in Asia. As the birthplace of boba tea, you can pick from a multitude of concoctions made by hundreds of vendors in this thriving industry. I prefer the traditional Teiguanyin and Wenshan Baozhong teas that are famous in Taipei. Taipei uses the Michelin star rating system for its restaurants, also known by the moniker: Bib Gourmand. Use these terms when searching for good food,

but know that the best sign for quality food is a long queue.

Excursion outside the city

Our tour package included a full-day excursion to a mining town turned sky lantern haven in Pingxi Old Street, then to a fishing village turned into Yehliu Geopark. Between these two main stops, we toured Old Street in Jiufen, a pedestrian packed shopping corridor at several hundred feet elevation with plenty of vistas. The location was the inspiration for the movie "Spirited Away."

This packed agenda made for a long day, but I must go with the fun and fabulous views at Yehliu Geopark as our top destination on the excursion from Taipei. Trying our hand at calligraphy on paper lanterns before releasing them into the air from an old railroad was a close second.

The value of having a tour guide was made evident among the multitude of tourists' shops. The cultural insights freely offered by our local guide made the trip more enjoyable for a guy like me who's interested in history.

Return to Taiwan?

Trips to the Taipei Zoo, an art community in Treasure Hill and a gorge on the east

coast of Taipei named Taroko (to name a few), unfortunately did not materialize on this trip. It's funny how everywhere I travel, there is more that I want to return to see. I feel like this is especially true at a place where there are good vibes felt between me or my family and the locals.

During our brief stay in Taipei, I found that Taiwanese are often more than willing to share an aspect of their culture or offer to help willingly and cheerfully. Such was the case when I was browsing through the language learning section of an Eslite Bookstore and a schoolteacher offered an online resource for learning Mandarin as an alternative to the pricier (and more confusing) bookstore options.

Feeling welcomed and appreciated as a guest is typically a good sign that the host would like to see you return. After visiting Taipei, I feel like we were treated as welcomed guests as opposed to just mere visitors. For those looking for more reasons to visit Taiwan, be sure to allow time for exploring one of the waiting lounges at Taoyuan International Airport featuring Taiwanese culture or industry. The Hello Kitty, MIT Bike and "The Glory of High-tech" waiting rooms, to name a few, are mentioned to spark your interest.

Don't delay, there are good vibes to be




felt, great food and a wonderful culture to explore in Taipei. Could you ask for more in an international destination so close to home?


Editor's Note:

Marcos and his family will complete their final tour of active duty with the Marines this fall and plan to separate in Japan upon his retirement. They wish "to continue serving as part of the military community on Okinawa and hold on to this lifestyle for just a little while longer."


Beautiful Yeongwol Awaits!




MORE INFO




The 26th Kim Sat-Gat Cultural Festival
2025.10.17-19




King Danjong Culture Festival




Donggang Raft Festival



Donggang International Photo Festival

 @ytcf_official

 www.ywcf.or.kr





Ebina Tel. 046-292-4286

3 minutes walk from "Ebina" station of Odakyu Line and Sotetsu Line

VINAWALK 6-Bankan 1F, 1-18-1, Chuo, Ebina-shi, Kanagawa-ken



Shibuya Tel.03-5459-7751

Shinagawa Takanawa Tel.03-5798-3501

Shinagawa Konan Tel.03-6718-2761

Ikebukuro Tel.03-5928-1391

Makuhari Tel.043-213-3256

Maihama Tel.047-700-9031

www.outbacksteakhouse.co.jp/en

My Journey to Hawaii's Volcanic Paradise. Kilauea Military Camp!

Stepping out of my one-bedroom cabin, I head to the Java Café to savor a cup of coffee goodness as the crisp morning air embraces me. Just across the road, not fifty feet away, a small gaggle of Hawaiian Nēnē geese leisurely forage across the dewy lawn. A smile tugs at my lips as I watch these exquisite, protected creatures go about their morning ritual, undisturbed by my presence. Suddenly, the first golden rays of sunlight crest over the towering ohia trees, igniting the sky in a breathtaking symphony of amber, crimson, and tangerine hues. Savoring the rich, bold notes of my coffee, I stroll onto the sprawling lawn, giving my Nēnē companions a respectful berth while reflecting on my enchanting arrival at Kilauea Military Camp.



Just yesterday, on a tranquil Friday afternoon, I arrived in the charming seaside town of Hilo, where I swiftly procured my rental car and began my ascent into the ethereal landscapes of Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park. Perched at an elevation of 4,000 feet above sea level, KMC has stood as a serene retreat since the early 1900s. Upon arrival, I was met with the warm smile of the front desk, who ensured a seamless check-in, providing a thorough briefing on the camp's abundant amenities before sending me off to my cozy cabin. After refreshing myself from the long journey, I meandered over to the Crater Rim Café for a well-earned meal. The cool mountain air carried a whisper of nostalgia as I admired the historic buildings nestled amidst the ohia trees, their delicate lehua blossoms a striking contrast against



the deep greens of the foliage. The architecture exuded a captivating duality—part Army camp, part mountain sanctuary. Entering the café, I was greeted with another warm smile from the cashier, who enthusiastically recommended the Beer Battered Ono Fish and Chips special. The meal was nothing short of delightful—crisp, golden fillets accompanied by a fresh salad, a refreshing beverage, and a delectable dessert, all complemented by a final, aromatic cup of coffee.

As I lingered over my drink, soft strains of music drifted from somewhere nearby. Curious, I inquired with the cashier, who pointed toward an exquisite stained-glass door. "Just through there," she said with a knowing smile, "you'll find the Lava Lounge."

Drawn by intrigue, I followed her direction and stepped into a cozy, pub-like sanctuary brimming with life. A welcoming hum of conversation filled the air as guests sat at the U-shaped bar and around intimate tables and booths, some indulging in burgers, quesadillas, and fries. Families, couples, and solo travelers alike reveled in the warmth of the space, all under the gentle embrace of a small band playing contemporary Hawaiian melodies. The bartender caught my eye and, after a brief and amiable exchange, suggested a Longboard. As I took my first sip of the smooth, golden ale, a deep sense of contentment washed over me, my travel fatigue dissolving into the harmony of the music and the convivial ambiance.

Before retreating to my cabin, I remembered the friendly front desk clerk's mention of the camp store. A short walk from the Lava Lounge led me to the KMC General Store, where I found an impressive selection of snacks, beverages, groceries, and charming souvenirs. After selecting a few treats, flavored water, and a bundle of firewood for my cabin's inviting fireplace, I made my way to

the register. The affable store clerk engaged me in lighthearted conversation, thoughtfully reminding me to grab a lighter—a simple yet invaluable suggestion for my evening plans.

