

URBAN *Affection*

Audley's specialists choose some of their favourite towns and cities



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LA PAZ, BOLIVIA

Literally breathtaking and completely fascinating, La Paz's busy streets are coiled around and down a canyon in the middle of the Andean altiplano, and is overlooked by the majestic snowcapped Mount Illimani. Bowler-hatted and big-skirted indigenous women fill the city with markets where you can buy anything from delicate textiles to llama foetuses (to be buried in the foundations of your house to ward off evil spirits). La Paz can be visited either as an extension to a trip to Peru, or as the starting point for a complete tour of Bolivia – the markets, the views, the handsome buildings and the bustling atmosphere will keep you enthralled for several days.

Nick Giles
01869 276 235

LHASA, TIBET

Lhasa is one of the world's most mysterious cities, a place of myths and legends forbidden to all outsiders for much of Tibet's history. While Lhasa is changing hugely under Chinese rule, the spirit of old Tibet persists in the winding alleys of the old quarter, the Potala Palace perched on its isolated rock above the city, and the atmospheric, smoky temples. In the Jokhang you can touch the core of Tibet's deep spirituality, joining the pilgrims in their circumambulations and spinning the prayer wheels to store up divine favour from the Buddha. Add to this the incredible surrounding scenery and the simple warmth of the Tibetan people, and the result is an absolutely unique travel experience.

Maeve Macrory
01869 276 206

KUCHING, SARAWAK (BORNEO)

Sitting proudly on Sungai Sarawak river, Kuching perfectly encompasses a vast array of Malaysia's delights. From the aromatic spice markets of the Arab Quarter and the swirling incense of Buddhist temples to the traditional stilted Malay villages of 'the suburbs'; from the colonial riverside palace and fort to the towering civic centre with 360° views, Kuching is a much underrated gem. Spend a morning exploring on foot and by private vehicle; lunch on the riverbank, then take in the State Museum complete with a reconstructed Iban Longhouse. In the evening head to 'Top Spot' with the locals for the freshest Malay cuisine in a buzzing atmosphere. You'll want to stay.....

Joanne Poole
01869 276 279

QUEENSTOWN, NEW ZEALAND

Queenstown is without doubt one of the most spectacular places. The bustling town nestles along the quiet, tree lined shore of the glistening Lake Wakitipu, with the dramatic, snow-capped Remarkables mountain range providing a breathtaking back drop. During the summer visitors can enjoy everything from fantastic walking trails, gentle sailing and relaxed café culture, to jet boating, heli-mountain biking and bungee jumping. The winter snows bring some of the best skiing opportunities in the country. Whether you are looking for an adrenalin filled adventure or unspoilt natural wilderness, you cannot go far wrong with Queenstown.

Samantha Drew
01869 276 240



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STONE TOWN , ZANZIBAR

Flanked by the Indian Ocean, Stone Town is one of the most exotic towns in Africa. Heavily laden dhows sail in and out of port, tall crumbling buildings cast shadows over labyrinthine streets and the smell of spices fills the air. There is no room for cars in Stone Town's streets so they're perfect for exploring on foot. It's best to start early, before breakfast if you can, and head for the market on Creek Road to see the traders weighing spices on brass scales, splitting exotic fruit with pangas and selling fish, fresh from the dhows. After the market the shops start to open and some of my favourite are opposite St Joseph's Cathedral. Here, long thin dark shops have dusty antiques hidden away in corners. There are brass studded chests, Zanzibari clocks and all manner of other fascination bits and bobs. During the heat of the day Stone Town

becomes Ghost Town with doors locked and few people on the streets. Head for Blues Café, on stilts over the ocean and enjoy a cool drink while watching for dolphins. The House of Wonders & Palace Museum are perfect places to shade from the sun and have superb exhibitions on the history and culture of Zanzibar. As the sun sets it's a must to sit by the sea and watch all the dhows sail in and out of harbour. Then finally, as dusk becomes dark the Forodhani Gardens come alive with street vendors barbecuing squid, prawns and crayfish. Enjoy a few spicy snacks and then head for the rooftop restaurant at Emerson's for an evening meal with the lights of Stone Town below you.

Richard Stidworthy
01869 276 272

ASWAN, EGYPT

Whilst the herds all stampede down to the Red Sea at the end of their trips to Egypt, the more discerning traveller (and I count myself in that number!) would do well to head to Aswan: after all, the Aga Khan, Agatha Christie and the last Egyptian king, Farouk, can't all have been wrong. Alongside the well-known monuments of Philae and the High Dam, it has so much to offer those seeking relaxation, not least the view over the Nile, dotted with green islands and rounded boulders, and then the stark Sahara on the far bank. The pace of life is gentle, there are Nubian restaurants for trying new, exotic dishes, and the souqs are popular with those looking for a more "authentic" experience.

Charlotte Moulton
01869 276 263

BOMBAY (MUMBAI), INDIA

India's biggest, richest and brashest city, Bombay is one of the world's great metropolises with a population of fourteen million. Home to Bollywood, bringing the glamour of the movies to the city's clerical workers, ministers and politicians, it was founded by the British on reclaimed marsh land and their legacy can be seen in the colonial architecture of the city centre. A boat trip out to Elephanta Island affords wonderful views of the city on the return leg as you head towards the Gateway to India. Ultimately, however, it is the vitality of India's most forward thinking city that will captivate you.

Helen Baker
01869 276 228