

Must-do in 2003

Our four Programme Managers make their suggestions for a 'must do' experience in 2003.



Yunnan Province in China

Regular visitors to China tend to regard this region as it's most diverse, beautiful and welcoming, ranging from Himalayan foothills in the north to the tropical riverscapes of the south. If you have seen the main sights of China, this is the perfect 'second' trip.

The capital and entry point is the wonderful city of Kunming, although the true treasures are the old towns of Dali and Lijiang (seen in the TV docu-drama *Beyond the Clouds*) in the north,

an ancient China of cobbled streets, beautiful mountain backdrops, and exotic hill-tribes that have had relatively little exposure to Western visitors.

South Yunnan meanwhile has more in common with its neighbours, sharing the diverse ethnicity and stunning scenery of Burma and Laos.

For those in the know, this is an unspoiled corner of Asia and I can only say GO. Before everyone else does.

Nick Coates, North and Central Asia



Laos

Known in years gone by as Lan Xang, or "land of a million elephants", Laos still retains much of its former charm and is an ideal country to visit in 2003. Having recently revisited my favourite country in South East Asia, I was amazed to find how untouched it remains by the onset of mass tourism. The people were as friendly as I remembered, even greeting me at immigration with a beaming smile!

With many newly-converted French colonial villas in which to stay and some stunning river journeys along

the Mekong, Laos represents a scenically breathtaking and culturally remarkable holiday destination.

Even a two week trip is hardly enough to see it all – to journey along the Mekong from the Thai border; see the spiritual capital, Luang Prabang; admire the thousands of Buddhas in the Pak Ou caves; wander the markets of the modern capital, Vientiane; travel by converted rice barge through the Mekong islands of the south; and finally to relax by the magnificent waterfalls of Tad Lo.

Chris Orme, South East Asia



Maldives

I would recommend to anyone to spend a few days in the Maldives on the way back from a trip to India or Sri Lanka. I did the same thing in 2002 and it provided the perfect end to a cultural tour of Sri Lanka. I stayed at the Taj Exotica on Emboodhu Finolhu where there is a choice of beach bungalows or water

villas from which one can step straight into the sea. The food and service were simply excellent and I must confess to having a wonderful massage in the luxurious spa. White sand, clear blue waters and amazing snorkeling and scuba diving make it my 'must do' for 2003.

Susie Brand, Indian Subcontinent



Torres del Paine National Park, Chile

In Southern Chile, right at the far tip of the mighty Andes as they start to taper down into the ocean, lies what I consider to be the most spectacular wilderness region in South America. Torres del Paine National Park is a breathtaking landscape of granite peaks, milky lakes full of luminous blue icebergs,

waterfalls and abundant wildlife (including condors and guanacos), all begging to be explored and appreciated by foot, horseback, bicycle or car. It is a jaw-dropping place, unmissable on any trip to Chile or Argentina, and is my "must do" for 2003.

Carolyn Foreman, Latin America