Back in the comfort of my cabin, I set about building a cozy fire, the flickering flames casting a golden glow across the room as I settled in with a movie. At last, exhaustion crept over me, and I surrendered to the plush embrace of my bed, pulling the warm covers snugly around me. My final thought before sleep claimed me was simple yet sincere: "What a perfect ending to a long day of travel."

My reverie is gently interrupted by the familiar honking of the Nēnē geese nearby. Lifting my



gaze, I am met with an exquisite sight—a radiant rainbow, luminous against the morning mist, arching gracefully over the parade field. Beneath it, the American flag flutters resolutely at the peak of the flagpole, kissed by the light morning breeze. A deep sense of serenity washes over me, and a smile spreads across my face as I revel in this perfect moment. I am profoundly grateful for my decision to explore this hidden gem—Kilauea Military Camp, a place where history, nature, and tranquility intertwine in the most enchanting of ways. ALOHA!

Visit www.kilaueamilitarycamp.com.
Facebook: @KMCHAWAII
Instagram: @kmcvolcano

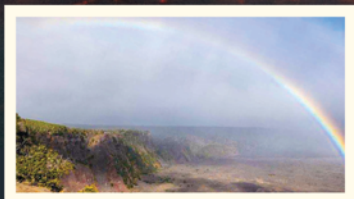


KILAUEA MILITARY CAMP

KMC

ISLAND OF HAWAI`I

JOURNEY TO ADVENTURE - EMBRACE SERENITY



LOCATED IN THE HEART OF HAWAI`I VOLCANOES NATIONAL PARK!

Discover Adventure at Kilauea Military Camp!

Escape to rustic charm at our historic military camp oasis on the Big Island of Hawai`i. Unwind in cozy lodgings, savor delicious dining at our Café, and explore our beloved Hawai`i Volcanoes National Park.

Your Adventure Awaits:

- Cozy Cabins & Lodging
- Delicious Dining
- Hike Crater Rim Trails
- Play: Bowl, Pickle Ball and more
- Tour Hawai`i Island
- Plan your Wedding or other event
- Relax at our Bar and Grill
- On-Site General Store

Reservations:

BOOK ONLINE:

www.kilaueamilitarycamp.com

Phone:

+1 (808)-967-8333

Address:

P.O. Box 48
99-252 Crater Rim Drive
Hawai`i National Park, HI 96718

Email:

usarmy.kmc-reservations@army.mil

BOOK ONLINE NOW AND GET 15% OFF YOUR LODGING!

USE PROMO CODE: SNS15



KILAUEA MILITARY CAMP
Proudly Serving Those Who Serve Since 1916
FAMILY • MORALE • WELFARE • RECREATION



PAGE: KMCHAWAII
GROUP: hellokilauea



kmcvolcano



SCAN ME

“The food was outstanding, the people were incredibly welcoming, and the scenery was unbeatable.”

Family fun in northern Thailand

Story and photos by
ERIN HENDERSON

MY PARADISE
Thailand



Five days in northern Thailand over Thanksgiving was the perfect amount of time to experience many of the highlights, including an overnight in Chiang Rai. November in northern Thailand typically has milder temperatures, which makes it the perfect time of year to visit.

We arrived late in the evening on the first day and took a shuttle van from the airport (they provided car seats) that our Airbnb host had arranged for us. Upon arrival at the Airbnb, we put the kids to bed (it was the best little farm stay) and then were served a welcome dinner that was one of our top meals of the week. They served yellow chicken curry packed with so much flavor we were blown away. The food was phenomenal and the best way to kick off our time in Chiang Mai.

Day 1: Ancient Town

We enjoyed breakfast at our Airbnb before hopping in a cab to Ancient Town. Our accommodations were located about 25 minutes away from Ancient Town, had a beautiful pool and animals roaming around (including a turkey I gave a wide berth to) and included a fantastic home-cooked Thai breakfast each day. After a quick stop for an iced coffee at Gravity Bistro, we set out to explore the temples. First up, Wat Chedi Luang.

Wat Chedi Luang is one of Chiang Mai's most important temples. Construction began in 1391 on the order of King Saen Muang Ma to house his father's ashes. The temple was finally completed almost a century later, in 1475. Sadly, in 1575, an earthquake struck and destroyed much of the pagoda (chedi). A partial restoration was undertaken in the 1990s, but the damage caused is still visible. They were also working on restoration projects on other buildings inside the walled part of the city while we were there.

After nap time for the kids and a pool break

for the adults, we ventured back to the ancient town and visited a few more temples, then ended the day with a fabulous dinner at the House by Ginger.

Day 2: Elephant Nature Park

While planning our trip to Thailand, I spent hours researching elephant sanctuaries and through that research, came across renowned conservationist Lek Chailert. Lek has dedicated her life to advocating for ethical elephant practices throughout Asia, creating sanctuaries committed to the rescue and rehabilitation of mistreated elephants.

During my research, I learned that for elephants to be trained to perform for humans or ridden, they undergo a process called phajaan in Thai, which involves breaking their spirit through torture. The elephants are removed from their mothers as babies, chained, beaten, starved and even stabbed in a small box with bull hooks until they submit or, in worse cases, die. If they aren't used in the tourism industry, the elephants are put to work in logging fields, where they are forced to work tirelessly, often sustaining untreated injuries while performing hard labor.

The day finally came for us to embark on a tour of Elephant Nature Park, the elephant sanctuary and rehabilitation center founded by Lek Chailert in Thailand. ENP is located an hour and a half outside Chiang Mai in the Mae Taeng Valley. We departed in a shuttle from their Chiang Mai office, making one stop during our journey to the sanctuary. As we entered the valley, we began seeing other sanctuaries nearby and glimpses of elephants as we drove past, peaking the excitement of everyone in the van.

We opted for the half-day tour since we were traveling with our two young children. We arrived at ENP around 9:45 a.m. and were shown our assigned table, where we could leave



anything we wanted to and where we would have our vegetarian lunch after the tour. We reconvened with our guide for the day and started our tour where they prepare the food for the animals on site.

In addition to elephants, the sanctuary also houses rescued buffalo, boar, goats, cats, and dogs, which require a substantial amount of food. We walked by shelves loaded with bananas, mounds of shucked corn and piles of watermelons prepped by dedicated staff and volunteers who spend their vacation days volunteering at ENP. Each elephant also receives a cake on their birthday (sponsored by digital donors who receive a video of the elephants receiving the cakes, a tradition that was started during COVID-19), so several were prepared on a table nearby to be taken out to the elephants. The sheer volume of food as we walked through was remarkable.

Next, we moved outdoors to where the elephants freely roamed the sanctuary. Having just spent time in South Africa the previous summer, I quickly realized how much smaller the Asian elephant is than the African elephant—other differences I noticed were in their head shape and ear size.

