

Climate Control

With winter raging in the Northern hemisphere and the tropics as balmy as ever, choosing the temperature of your holiday is as easy as turning a dial. There's no better time of year to pick and choose the temperature you want when you holiday in Asia – and all within a few hours' flight time. Fancy something cold and fresh? Can do. Something more tropical and steamy? Also possible.

where to stay

-20°

HARBIN, CHINA

If you like it cold - very cold - Harbin is the place for you. Built by the Russians at the end of the 19th century when the railway was being laid from Moscow to Beijing, Harbin is an architecturally fascinating place: with a history of Jewish and European settlement, it looks more like Melbourne than Manchuria. Add to that the blanket of snow covering the town at this time of year, as well as the world famous Ice Sculpture festival featuring ice sculptors from all over the world, and you have a recipe for an intriguingly different vacation.

Where to stay:

To get a feel for Harbin's history, the **Modern Hotel** - built in 1906 by a Russian Jew - is the only place to consider. In the middle of the charming Old Quarter, the Modern is a quirky yet perfectly comfortable choice, with Harbin's most popular 101-year-old ice cream parlour attached. *Tel: +86 451 8461 5846*

Where to eat:

Russian restaurants abound, serving borscht, Russian sausage and Leba rye bread. But for a unique experience, head to **Russian Park**, where you can enjoy a steaming Chinese hotpot in a restaurant built entirely out of ice.

2°

SAPPORO, JAPAN

Cold enough for the Winter Olympics, yet offering a warm welcome at the many inns and izakayas dotting the city streets, Sapporo is charming come winter. With its famous Snow Festival, deliciously hearty regional Japanese cuisine and famous brewery - a beer so good they named a town after it - winter is the right time to sample the delights of Japan's most famous northern city.

Where to stay:

The **Ginrinso** is one of Japan's finest examples of traditional ryokan inns. Situated above the city in the mountains, with spectacular views and outdoor hot springs, the Ginrinso doesn't come cheap, but is worth every penny to experience the art of the ryokan done properly. *japaneseguesthouses.com/db/sapporo/ginrinso*

Where to eat:

The **Sapporo Brewery** - a must visit - features a superb restaurant, offering a delicious range of food, Japanese and German, that complements their delicious brew. It is a fascinating insight into the history of Japanese brewing and the German pioneers who brought brewing to this area.

where to eat

where to stay

8°

8°

HANGZHOU, CHINA

With its picture-perfect location on the West Lake and impossibly beautiful avenues lined by weeping willows, Hangzhou in winter - all mist and silver skies - is beautifully moody destination.

Where to stay:

The **West Lake (Xihu) State Guest Hotel**, a former mansion on the shores of the lake, is as beautiful as hotels come. A 100-year-old construction oozing history and character - but sacrificing nothing in luxury and amenities - the Xihu will have you composing poetry and writing calligraphy praising its beauty in no time. *Tel: +86 571 8797 9889*

Where to eat:

Hangzhou cuisine relies on vinegary spices and meats to create hearty meals - perfect for this time of year. The **Louwailou Restaurant** is one of the best of many in the city, serving classic Hangzhou cuisine on a beautiful bridge over the lake: fresh West Lake fish in vinegar sauce, Aunt Song's Fish Broth and Dragon Well Tea & Shrimps are just a few of the many delights on offer.

16°

16°

MACAU, CHINA

These days, it's better known as Vegas on the Pearl River Delta, but 500 years of colonial history isn't so easily erased: there's still much of old Portugal to discover in Macau. Wander the winding cobbled streets, marvel at the gorgeous old houses, stop off at the many cafes and restaurants for a vinho verde and a bacalhau, wonder at the cute Portuguese letterboxes and street signs. If the Brits across the river were in Hong Kong for reasons of commerce, the Portuguese must have had a different motive altogether: this place was designed for relaxation.

where to stay

Where to stay:

Converted from an old Portuguese fort, with six-foot-thick walls and overlooking the inner harbour, the **Pousada de Santiago** is the best place to stay to get a feel for Macau's history. Beautiful old antique furniture in the rooms, ornate decoration and a lovely outdoor terrace make this a little piece of Lisbon in the South China Sea. *saotiago.com.mo*

Where to eat:

On pretty Hac Sa beach, **Senor Fernando** has been serving up the best Portuguese food - some would say the best food full stop - in the region. In this elegant yet laid-back beachside eatery, you can feast on roast suckling pig and salted cod rice, washed down with generous amounts of wine from the 100% Portuguese selection.

