Lonely Planet Best in Asia

Posted on

Arugambay Sri Lanka Number 8

Global travel authority Lonely Planet has revealed its 2018 Best in Asia list – an agenda-setting collection of the continent's 10 best destinations to visit in the year ahead.

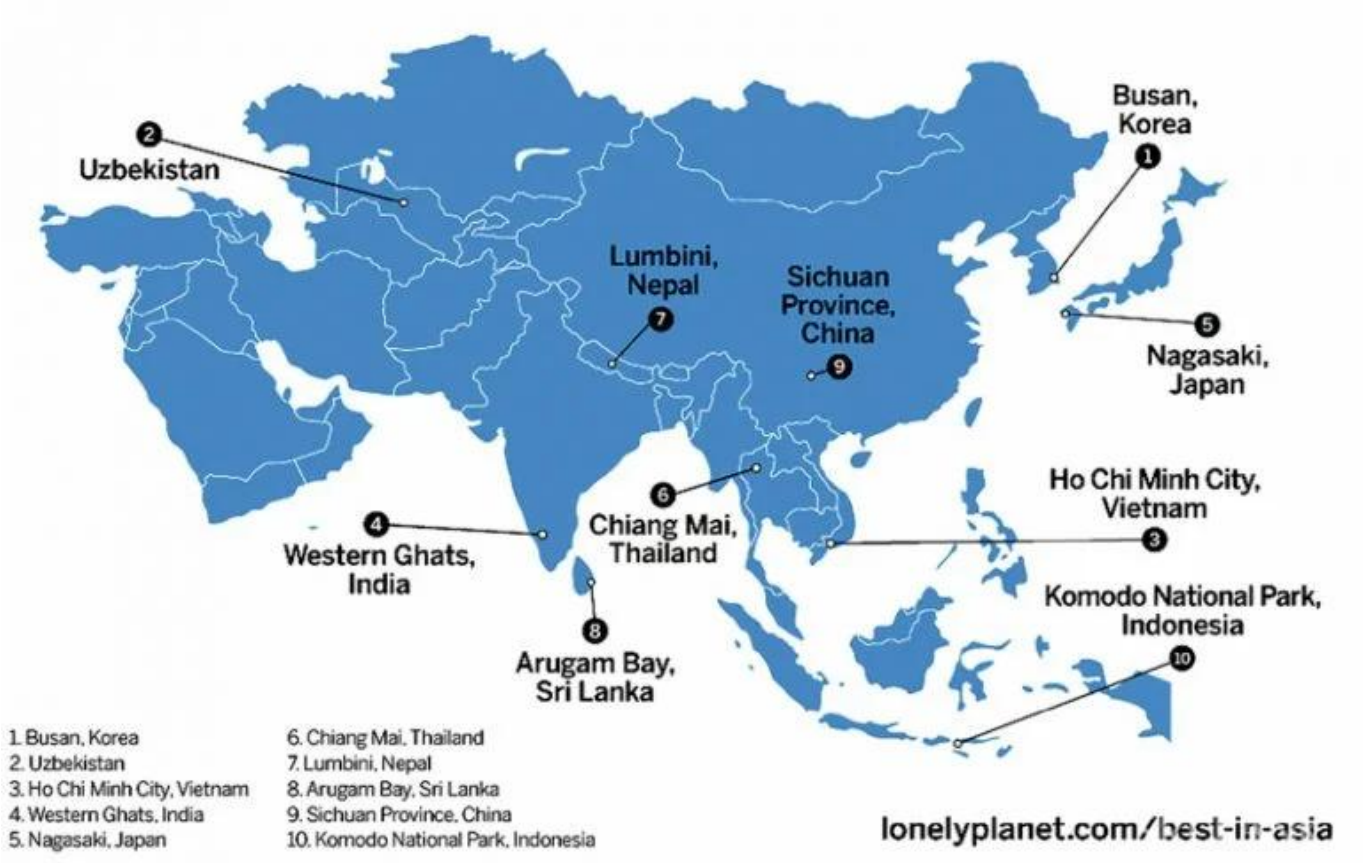
For this third annual Best in Asia list, Lonely Planet's in-house Asia experts have named "eclectic" and "vibrant" Busan, South Korea, as the number one destination; while the jewelled architecture and ancient cities of Uzbekistan are in second place; and in third comes Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, "a supercity that somehow keeps getting cooler".

"Asia is such a vast and diverse continent for anyone dreaming of an escape," Lonely Planet's Asia- Pacific Media Spokesperson, Chris Zeiher says. "Our experts

have combed through thousands of recommendations to pick the best destinations to visit over the next 12 months".

"From Nagasaki in Japan, to Arugam Bay in Sri Lanka," Chris says, "this is a line-up to inspire a multitude of travellers – whether they're based in Asia, or maybe they've already visited some of the region's heavy-hitting destinations".