We continued our walk, catching up to a group of elephants just receiving their brunch. Sensing the arrival of the food, a baby trotted over and made sure to wiggle her way into a spot on the feeding platform between the older ladies already partaking in the vegetarian delights.

We spent the next hour and a half slowly meandering around the park, learning about the elephants we encountered along our walk. As we approached one of the last elephants on our tour, I immediately noticed her gait seemed off. As we got closer, it became apparent she had sustained a terrible injury. Medo came from

the logging industry, where an accident left her with a broken ankle that went untreated for a long time. When her previous owners realized she could no longer work, they forced her into a pen for breeding purposes. The male bull she was caged with dislocated her hip in an attempt to mate, exacerbating her injuries further.

By the time Medo was rescued and brought to the ENP, there was nothing they could do to fix her ankle. Her story is just one of many like this as you walk around and see first-hand the results of human mistreatment of these beautiful animals. The backs of elephants are wholly worn down from being ridden and limps of other elephants who sustained injuries while logging, being chained up or performing for tourists. The magnitude of the mistreatment

weighs heavily when you are staring at it directly in front of you.

To care for the elephants and other animals, ENP has nine veterinarians on-site, with three specializing in elephants and the remaining six serving as general practitioners.

As the tour ended, we were left to reflect on the experience and enjoy a buffet lunch before hopping the shuttle back to Chiang Mai.

The sanctuary model created by Lek is being utilized in other parts of Thailand and Southeast Asia, where the shift from riding and watching elephants perform to solely enjoying them in their natural habitat is slowly gaining traction.

Per ENP, "Elephant Nature Park encourages elephant owners and tourism operators to adopt ethical practices for the well-being of elephants under their care. To further promote responsible elephant tourism, Asian Elephant Projects was established to support various Saddle Off projects throughout Thailand, representing a significant advancement in the way these

projects operate.

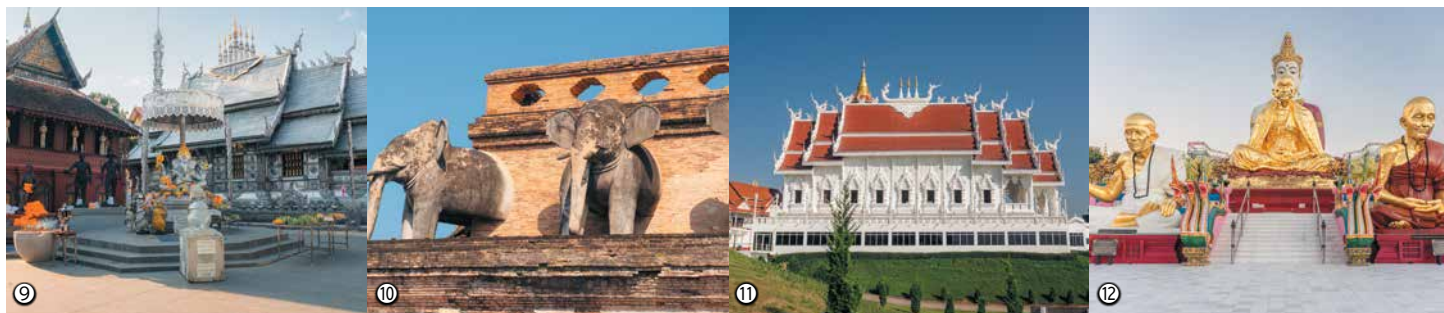
The Saddle Off model seeks to elevate the living conditions of captive Asian elephants by eliminating the burden of elephant riding and performing in shows, while still enabling owners to sustain their livelihood through responsible tourism. By creating a stress-free environment, these programs provide elephants with the opportunity to roam, socialize, and forage in natural habitats, while allowing visitors to have an authentic and intimate interaction with these gentle giants."

The Elephant Nature Park in Thailand spans approximately 200 acres, housing over 100 elephants on site. As they continue to rescue elephants, the need for additional space will inevitably arise. They also have a sister sanctuary in Cambodia,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 30



① ENP elephant playing in the sand. ② Our son at Wat Phra That Doi Suthep. ③ Choui Fong Tea Plantation. ④ Wat Chedi Luang. ⑤ A monk blessing a scooter in Chiang Mai. ⑥ Our family at ENP. ⑦ A volunteer at ENP prepping food for the elephants. ⑧ Elephants at ENP.



9. Wat Sri Suphan. 10. Wat Chedi Luang. 11. Wat Huay Pla Kang Goddess of Mercy Chiang Rai. 12. Wat Saeng Kaeo Phothiyan.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29

the Cambodia Wildlife Sanctuary, which is home to a 32,000-acre jungle habitat preserve featuring three elephants and other wildlife.

If you're planning a trip to Chiang Mai, I highly recommend ENP. They offer various ways to get involved through volunteer efforts, as well as full-day and half-day tours for visitors.

Day 3: Breakfast, then more temples

Our third day brought more temples, starting with Wat Phra That Doi Suthep. To get up to this golden temple, you must ascend 300 steps. With our kids in the carrier packs, we went up. At the top, we removed our shoes and enjoyed strolling around the ornate temple. Up the road from the temple are a campground and a lookout point, so after we walked to that, we made our way back to our farm stay. In the early afternoon, my friend who was with us and I went out and got fine-line elephant tattoos, an optional stop on your itinerary, ha!

Early evening brought a few more temples around the ancient town, including Wat Sri Suphan, a stunning silver temple (though men are only allowed inside the main temple). Next door, local artisans are working on various projects. Dinner time brought us to Aroon Rai, a restaurant that received notoriety as one of the places Anthony Bourdain ate at while filming *A Cook's Tour* in 2002.

Day 4: Overnight trip to Chiang Rai

Instead of doing just a day trip to Chiang

Rai, we opted for an overnight trip since our flight on our last day was not until 11 p.m. That gave us roughly two days in the Chiang Rai area to explore. If you don't have time for an overnight stay, various tour groups offer various day trips, which are great since they include transportation to each location and back to Chiang Mai.

We hired a private shuttle driver with car seats to take us from Chiang Mai to the White (Wat Rong Khun) and Blue Temples (Wat Rong Suea Ten) in Chiang Rai before dropping us off at our hotel for 4,500 Thai Baht (\$125). The trip is roughly two and a half hours by car. After we arrived at our hotel, we grabbed a late lunch at the resort while waiting for our rooms to become available.

That evening, we enjoyed a lovely dinner and drinks at the resort restaurant at Le Meridien (Marriott family) overlooking the water. We decided once we arrived in Thailand to stay overnight in Chiang Rai, and I am so glad we did. There is so much to do up there, and I wish we had spent an extra full day to see the Golden Triangle. The mountainous countryside is beautiful, with pineapple fields, tea fields, and, of course, stunning temples. There are also several waterfalls within an hour of Chiang Rai that would be worth checking out.

