

# Eastern Promise

*Charlie Read from our Southeast Asia team recounts his travel experiences in the region*



Meet the Specialist

Charlie Read

“...and if you find a country you like and get a good job there, don't hurry back!” And so it was with these reassuring words from my Mum ringing in my ears that I boarded my flight for the first of 15 countries I was to explore over the next 18 extraordinary months.

That was some years ago now, but the adventures I had then have stood me in surprisingly good stead – who would have thought that backpacking round the world would lead to a career? Looking back at those days it is no coincidence that the countries and sights that moved me most then are the ones that I enthuse about to Audley clients now.

Laos' smiley-eyed people and misty mountains evoke my fondest memories of Southeast Asia, and its pace of life seemed to suit me best. Lazy days were spent 'innertubing' on Nam Song river in Vang Vieng, under the watchful eye of the limestone karst cliffs that loom over you like a concerned parent. Luang Prabang is a magical place – time spent swimming in the aquamarine pools of the Kuang Si waterfall and watching the world go by in a swirl of saffron and incense whilst enjoying a Lao beer was definitely time well spent. I can't recommend it highly enough.

Cambodia's irrepressible temples of Angkor still stand out as extraordinary. The sheer size, majesty and craftwork of the temples are both astounding and beautiful. Watching the sun set from Angkor Wat, surveying the endless plains and jungles of the north, clambering through the enormous roots of the trees that envelope Ta Prohm and staring in wonderment at the stone-carved faces of the Bayon were all experiences that remain indelible in my memory.

Thailand's beaches are still some of the best in the world, and 'post tsunami' are as broad, clean and

golden as they ever have been. Fishing, beach cricket and teaching local children magic tricks was how I spent my time, the beauty of the beach being that you can do what you like, when you like, if you like.

In fact, one client was so impressed with Krabi and the beach hotel I found for him, he decided he wanted a lasting reminder of it...

## Dragon Tales

We couldn't resist booking a trip with Audley. My daughter Nicola and her husband Hugo returned from a two-week tour of Vietnam and Cambodia with such a wealth of stories that we were soon in touch with Charlie in the Southeast Asia team, who organised a four-week trip of a lifetime for us.

During the trip we took a private tour of laid-back Hanoi, spent the night on a junk in Halong Bay, took an overnight train journey on the wonderful Victoria Express, saw the sun set over Angkor Wat and explored the Golden Triangle, but the highlight for my wife and I was undoubtedly Nakamanda, a 'boutique' hotel by the beach in Krabi, Thailand. Actually, to say it is by the beach is inaccurate – it is on the beach, in the forests, among the hills, by the cliff faces... It has been designed to integrate with the beautiful setting as much as possible, so you can dine with the waves at your feet and dive just yards from your stylish, comfortable room.



We loved Nakamanda so much that on our return to the UK we decided to use the name for the yacht we were building. When I mentioned this in a casual post-trip chat with Charlie he told me that 'Nakamanda' actually means 'sacred sea dragon' and is a figure in the folklore of the nearby Andaman Islands, so it is not only an apt name for a boat but is also something of a coincidence as our first yacht was called 'Magic Dragon'. We are taking this as an auspicious sign, and if we build memories to match our time in Krabi while sailing in *Nakamanda* we shall consider ourselves very fortunate indeed.

*Mr. Simon Wainman,  
Audley client*

