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SPICE ROADS 2

Adventure holidays!

The idea of lounging on a beach chair with a cocktail in hand just doesn't cut it for some holidaymakers. What they seek is not just a vacation, but an adventure. Go takes the plunge to bring you a list of travel spots famous for their out-of-the-ordinary activities.

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1 Malapascua Island, the Philippines — Technical diving

More than 7,000 islands make up the Philippines, but in recent years, the idyllic island of Malapascua has gained attention as the preferred destination for technical diving. Home to a wall dive measuring over 10km where sharks, rays and other marine life roam, divers also flock to the island from all over the world to explore Japanese war wrecks and small sea caves.

Matt Reed, the resident technical instructor at dive facility Evolution, says that technical diving differs slightly from scuba diving in that technical divers “either go deeper, stay longer, or enter a cave or wreck”. The busiest times are during Christmas and Easter, although diving conditions are good all year round.

2 Luang Prabang, Laos — Mountain biking

The untouched natural charm of the Luang Prabang countryside offers spectacular views, beautiful waterfalls and peaceful towns and villages. The best way to experience it up close is by going on a mountain biking expedition. Sally Hoare, marketing and communications manager of bicycle tour operator SpiceRoads, explains that the company's tours are popular among those who seek to venture off the beaten track while discovering new places.

Visitors usually flock to Luang Prabang between November and March but Hoare recommends visiting from July to October when there are fewer tourists and the mornings are usually clear, making it perfect for riders to explore the countryside on mountain bikes.

3 Mui Ne, Vietnam — Kitesurfing

“Be warned, kitesurfing is highly addictive,” says Jeff Newell, owner of kitesurfing school C2Sky Kite Center in Mui Ne. The

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seaside village comes alive from late October up to early April every year with kitesurfers as the village gets lots of wind largely due to the thermal effect from the surrounding sand dunes during these months.

Newell says most people are attracted to the “thrill of being able to jump through the air, freedom of surfing without having to paddle out or wait for the waves and the ability to travel long distances powered only by the wind” using just an inflatable power kite with a control bar and lines, a harness worn around the body which connects to the kite as well as a board.

4 Taipei, Taiwan — River tracing

Struggling against the strong current of a river may not be your idea of fun, but in Taipei, people are doing just that with river tracing (locally known as canyoning). Apart from the thrill of navigating against the powerful currents of a river, natural obstacles such as pool jumps, natural rock slides and many more also provide for an exhilarating experience. Summer is usually the busiest time as the temperature makes it all that more inviting to jump into the waters.

Cam McLean, owner of In Motion Asia, explains that Taiwan as a whole is recognised as having the best canyoning routes in Asia because of its topography. Its mountainous terrain means that there is a vast number of mountain streams cascading rapidly down steep valleys due to tropical rains occurring high up in the island's central mountain range.

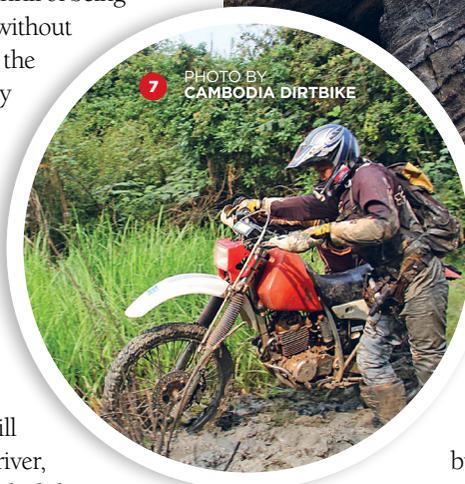
5 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia — Base jumping

Australian Gary Cunningham travels to Malaysia every year to participate in the annual KL Tower BASE Jump, and he doesn't mind it one bit. “The opportunities to base jump in my home country are extremely limited so it is necessary to travel to do a lot of base jumping. The welcome feeling I get from Malaysians is amazing”.

Base jumping takes a whole lot of guts, but the feeling of accomplishment after a jump is completed is incomparable and the spectac-



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ular view on the way down is a bonus. Although it does not require a good level of fitness as it is a gravity-powered sport, participants need a strong will, focused mind and fast reflexes.

The event is unique as it is one of the few that allows base jumpers to leap off a tall building in the middle of a city. Cunningham says that what brings base jumpers back is “the climate and the warm Malaysian welcome”.

6 Son Doong Cave, Vietnam — Caving

Recently discovered in 2009, Son Doong Cave is one of the planet's largest caves, with its biggest cavern being capable of comfortably fitting a Boeing 747. However, according to Oxalis Adventure Tours technical and safety advisor Deb Limbert, “Son Doong is not really a destination for cavers. Most people who visit have never been in a cave and may never go into a cave again. They are people who just want to see the beauty of Son Doong Cave”.

Strictly speaking, caving experience is not needed although experience in outdoor activities such as trekking does come in handy. As most caves in Vietnam have big rivers, the ability to swim is hugely advantageous. The rule of thumb is as long as you're well-prepared, you will have no problem.

7 Siem Reap, Cambodia — Dirt biking

Dirt biking is exhausting, more so in Siem Reap where the temperatures can get hot and the tracks are quite hard to ride. However, that doesn't deter people who do it for a multitude of reasons — freedom, adventure, eye-opening experience and a whole lot more.

Chris Berz, operating manager at Cambodia Dirtbike Tours, explains: “The beautiful nature, wilderness, remoteness, nice and friendly people, lack of restrictions, weather, affordability as well as historical and cultural sights keep people coming back”.

Exploring on a dirt bike offers surprises along the journeys — from long open highways alongside huge lorries overloaded with raw timber to smaller provincial dirt roads that wind along stilted wooden houses. These journeys often take riders through tiny villages lost in time, sometimes even crossing rivers on wooden bridges or needing to float bikes on small wooden boats. 