Day 5: Temples, village, tea plantation, airport

Through our resort, we hired a guide to take us to a few more sites around Chiang Rai before driving us back to the airport in Chiang Mai in the evening. We started the morning at Wat Huay Pla Kang, Goddess of

Mercy Chiang Rai, then made our way to the Karen Hill Tribal Village nearby.

We finished our morning at the Choui Fong Tea Plantation. The views from the tea plantation are stunning, and to get there, you drive through miles of pineapple fields and countryside.

On our way back to Chiang Mai, we stopped at one more temple, Wat Saeng Kaeo Phothiyan (which felt a little cluttered and like a theme park inside with all of the statues), and then witnessed a beautiful sunset as we walked back to our shuttle for the airport.

If you are planning a visit to Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, a week is ideal for seeing many of the major sites. When we travel with our kids, we try not to pack our schedules as full so they have some downtime in between visiting the sites and we were all experiencing some temple fatigue towards the end of the trip. Despite the temple fatigue, we highly enjoyed Thailand. If you are traveling with older children or no children, you will be able to fit in even more. The food was outstanding, the people were incredibly welcoming and the scenery was unbeatable.

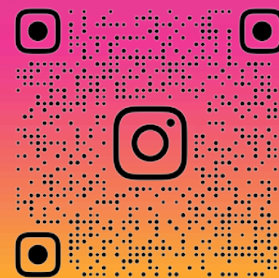
About the Author

For 15 years, Erin Henderson has been a photographer capturing compelling stories around the world - from travel and food to conservation and military life. She's published internationally and mentors entrepreneurs from her base in Stuttgart, Germany. You can find more of her work at erinhendersonmedia.com.



Instagram STARS AND STRIPES

#Follow us on Instagram!



STARSANDSTRIPESPACIFIC

“Four hundred Lumpini monitor lizards patrol the park. They are mostly harmless to humans (unless you're an American with an overactive imagination).”

A morning break in Bangkok

Story and photos by
AUSTIN A. HOWTON

MY PARADISE
Thailand



I didn't know what a monitor lizard was until I was frantically paddling a fiberglass duck boat across an artificial lake in Bangkok's Lumpini Park trying to place yonder between me and a ten-foot reptilian leviathan eyeing me like he knew what that Short-Tail Stingray did to Steve Irwin.

"I was just doing my job," the lizard said when later asked about his performance that day.

Four hundred Lumpini monitor lizards patrol the park. They are mostly harmless to humans (unless you're an American with an overactive imagination).

Lumpini Park is a green sanctuary among the mass crowds and tuk-tuk filled streets and otherwise chaos of Bangkok. Businesspeople engage in their morning jog here, the elderly practice qi gong and kids kick a rattan takraw over the net playing Sepaktakraw.

Thought of as Bangkok's smaller version of Central Park, Lumpini Park is in the heart of the business district of Bangkok surrounded by skyscrapers. It spans 142 acres and has many tree-lined paths, flowers, lawns, lakes, duck/swan boats as well as animals like exotic birds, cats, fish, turtles, monitor lizards, etc. Further, it

houses Thailand's first and oldest operating public library, a Chinese clock tower, statues and features periodic performances by the Bangkok Symphony Orchestra.

Founded by King Rama VI in 1925, Lumpini became the first public park in Thailand. Beginning in the 1950s, the site became notable

for Muay Thai as the original Lumpinee Boxing Stadium was housed just outside of the park (on the site that is now One Bangkok).

Lumphini Park is smack dab between two MRT stops: Silom and Lumpini. The nearest BTS (sky train) stop is Chidlom. Tuk-tuks,

Bolt, and Grab are available too.

The park is open daily from 4:30 a.m. until 10 p.m. Cycling is allowed from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Alcohol, smoking and dogs are strictly prohibited.

Lumpini Park is a haven. Whether you go for the early-morning calm, a mid-vacation run, the wildlife encounters, or just a place to breathe, it fulfills expectations.

If you happen to spot something large and scaly slithering in the water, don't panic— simply steer your duck boat the other way.

Speakin' Thai

Hello: Sawasdee Kap

Thank you: Kob Khun Kap

No worries: Mai Pen Rai Kap

Delicious: Aroy Kap

Sorry / excuse me: Kho Thot Kap

What is your name?: Khun Chue Arai Kap

Bathroom: Hong Nam



About the Author

Austin Howton is a U.S. Air Force Contracting Officer and licensed attorney that has been stationed at Kadena since November of 2023. He enjoys reading, travelling and exploring the intersections of law, government and global affairs.

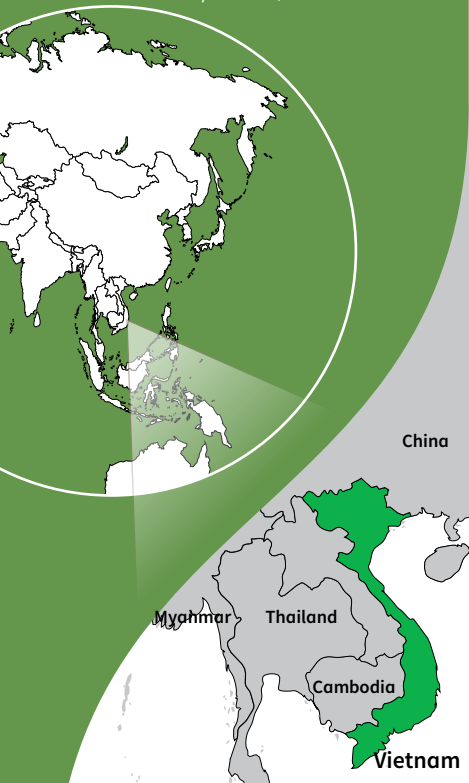
“Although I haven't yet explored all of northern Vietnam, the places I have seen remain some of my favorite destinations in the world.

From stunning landscapes to great food and friendly people, Vietnam has a lot to offer.”

4 top spots in Vietnam

Story and photos by
ERIN HENDERSON

MY PARADISE Vietnam



I've had the privilege of visiting Vietnam twice, spending over two weeks exploring this incredible country—and even that didn't feel like enough time. While I did make stops in Halong Bay and Ho Chi Minh City, they didn't make my list of highlights. In my view, there's so much more to discover in other parts of Vietnam. That said, I should note that I haven't toured the Mekong Delta yet—an experience that could very well change my perspective in the future. I visited in early April and November, and hands down, November was the best time to go, with temperatures being much milder and less humid.

Hanoi

If you are planning to visit northern Vietnam, you will likely find yourself in Hanoi as a starting point. The bustling motorbikes skillfully balancing household appliances, the locals in traditional hats pedaling produce from their bikes and the local cuisine make Hanoi a top destination in Vietnam. There is so much always happening in Hanoi and the food is phenomenal, pun intended. My favorite pho place is Pho Suong, located in a quiet, unassuming alley. Pull up a plastic stool, order your favorite pho and wash it down with a refreshing Bia Hoi (fresh local brew).

