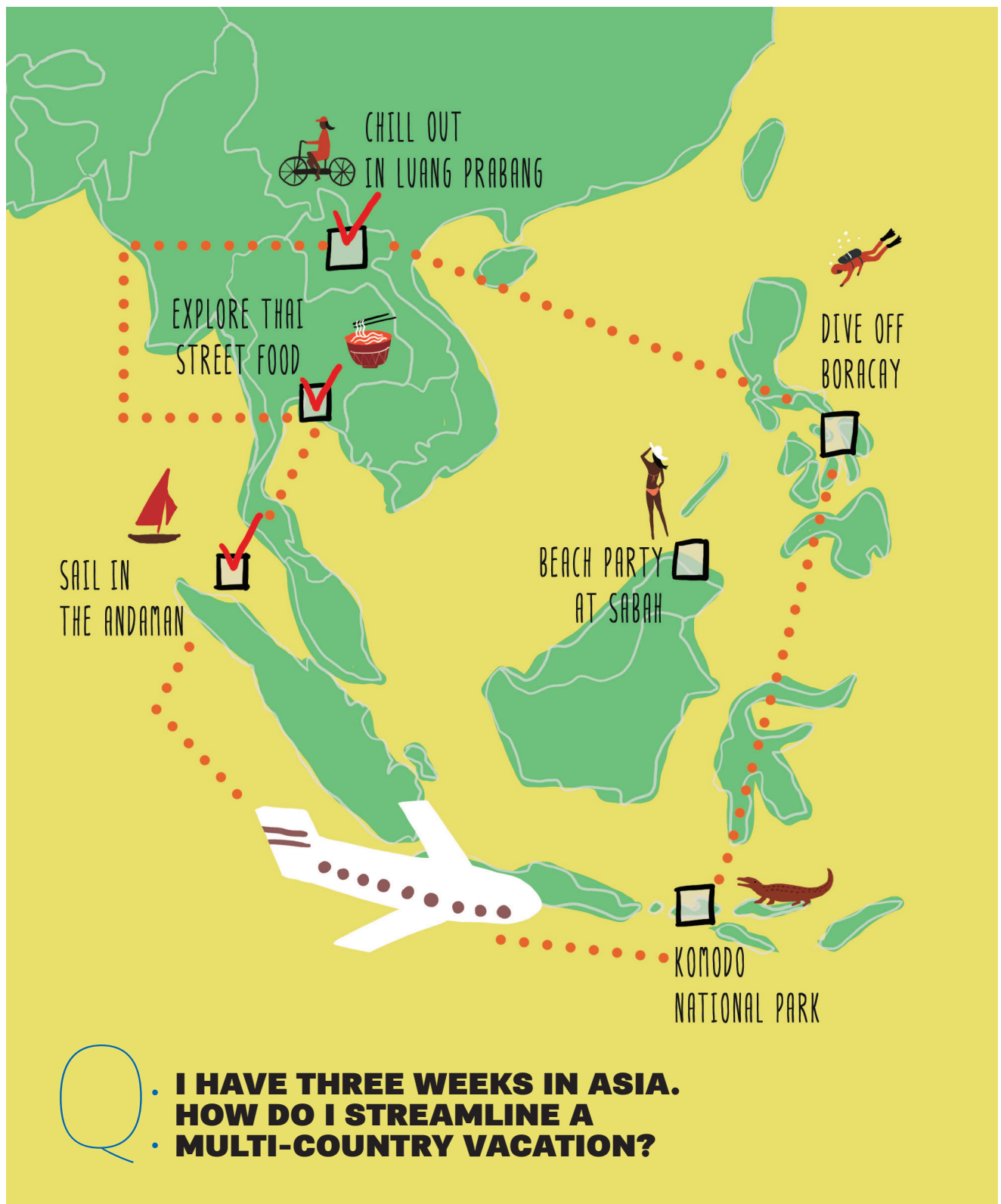


The Fix



Q • **I HAVE THREE WEEKS IN ASIA. HOW DO I STREAMLINE A MULTI-COUNTRY VACATION?**

A: A three-week sojourn is an ambitious undertaking, especially if you try to pack too many countries into a relatively short time frame. “Clients need to be

realistic in planning and evaluating how much can be done,” Karin Hansen, one of T+L’s top travel agents in the region, cautions. “They need time to relax and not tour eight hours a day.” In other words, steer clear of the temptation to jam half a dozen countries into the trip and concentrate on enjoying maybe two to five destinations at a reasonable and leisurely pace.