20°

20°

HANOI, VIETNAM

Winter is the best time to enjoy the Vietnamese centre of style, when the population brings out its best Parisian boho-chic outfits. Stylish restaurants, beautiful bars, magnificent monuments and the hauntingly serene West Lake are just some of many attractions. Hire a moped, brave the traffic, and spend the days scooting through the leafy boulevards, discovering the many gems hidden in this most satisfying of cities.

where to eat

Where to stay:

For a sense of place in Hanoi, nothing beats the **Sofitel Metropole**. A colonial French structure as old as Hanoi itself, the Metropole exudes Gallic style while enveloping you in true luxury. *accorhotels-asia.com*

Where to eat:

It's not Vietnamese, and it has nothing to do with French history, but **La Salsa** tapas bar, in the shadow of Notre Dame Cathedral, is a superb place to spend an evening with a glass.

24°

24°

LUANG PRABANG, LAOS

Winters are mesmerising in LP: golden light, perfumed air and a temperature a few degrees cooler than the customary sweltering heat. In this soporific town, days are filled by cycling around the temples with frequent stops in shady cafes for iced lemon teas, before retiring to a spa for a two-hour massage in the afternoon, finishing in time for a Beer Lao by the river at sunset.

where to stay

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where to stay

Where to stay:

Maison Souvannaphoum is a converted Prince's palace, renovated stylishly by the Banyan Tree. Spend your time under the fans in the café with a fresh coffee, or lounge by the pool and watch the palm trees sway, framed by the bright blue winter sky. coloursofangsana.com

Where to eat:

Café Ban Wat Sene, run by a happily exiled Frenchman, epitomises the Laotian mix of French class with laid-back Indochinese charm. A welcome oasis of shade during the day, a stylish bolthole at night.

28°

PAI, THAILAND

Make the most of the all-too-brief Thai winter by heading up north. Pai - a small bohemian town an hour or two west of Chiang Mai - manages to retain its backpacker (sorry, independent traveller) roots, while adding more and more upmarket accommodation options every month. Situated in highland territory, nights can get chilly, but the local Thai whisky will warm the cockles of your heart, and many other places besides.

Where to stay:

Rim Pai Cottage captures the essence of the new Pai: stylish but not slick, comfortable but not corporate. Beautiful wooden houses (including one tree house) with lovely polished floors and stylish bathrooms: after a stay here, you'll be looking for nearby land and asking for the architects' drawings. rimpaicottage.com

Where to eat:

Pai Burger Stall begs the question: is the world's best burger in New York? Chicago? Philadelphia? No, it's here at this tiny shack on Pai's main walking street, across the road from the temple. Pull up one of the six stools, order a Chang beer, and make yourself comfortable while the owner - herself an escapee from Bangkok's chaos - rustles up the best burger and chunky chips you'll ever have.

32°

KOH YAO, THAILAND

All of Thailand is beautiful in the winter months: the rainy season has ended, the air is fresh, the land is green and the sky is blue. The South is no exception, and for an example of tropical bliss, you'd be hard pressed to find something better than Koh Yao. Only an hour east of Phuket by boat, yet a million miles away from the bars and shopping, Koh Yao is where you go when you've already been away from it all, but still want to go further.

Where to stay:

Koh Yao Resort is Robinson Crusoe meets Giorgio Armani: undeniably basic and open-to-the-elements bungalows (think roof but no walls), yet with an understated sense of style that can be hard to find in this part of the world.

Where to eat:

You can eat in the resort while gazing out to sea - something of which you might possibly never tire - or you can hire a motorcycle and go scouting for one of the many small Thai family restaurants serving delicious fresh seafood, expertly cooked.

36°

PERTH, AUSTRALIA

If heat is your thing, fly south for winter: the most isolated capital city in the world is at its hottest this time of year. Burning sun and noonday temperatures of 40 degrees - sometimes more - are common; but watching the sun sink below the Indian Ocean as you are fanned by the cooling sea breeze, makes it hard to imagine being anywhere else.

Where to stay:

The **Cottesloe Beach Hotel** is situated in Perth's most glamorous beachside district, with bars and cafes in every direction and the astonishingly clear waters of Cottesloe Beach just across the road. cottesloebeachhotel.com.au

Where to eat:

Fremantle's boutique brewery hotel, the **Sail & Anchor**, offers a modern take on classic Aussie pub grub: Asian-influenced gastronomic delights which taste all the better when accompanied by one of the mouth-watering selection of boutique brews.

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where to eat

where to stay