Another popular Vietnamese delight is banh mi, a delectable Vietnamese sandwich served

with a variety of toppings (vegetarian or meat) on a fresh baguette. A great place to get one is at Banh Mi 25. What started as a food cart quickly morphed into a must-visit Banh Mi location in Hanoi. There is almost always a line, but generally, it moves quickly. If you are lucky enough to snag a seat inside, congrats. If not, don't be afraid to dig in while standing on the side of the road. I did both and they were equally satisfying.

And since I am talking about food, egg coffee is something you must try when you visit Hanoi. Although it sounds a bit off-putting, it is light and tasty. Stop by Little Hanoi Egg Coffee to try a

Quick Tips

- Download Grab for easy transportation.
- If you are traveling with babies or toddlers, leave the stroller at home and stick to a carrier in the busy streets.
- Start your visa two to three weeks before your trip and have a printed copy with you.
- Bring a few more tops than usual, in the humidity sweating through clothing is not uncommon.



cup. Egg coffee aside, my go-to drink when in Vietnam is frozen coconut coffee. It's made with condensed milk and is the perfect drink to cool off in the Vietnam heat. You can sign up to take a coffee class in Hanoi and learn to make both coffee styles and more. Check out Airbnb Experiences or Get Your Guide for class offerings.

Hanoi is home to many popular sights, most of which revolve around the Old Quarter, my favorite place to hang out and take street photos. If you want to see the popular Hanoi Train Street, be aware that as you approach, what I like to call the Train Street "fixers" will approach you to ask if you want coffee or beer and then escort you to a restaurant along the street. It's getting harder to get a seat inside the track area because officials are cracking down on tourists being inside the area while the train is coming through.

There are barricades in place — something to be aware of.

Other great places to visit are Hoan Kiem Lake, where, if you go at sunrise, you will find locals exercising and enjoying their morning. If you go later in the day, you can visit Ngoc Son Temple, located on the lake.

Other top sights

- Saint Joseph's Cathedral
- Hanoi Opera House
- Temple of Literature
- Hoa Loa Prison
- Imperial Citadel of Thang Long
- Take a walking tour or food tour with a local guide

Quang Phu Cau Incense Village

Though technically, this could be considered part of Hanoi, I wanted to highlight this location. Located approximately 36 kilometers from Vietnam's capital city, Hanoi, is a century-old village called Quang Phu Cau, renowned for its incense production.

The village produces approximately 50 tons of incense each month, which is consumed in Vietnam, India, China, Malaysia and many other countries. The craft generates jobs and income for about

70% of the village households. Workers make 5-6 million VND (\$215-\$258) each month; more experienced workers can make 6-8 million VND (\$258-\$345). This is the average salary in Vietnam, which enables locals to afford larger homes and maintain public infrastructure.

According to a documentary by Business Insider, until 2019, the village of Quang Phu Cau exported roughly 300 tons of incense each year to India. In 2019, India imposed a partial ban on incense imports from Vietnam to bolster its domestic production. This gap meant the small village had to be creative. One man, Nguyễn Thi, led the charge in creating a co-op for incense production. The co-op was registered as a legitimate business in Vietnam.

To make the incense sticks more appealing to Vietnamese people, the incense sticks were lengthened, with bright colors and scent added. The colors you will most often see in photos online or on a stroll through the village are pink and red. Pink represents the country's flower, the lotus and red represents the Vietnam flag.

If you are planning a trip to any of the thousands of craft villages located throughout Vietnam, I encourage you to appreciate the workers who are keeping the crafts alive. Be respectful of their time, ask before taking photos, and, above all, be friendly. The kind locals are working very hard under those hats in the unrelenting heat to support their families.

Tips on visiting village

- Many online platforms like Get Your Guide offer tours departing from Hanoi. This may be the best way to secure transportation to and from the village and have a guided experience.
- Book a private car from Hanoi to and from the village. You may not be able to secure a ride back since the town is remote. I opted to visit the village alone because I wanted autonomy while photographing and I did not want to be constrained by a specific timeline.
- Go on a sunny day, and bring water, a hat and sunscreen.
- Arrive early, no later than 9 a.m. They



① Hoi An. ② Hanoi Train Street. ③ Incense Village in Quang Phu Ca.

will start to lay the incense out to dry by then, and the temperature outside may be more tolerable. An early start also gives you more time to explore the village. Give yourself a few hours there.

- Cell phone service is sparse, so make sure you have a return transportation plan in place before arriving, especially if you do not opt for a guided tour.
- Smile and greet the locals; we are all human and crave interaction.
- Bring cash. The entrance fee for the two main incense drying areas is 50,000 VND (about \$2). I also tipped the workers who posed for photos.

Ninh Binh

As you approach Ninh Binh, widely regarded as "Halong Bay on Land," you are greeted by towering limestone formations. Though it's less than two hours away from the bustling Hanoi, you get a sense of remoteness as you make your way into town. That's not to say there isn't a lot to do, but when removed from the buzz of the city, the quiet is a welcome change of pace.

I checked into my hotel, dropped my bags and walked roughly 500 meters down the road to jump on the first boat tour of the trip, the Tam Coc Boat Tour. On this tour, the boat is rowed primarily using feet

CONTINUED ON PAGE 34

E-Newsletters

Stars and Stripes offers **FREE** email newsletters on a variety of topics of interest to the military community. Sign up to one or all today!



DAILY HEADLINES

WEEKLY UPDATE

PACIFIC



EUROPE

MILITARY HISTORY

VETERANS NEWS

STARS AND STRIPES

STRIPES OPINION

DoDEA Newsletter

Health and Fitness





CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33

instead of hands.

The tour lasted just under two hours, and we rode through the most picturesque scenery of towering limestone cliffs and through three caves that had us ducking to avoid being speared by the stalactites hanging all around. This tour offers excellent views of the Mua Lua Cave peak from below, which got me even more excited for the hike up there, which I had planned for early the next morning. Despite what I had read online about being inundated with locals attempting to sell you things while on the boat, we were only approached once, asking if we wanted a souvenir photo taken, which I kindly declined. The ride was tranquil and lovely, the perfect way to kick off my time in Ninh Binh.

The next morning came an early alarm and I hopped on a bike at sunrise for the 15-minute ride over to Mua Cave. It's named for the one small cave that is at the entrance of the stairs, but the star of the show is the breathtaking views of the Ngo Dong River after you ascend 500 stone steps on Ngoa Long Mountain. The hike up can be challenging with the uneven stone steps, but the reward at the top is worth every step. Because it was early in the morning, there were only a few other people around during my visit. I spent

about an hour at the top, hiking to both viewpoints and soaking in the quiet views of the harvested rice fields below.

