

Angkor by Gerard Bley (Saranjai)

Gerard Bley's panoramic black-and-white images of the fascinating monuments to a lost civilisation around Siam Reap lead the reader through an almost spiritual journey of discovery. The pictures portray the eerie stillness of the Wat and its environs, oft contrasted by an array of human activities that reflect the region's tradition, culture and religion. Published in both French and English, the images are interspersed with poetic quotes by various authors who have written about Angkor.



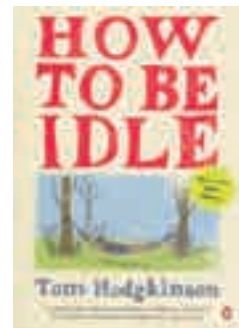
People Photography: A Guide to Taking Better Pictures by Michael Coyne & Landscape Photography: A Guide to Taking Better Pictures by Peter Eastway (Lonely Planet)

As part of the Lonely Planet travel photography series, these are invaluable guides for those who want to improve their photographic skills using people or nature as their subjects. Seasoned travellers and professional photographer, Coyne and Eastway share their in-depth knowledge and the skills they learnt along the way.

lifestyle + travel recommends

How to be Idle by Tom Hodgkinson (Penguin)

It is not often that a tome is published which provokes the reader to re-think his or her whole life - and I'm not talking pop-psychology or 'management guru' tips, I mean a sound argument which gnaws to the very fabric of one's socio-cultural being. This book should carry a warning on the front page, much like music albums with profane lyrics, as after just a few pages, one has a powerful urge to cease adhering to the post-industrial revolution, Protestant work ethic of rising early to the ruthless alarm clock and spending most of one's daylight hours in a grey, neon-lit office surrounded by people you didn't choose to be with.



Far from an immature, anarchist rant, Hodgkinson, an ex-magazine editor, now a well-contented idler, presents a superbly researched and incredibly witty look at, with many digressions, the history of idleness. There have been a surprising number of books and articles on the subject by the world's most gifted writers and thinkers over the last few centuries, and I feel I must quote Jerome K. Jerome's thoughts on the subject: "Ah! How delicious it is to turn over and go to sleep again: 'just for five minutes.' Is there any human being, I wonder, besides the hero of a Sunday-school 'tale for boys,' who ever get up willingly?"

Despite Hodgkinson's disbelief that 'the bloody-minded and freedom-loving Brits allow[ed] themselves to become servants of capitalism,' he is a realist, and knows that we can't all just quit our jobs and revert to subsistence living, but he argues for the advantages of cutting back to a three-day week, reminds us that we can rebel against the system (and preserve our dignity) by snatching a few more hours in bed (it is well known that we do our most effective thinking while snoozing in bed - but how many bosses would consider that a good excuse for tardiness?), and laments the fact that most of us 'toil all day and then pay for the pleasure of running on a treadmill' come evening. Un-putdownable - *PM*

Gift Books

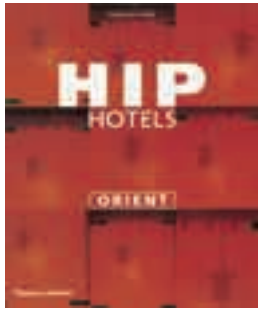
Dreams Of Book Series by AZU

The CD-sized, AZU's Dreams Of... picture books, currently cover Cambodia (Angkor and Phnom Penh) and a five-book box-set of Thailand (Phuket, Chiang Mai, Bangkok, Hua Hin, Krabi & Koh Samui), although by the time you read this many more will have been produced. Endorsed by national airlines or tourism boards, with concise text by celebrated Bangkok-based author John Hoskin, a large number of photographers were called upon to shoot the series - with mixed results. The aims: to get wannabe visitors more interested in the destinations covered; and as a pictorial keepsake of a destination already visited. The picture books are available from www.azueditions.com or bookstores in Thailand and Cambodia. Write to www.azueditions.com for customised editions.