When whittling down your hit list, consider grouping countries by geographic proximity and climate. Though most of the countries in Southeast Asia have distinct wet and dry seasons, when they fall varies by a surprising amount. November through December brings sunny skies to Thailand, Laos, the Philippines and Cambodia, but torrential monsoons to Indonesia. Even if you do stick to similar areas, dramatic differences in elevation—think Malaysian Borneo, which features steamy jungles and snowcapped peaks—and other factors mean that packing light, collapsible, fast-drying layers is a must.

One of the biggest hurdles of such a trip, or course, is the price. Tickets even on budget airlines such as **AirAsia** or **Nok Air** add up quickly. If you’re planning several flights within a short period of time, consider going for an air pass, such as the one offered by **Bangkok Airways**

(bangkokair.com/pages/discovery_airpass/discovery-airpass). The pass, which is also valid with **Lao Airlines**, allows travelers to purchase vouchers for tickets at a discounted rate, provided they buy three or more. Many vouchers start as low as US\$88, making this more economic than most low-cost carriers. Alternatively, **Malaysia Airlines** (malaysiaairlines.com) allows passengers to book multi-city tickets that encompass up to five international destinations, meaning you don’t have to shell out for a series of pricey one-way flights.

If you’re traveling from outside of Asia, the best deal of all comes from **oneworld Visit Asia Air Pass** (oneworld.com/flights/single-continent-fares/visit-asia), which offers unlimited flights within Asia on Cathay Pacific, Malaysia Airlines, Dragonair, Japan Airlines, Royal Jordanian, Qatar Airways, S7 Airlines and their affiliates. The catch is that you must be a resident of a non-Asian country, and your journey must start outside of the continent. But this might be the closest thing you can get to a Eurail pass in Asia.

Another option is simply to research your prices. Fare comparison sites such as the ever-popular **Hipmunk** or apps such as **Skyscanner** can help, but often you can find

discounts just by going to the airline’s actual website. “I’ve seen Singapore Airlines quote a fare from Bangkok to Singapore for US\$700,” says Patrick O’Connell from Asia Transpacific Journeys, “but offer the same exact flight on their website for US\$250.”

If you’re worried about spending half of your trip languishing in airport terminals, opt for other methods of culture-crossing, border-spanning transport. **Spice Roads** (spiceroads.com) offers multi-country cycling trips through Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and more, while **Smiling Albino** (smilingalbino.com) has tours on dirt bikes and motorcycles. And if you’d like a slightly less active trip, river cruises up the Mekong, such as **Viking Cruises** (vikingrivercruises.com), allow travelers to take in the scenery with less effort.

No matter how you choose to travel, make sure you look into your vaccination history and requirements before embarking. For an Asian trip, “It’s always wise to make sure your tetanus is up to date and Hep A and Hep B immunizations are recommended in most of these countries,” notes Jarrod Hobson, also of Asia Transpacific Journeys. “Typhoid and even malaria prophylaxis may also be recommended for some destinations.” Ideally, go for a checkup at home and, just in case, pack a translation app such as **iHandy** that can help explain your medical needs to doctors in 52 different languages.

Q: HOW DO I AVOID INTERNATIONAL DATA OVERRAGES ON MY PHONE?

A: In many Asian countries, from Indonesia to Thailand, you can get a local SIM card with a data package at the airport; in Singapore, go to a convenience store (passport required) and in Vietnam, to any street vendor (passport definitely not required). But if you need to keep your home number, be sure to turn off push notifications, location services and auto updates. Use Wi-Fi for social media and any other data-rich needs. Google Maps lets you download info in advance. App CityMaps2Go offers detailed directions sans connection. Others, like My Data Manager and Onavo, will help track your usage—and stay within your plan’s limits.