After the hike down, I pedaled back into town for breakfast and some much-needed coffee from An Tom Coc Restaurant & Coffee. Nourished and caffeinated, I set out for Trang An, the second boat tour of the trip. Trang An is approximately 20 minutes by car from Ninh Binh and the longest of the boat tours. The tours are quite scenic and feature numerous historically rich temples and pagodas. There are three options for tours along Trang An, the most popular being the second option (I chose this option), which takes you to a mix of temples and through a few caves. This route takes roughly two to three hours, depending on how long you explore the temples during your stops. It also takes you by some of the areas where Kong: Skull Island was filmed.

The next stop was Hoa Lua Ancient Capital and I only spent about 30-40 minutes there before calling a Grab and heading back to the hotel. A quick bike ride from the hotel had me at Minh Trang Handmade Gifts. This beautiful shop is filled with exquisite handmade embroidery, clothing, ceramics and much more. During my time at the shop, I was shown the upstairs area where the craftsmen and

women work on their sewing projects for the shop or buyers overseas, and I highly enjoyed watching them work skillfully.

After some time wandering the shop and chatting with the fabulous Nhi, I ended up next door at Chookies Beer Garden to finish out a full day with some adult beverages. I wasn't sure what to expect from this place, but the drinks blew me away. I enjoyed the well-crafted cocktails in a poolside booth, reflecting on my favorite parts of the last two days in Ninh Binh.

If I had to choose between visiting Ha Long Bay and Ninh Binh, I would pick Ninh Binh. There is so much more to do if you enjoy being outdoors and the scenery is just as stunning. There are plenty of lodging options, ranging from hotels to eco-lodges and exploring by bike is the best way to experience the area.

Hoi An

Our family flew from Hanoi to Da Nang and stayed in a quaint villa outside of Ancient Town. Chi was an exceptional host, offered a breakfast service each day and the pool was the perfect oasis to escape the afternoon heat. She also provided bikes, so exploring the rice fields and quiet outskirts of Hoi An was especially enjoyable on two wheels. If you want to get some quality beach time, stay in Danang and then do a



④Hoi An at night. ⑤Train Street Hanoi. ⑥Coffee-making class Hanoi. ⑦Kha Thi Leather Shop in Hoi An. ⑧Local in Hoi An.



9

day trip from there to Hoi An.

Ancient Town

Our first full day in Hoi An was spent exploring Ancient Town, which was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999. We purchased a ticket for 120,00 VND (roughly \$5) to visit any five sites within Ancient Town during our trip. You simply hang on to the ticket while you are visiting and show them at whatever site you decide to explore. There are 21 sites, including temples, the Japanese covered bridge, museums, tombs and ancient houses. Sadly, while we were visiting, they had just started the restoration of the Japanese-covered bridge, so there were no good angles to see it from the outside, though you can still walk through it.

Hoi An is a photographer's dream. By day, stroll the streets filled with colorful old French architecture, vibrant lanterns and overflowing street markets. By night, enjoy the shift in energy as the city comes alive with glowing lanterns lining the water and storefronts. The energy at night is palpable - live music emanates from restaurants while visitors enjoy boat rides, ice-cold beverages from rooftops and decks, and sample street fare from carts that line the road.

Enjoy a leisurely boat ride at night and

release a lantern into the water. We did this after an excellent dinner, making it the perfect date night in Hoi An.

Some fantastic places to eat in Hoi An:

- **Tok:** We were blown away by this place. We ordered most of the tapas on the menu to share and everything was fantastic. The restaurant itself is stunning, with great views of the rice paddies. Their staff even brought out toys for our kids to play with while we ate; they truly went above and beyond.
- **The Field Restaurant & Bar:** Great views along the water and great drinks.
- **Mango Mango:** Located in the Ancient Town, this vibrant Asian fusion restaurant is in a great location to watch the nightlife in Hoi An and listen to the live bands that play at nearby restaurants. You can make a reservation to sit on the top deck upstairs or opt for the downstairs deck or restaurant if you don't have the time to make a reservation. I ate here twice during our stay and ordered the tuna each time; it was delicious!

Coffee

There are numerous options, and most places are likely to be great. We ended up getting coffee from these two places several times. I've mentioned this before, but I

Speakin' Vietnamese

Hello: Xin chào (sin chow)

Thank you: Cảm ơn (gahm uhn)

Yes: Vâng (vuhng)

No: Không (khome)

Please: Làm ơn (lam uhn)

Excuse me /Sorry: Xin lỗi (sin loy)

Goodbye: Tạm biệt (tam byet)

cannot get enough of coconut coffee while in Vietnam.

• **Puff Puff:** They have two locations, but we visited the one in Ancient Town twice. It's located conveniently right as you walk through the open-air market at the beginning of ancient town, so it's the perfect location to grab a frozen coconut coffee to explore with or sit and relax on your way out.

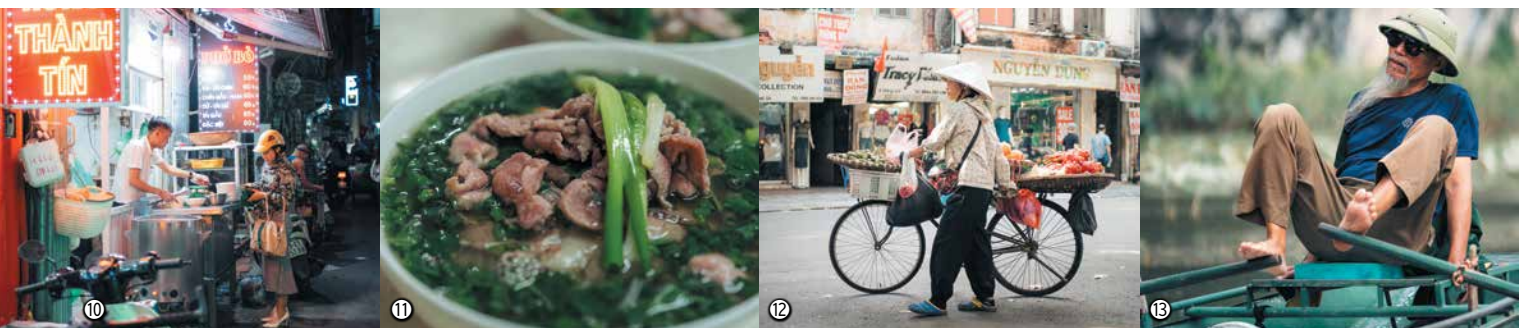
• **Tin Coffee:** This coffee place was right around the corner from where we were staying (outside of Ancient Town), so it was an easy walk or bike ride to get over there. They also have great coconut coffee, cold brew and egg coffee.