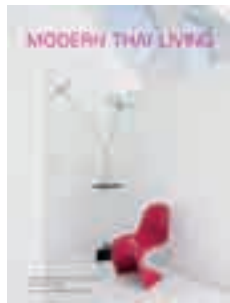
All titles reviewed here are available
from Asia Books: www.asiabooks.com





Hip Hotels Orient by Herbert Ypma (Thames & Hudson)

Not only is this title classic coffee table-hip, it is also extremely informative. With in-depth, quirky reviews of Asian hotels (with sensitivity towards the local cultures and religions reflected in the photography), the lay-out is contemporary chic and, more importantly, the accommodations well researched and incredibly well selected.



Modern Thai Living by Wongvipa Devahastin na Ayudhya and Sakul Intakul (Periplus)

Gone are the days of thatched villas. Thai architecture, interior and product design have catapulted onto the global stage, and this book showcases the sleek, modern spaces dotted around Thailand, featuring new shops, homes, restaurants, bars and offices that best reflect the wave of young local talents – each beautifully styled by Thailand’s top florist, Sakul Intakul, renowned for his dramatic flower arrangements, and illustrated with high-quality photos by Masano Kawan.



Lonely Planet’s Best Of... Guides

Instead of lugging around a Complete Works of Shakespeare-size Lonely Planet Guide on a short city break, the progressive Australian company’s new *Best Of* pocket city guides come in very handy when exploring a specific destination. *Best Of London* has already proved its weight in gold for me on a recent trip, with its maps of the London Underground, out-of-city Excursions, Greater London, West End, Central London, Camden Town and Greenwich, and no-nonsense, as-neutral-as-you-can-ask-for, colour-coded chapters on London’s Highlights, Sights & Activities (including Quirky London and London for Children), Out & About (including Walking Tours and Day Trips), Shopping, Eating, Entertainment and Sleeping.

Best Of Bangkok provides me much more regular use; even though I have lived in this city for five years, it is amazing how much of it I still don’t know very well. Neighbourhood, Highlights and Itineraries sections are particularly practical for first-timers, and the Notable Buildings page is a nice idea not often seen in guides. Again, Quirky Bangkok and Bangkok for Children will appeal to many visitors, as will sections on Meditation Courses, Thai Cooking Schools, Traditional Massage and Recommended Organised Tours. Inevitably, it is the Eating and Entertainment section’s pages that are the most-thumbed in my copy. The other *Best Of* guide on my desk is *Las Vegas*, which, although also appearing exceedingly useful, I can’t imagine ever finding the inclination to visit that particular city again. The first to email me at editor@lifestyleandtravel.com with an amusing reason why they are thinking of discovering Las Vegas will therefore receive my copy. – Peter Myers

Armchair Traveller

Review by Greg Lowe

Himalaya by Michael Palin (Weidenfeld Nicolson)

Think of a modern day Marco Polo and people like Ray Mears or David Hempleman-Adams are more likely to come to mind than a world-class comedian. Nevertheless, former Monty Python Michael Palin has been successfully carving out a name for himself as an intrepid explorer ever since the BBC commissioned him to follow in the footsteps of author Jules Verne’s fictional character Phileas Fogg, in *Around the World in 80 days*. Since then, Palin has embarked on, and penned accounts of, a jealousy-inducing list of voyages, including trips from the North to South Poles, a Hemmingway Adventure, and a crossing of the Sahara desert’s harsh extremes.

In his latest offering, *Himalaya*, Palin and crew navigate the 2,900-km mountain range – which means ‘Abode of Snow’ – from Afghanistan to southwest China.



Written in an as-it-happens diary format, Palin’s engaging prose describes the ups and downs of life on the road, as well as documenting the realities of life for the locals who live in the various countries and regions he travels through.

While the whole journey was full of spectacular scenery and colourful encounters – in Nepal their guides were abducted for 48 hours by Maoist rebels – for the author, one event is most memorable: “The first real view of the Himalayas, travelling from Nepal to Tibet; The whole sea of peaks was absolutely mind-blowing,” he told *lifestyle + travel* by phone from London.