Another popular activity in Hoi An is purchasing custom clothing or leather goods. I had a pair of sandals made for \$30 at Kha Thi Leather Shop and they were ready the next day. Be prepared to negotiate a bit and don't settle for the first price they give you (but also, don't lowball them).

Although I haven't yet explored all of northern Vietnam, the places I have seen remain some of my favorite destinations in the world. From stunning landscapes to great food and friendly people, Vietnam has a lot to offer. I hope you enjoy your time in Vietnam as much as I did.

About the author

For 15 years, Erin Henderson has been a photographer capturing compelling stories around the world - from travel and food to conservation and military life. She's published internationally and mentors entrepreneurs from her base in Stuttgart, Germany. You can find more of her work at erinhendersonmedia.com.



9 Mua Lua Cave. 10 Pho Suong. 11 Pho at Pho Suong. 12 Old Quarter Street Photography. 13 Peddling with feet along the Tam Coc.

“This island nation, a group of over 500 islands, is renowned for its rich marine life, stunning landscapes, and warm, welcoming people.”

Palau hidden gem of Western Pacific

Story and photos by
DIETER KUDLER

MY PARADISE
Palau



Stationed in the Pacific and looking for your next adventure? While many of you have already explored the wonders of Japan, South Korea and the Philippines, there's one destination that stands out for its natural beauty and world-class diving—Palau. Located just 1.5 hours by air from Guam and 4.5 hours from Japan, Palau is a must-visit for those seeking an unforgettable experience in the heart of the Pacific.

Why Palau should be your next destination

Palau is more than just a tropical paradise; it's a treasure trove of natural wonders and cultural experiences. This island nation, a group of over 500 islands, is renowned for its rich marine life, stunning landscapes and warm, welcoming people. Whether you're a seasoned diver, a snorkeling enthusiast or just looking to relax on pristine beaches, Palau has something to offer everyone.

One of the most compelling reasons to visit Palau is its status as a UNESCO World Heritage site. The Rock Islands Southern Lagoon, with its crystal-clear waters, lush greenery, and unique mushroom-shaped islands, is one of the most iconic landscapes in the world. It's a place where you can truly disconnect from the hustle and bustle of everyday life and immerse yourself in the beauty of nature.

Diver's paradise

Palau is often ranked among the top three dive destinations globally, and for good reason.



The underwater world here is like no other, offering something for everyone, from beginners to highly advanced divers.

One of the most famous dive sites is Blue Corner, known for its exhilarating currents and the abundance of marine life, including sharks, barracudas and Napoleon wrasses. This site is not for the faint-hearted, but if you're up for the challenge, it will be an experience you'll never forget.

German Channel is another must-visit for divers, especially between November and February when manta rays congregate in large numbers. The sight of these majestic creatures gliding effortlessly through the water is simply breathtaking.

Ulong Channel combines history and adventure. Once used as an anchorage by Japanese forces during World War II, it now offers divers thrilling drift dives through strong currents, vibrant coral reefs and abundant marine life, including sharks and turtles. The channel's unique mix of historical significance and natural beauty makes it a must-visit in Palau.

Snorkeling in Palau an experience like no other

If diving isn't your thing, don't worry—Palau is also a top destination for snorkeling. The island's calm, clear waters are perfect for exploring the vibrant coral reefs and the diverse marine life that inhabits them.

One of the best spots for snorkelers is Milky Way, a unique lagoon known for its white, limestone-rich mud. Locals and visitors alike flock to this spot for a natural mud bath, believed to have rejuvenating properties. It's a fun, one-of-a-kind experience that also makes for great photos.

The Soft Coral Arch is another popular snorkeling destination. As its name suggests, this spot is teeming with colorful soft corals, making it a visual feast for snorkelers. The shallow waters here are perfect for those who are new to snorkeling or prefer to stay close to the surface.

BLUE
CORNERGERMAN
CHANNELULONG
CHANNEL

Lastly, there's Ulong Channel, which isn't just for divers. Snorkelers can also enjoy the vibrant coral gardens and the chance to see turtles, sharks, and a variety of fish. The channel's gentle current makes it an easy drift snorkel, allowing you to cover more ground with minimal effort.

World's first shark sanctuary

Palau is also home to the world's first shark sanctuary, established in 2009. This forward-thinking conservation effort has made Palau a haven for shark lovers. The sanctuary covers an area of 600,000 square kilometers, protecting dozens of shark species from fishing and other threats.

Diving or snorkeling in Palau offers a high chance of encountering these magnificent creatures in their natural habitat. Whether you're a seasoned diver or a beginner, the sight of a shark gracefully swimming by is sure to be one of the highlights of your trip.

Warm hospitality, rich culture

Beyond its natural beauty, Palau is known for its warm and friendly people. The islanders are proud of their heritage and are eager to share their culture with visitors. From traditional dances and music to local crafts and cuisine, there's much to learn and experience in Palau.

One way to immerse yourself in the local culture is by taking a guided land tour. Fish 'n Fins offers cultural tours that take you to historical sites, traditional villages and natural landmarks. These tours provide a deeper understanding of Palau's rich history and the close connection its people have with the land and sea.

Where to eat, meet, relax

After a day of diving or snorkeling, you'll want to refuel and relax. Fortunately, Palau

has a variety of dining options to suit every taste.

For a taste of India in the Pacific, The Taj is a must-visit. This Indian restaurant is a favorite among foreign visitors and offers a wide range of authentic dishes. Just next door, you'll find CroFe, a cozy coffee shop that serves up delicious coffee and pastries—perfect for a post-dive pick-me-up.

If you're looking for a more casual dining experience, head to the Canoe House at the Central Hotel. This spot is known for its burgers, pizzas and cold beers, making it a great place to unwind after a day of adventure. Plus, Thursday nights are karaoke nights—a fun way to meet fellow travelers and locals alike.

For lovers of Mediterranean cuisine, Barracuda Restaurant at Fish 'n Fins offers a delightful menu that includes everything from fresh seafood to pasta dishes. It's a great spot to enjoy a leisurely meal while overlooking the beautiful waters of Palau.

One-stop-shop

Planning a trip to Palau has never been easier, thanks to Fish 'n Fins, Palau's premier dive and tour operator. Established in 1972, Fish 'n Fins is a PADI 5-star IDC Center that offers everything you need for a memorable vacation. Whether you're looking for dive packages, snorkeling tours, or land excursions, they have it all.

Fish 'n Fins also offers hotel-dive packages at some of the best prices in Palau, taking care of all your travel arrangements so you can focus on enjoying your trip. If you're stationed in Guam, Japan, or South Korea, you're in luck—Fish 'n Fins offers a 10% discount for U.S. service members.

One of the highlights of booking with Fish 'n Fins is the convenience of having everything arranged for you. Their packages include not only your dives or tours but also your accommodations and meals. Each dive and snorkel package comes with a delicious bento lunch from Barracuda Restaurant, so you can enjoy a tasty meal in between your underwater adventures.



Making most of your time

With so much to see and do in Palau, it's essential to plan your trip carefully to make the most of your time on the islands. Start by deciding what type of activities you're most interested in—whether it's diving, snorkeling, or exploring the land.

For divers, the Blue Corner, German Channel and Ulong Channel are must-visit sites. If you prefer snorkeling, don't miss the Milky Way, Soft Coral Arch and Ulong Channel. Each of these spots offers a unique experience and a chance to see some of the best marine life Palau has to offer.

When it comes to dining, be sure to try a variety of local and international cuisines. Whether you're indulging in Indian food at The Taj, enjoying Mediterranean dishes at Barracuda Restaurant, or grabbing a burger at the Canoe House, you're sure to find something that satisfies your taste buds.

Finally, take the time to immerse yourself in Palau's rich culture. Whether you're exploring traditional villages, attending a local festival, or simply chatting with the friendly islanders, you'll gain a deeper appreciation for this unique part of the world.

We hope to see you in Pristine Palau soon—it's an experience you won't want to miss.

How to Explore

If Palau sounds like your next great adventure, don't wait to start planning. For more information on dive and tour packages, accommodations, and travel arrangements, visit the Fish 'n Fins website www.fishnfins.com or reach out to their team via email info@fishnfins.com or WhatsApp 6807755416. They'll get back to you as soon as possible, ensuring that your trip to Palau is as smooth and enjoyable as possible.



FISH 'N FINS





Grapes in Yamanashi

Story and photos by
AIKO SETOGUCHI

MY PARADISE
Yamanashi



Some falls ago, I visited Asahi En, a grape farm in Katsunuma, Yamanashi, west of Tokyo. One late morning, I got on an express train from Shinjuku, and after about an hour, found myself with a sea of grape leaves spreading before me at Katsunuma Budou-kyou Station. The name of the station means “home of grapes.”

Once I stepped off the train, I dove into the cool mountain air and aroma of grape leaves. A monochrome landscape spread before me – a field full of grape leaves in bright green and mountains in bold green. Nothing else, just a breathtaking view!

I headed to one of the farms in the area for grape picking. When I arrived, my immediate impression was that grape trees are much shorter than I anticipated! Seeing large bunches of grapes at supermarkets, I always thought they must have been from large trees. However, the grape trees in front of me were reachable just by extending my arms or with a moderately-sized ladder.

Even more surprising were the many varieties of grapes available like Kaiji, Koushu, Berry A, Pione, Shine Muscat, Pizzutello Bianco, Rosario Bianco. The Pizzutello Bianco was especially exciting to me – unlike regular round grapes, these were oval but with a light green color like Muscat. A farm employee told me the grapes are nicknamed “lady fingers” because of their delicate shape. The farm, she said, imported a seedling of Pizzutello Bianco from Italy and planted it next to trees they already had at their farm. It looked so rare. No wonder it was popular among visitors.

I was lucky enough to be able to pick the last remaining bunch of the season at the farm! The taste of it was sweet, just like regular muscat. It was easier to eat because the shape was slimmer than round ones. After Pizzutello Bianco, I got to pick Kaiji, which are native to Yamanashi. Kaiji grapes are sweet and have a light red, thin skin.

I spent the next hour exploring the many new varieties of grapes at the farm.

Back in my childhood, I only knew three kinds of grapes, purple Kyoho, shiny green Muscat and red Delaware. I adored Kyoho because it’s the grape of my birthplace in Nagano. I liked Delaware because they were seedless and as a kid, I wasn’t a fan of the firmness of Muscat grapes. At the farm, I was stunned by

Things to know

Address: 1852 Katsunumacho Katsunuma, Koshu, Yamanashi 409-1316

Hours: 8:30 a.m.- 4:30 p.m. daily.

Website: <https://asahien.net/>

Information: Grape harvest season runs in early August to mid-October. More details on Asahi En Website.

the many types of grapes they had and left with two basketfuls.

I’ve been patriotic to Nagano’s apples, peaches and Kyoho grapes, proudly calling them Japan’s three best fruits. But learning more about grapes in Yamanashi made me think discovering new fruits is not so bad. Apples will always bring me nostalgic feelings of cold seasons in Nagano and New York, my third home after Nagano and Kanto, while grapes will probably remind me to be open to something new and exciting!

About the author

Aiko has been a proud contributor to Stars and Stripes since 2023 and to the New York Times since 2019. She'd like to thank the Stripes editors, her colleagues and friends in Japan and the U.S., plus her Mom and cats, all of whom have been cheerleaders of her writing career.

Sky Plaza Misawa
Since 2011
OPEN 24 HOURS

Air Base Main Gate
Misawa Station Police Station Misawa
City Office Civic Center

2-8-34 Chuo-cho, Misawa, Aomori
Open 10:00-
0176-51-1712

★DEMZU CAFE★

(Open Hour)
Open weekdays & Sundays
11:00 - 19:30
Fridays & Saturdays
11:00 - 20:00
(Closed)
Every Tuesday

Jack & Betty II
AVIATION & SCIENCE MUSEUM, AOMORI

(Open Hour)
Weekday 11:00 - 16:00
Sat, Sun & Holiday 11:00-16:30
158 Kitayama, Misawa-shi,
Aomori-ken, 033-0022

Festival Food Truck at Sky Plaza

Jack & Betty



Guam Reef Hotel *On The Beach in The Heart of Guam*

Guam Reef Hotel offers hospitality and high quality entertainment venue. Located in the center of the shopping and entertainment district and within walking distance of all the exciting Tumon attractions.



ROOMS

Guam Reef Hotel has 426 well-appointed stylish rooms and is located in the heart of Tumon. Our Beach Tower and Infinity Tower offer you a wide range of rooms from modern minimalist to rooms with panoramic views of Tumon Bay. All rooms include a flat-screen TV, hot/cold water dispenser and free Wi-Fi for your pleasant stay.

FITNESS

You can take advantage of our fitness room (678 sq ft) to unwind and further enhance your stay with us. Whether you prefer cardio exercises, weightlifting, or stretching, our fitness room has everything you need to stay active during your stay.



AMENITIES

We have a free laundry facility located at the lobby level, available 24 hours for your convenience. Additionally, there is a microwave and ice machine available on every floor. Our newly opened meeting rooms, with three options available based on group size, are complimentary for military in-house guests.



Guam Reef Hotel

On The Beach in The Heart of Guam



For Reservations:



1-671-649-2229 / 1-671-646-6881



reservations@guamreef.com



****Military Rates available***

1317 Pale San Vitores Road, Tamuning, Guam 96913