Top 10 destinations to visit in 2018



1. Busan, South Korea

"A stunning confluence of scenery, culture and cuisine…Busan packs an eclectic offering of activities to suit all travellers: hike hills to Buddhist temples, settle into sizzling hot springs and feast on seafood…at the country's largest fish market. Poised to steal the spotlight, Busan is East Asia's Culture City for 2018 and will be at its most vibrant with…colourful events showcasing the country's cultural heritage, from street art festivals to traditional dance shows".



It’s the perfect time to visit South Korea’s second city
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2. Uzbekistan

“Change is afoot in a country that has remained largely closed off to the wider world due to tight control following the end of the Soviet era. Uzbekistan has long held sway over travellers’ imaginations, with its dreamy mosaic-clad mosques and Silk Road lore…and in 2017 took huge strides in opening up to tourism, announcing visa-free and e-visa schemes, new air routes and extensions to its shiny high-speed rail line, making access to its arsenal of jewelled architecture and ancient cities easier than ever”.



Uzbekistan’s historic treasures are now more accessible than ever
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3. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

“The southern supercity of Ho Chi Minh City somehow keeps getting cooler. Aging apartment blocks are being colonised by vintage clothes stores and independent coffee shops, innovative breweries are fuelling one of the best craft beer scenes in Southeast Asia, and…eclectic venues are strengthening the local music scene. Add in long-standing attractions The War Remnants Museum and a pioneering street food scene…and this buzzing Asian megalopolis is in no danger of going out of style”.



This slick supercity is in no danger of going out of style
©Dung Pham/500px

4. Western Ghats, India

“The Western Ghats offer…an atmospheric mirror to Shimla and Darjeeling, with added jungle appeal… coffee, tea and spice plantations, charmingly dated colonial outposts, thundering waterfalls, and a steam-powered mountain railway. These rugged hills are UNESCO listed as one of the top spots for biodiversity in the world, protecting the neelakurinji flower, which blooms only once every 12 years and will be painting the hills in purple livery from August to October 2018”.



Rare flowers, steam trains and quirky hill stations are all on offer in the Western Ghats
© Nate Hovee/Shutterstock

5. Nagasaki, Japan

“For most, Nagasaki is synonymous with the tragic atomic bombing of August 1945…but remarkably, the city has converted the catastrophe into a call for peace, exemplified by the tranquil Nagasaki Peace Park and the Atomic Bomb Museum. However, Nagasaki’s identity transcends one violent act…visit a new foreign-trade museum housed in Japan’s oldest church, or pass the verdant harbour towards the hiking routes that snake through the surrounding volcanic hills”.



Nagasaki’s identity transcends one violent act
© SeanPavonePhoto/Getty Images

6. Chiang Mai, Thailand

“This former capital of the Lanna Kingdom feels plucked from the pages of history, where visitors browse stalls of antique jewellery…among archaic alleyways…yet despite this, a young, creative population has taken up residency in Chiang Mai bringing an exciting buzz…alongside majestic chedis (stupas) are cafés known for their latte art, mural-walled fusion cuisine restaurants and the newly- opened, award-winning MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum”.



A new energy has enveloped ancient Chiang Mai, evident in its innovative culinary scene
©Kseniia Ivanova/EyeEm /Getty Images

7. Lumbini, Nepal

“For decades, Lumbini was somewhere travellers flashed through en route from India to Nepal, unaware they had passed within yards of the birthplace of the historical Buddha. Today, Lumbini is on the ascendancy…a new international airport is under construction offering a safer route into Nepal, and ever-more aweing temples are springing up”. Despite these developments, “the town’s cardinal draw will remain its tranquillity”.



Change is apace in sleepy Lumbini
© AlexFox/Getty Images

8. Arugam Bay, Sri Lanka

Despite Sri Lanka emerging as one of the world's hottest travel destinations, Arugam Bay, a surf town on the country's east coast, has miraculously managed to retain its cool. While holidaymakers swarm the country's ancient citadels and hiker-strewn hill stations, here you'll find barefooted boarders sprawled outside vegan cafes and scrawled signs on hotel doors reading: 'gone surfing, back soon'.

Renowned as a long-time surf haven, the town boasts breaks to satisfy all levels, along with a number of schools to get everyone hanging 10. If the turquoise swells can't tug you in, Arugam Bay has authentically grown its on land offering, with an increase in beachside bars and makeshift music festivals; plus a handy proximity to Kumana National Park, home to leopards, elephants and crocodiles.



Arugam Bay boasts a laid-back vibe and surf breaks for all levels
© Shanti Hesse/Shutterstock

9. Sìchuān Province, China

“Far-flung villages, towering skylines, giant pandas and fiery cuisine; Sìchuān Province is a microcosm of modern China…gain perspective surveying the Lè Shān Grand Buddha or climb Éméi Shān to absolve a lifetime’s sins…ride the first section of the Sìchuān-Tibet Railway to visit time-frozen Tibetan villages…or spot the mushrooming of luring brewpubs and boutique hotels in cosmopolitan Chéngdā.”



Sìchuān is a microcosm of China, with a selection of ancient and modern attractions ©akedesign/Shutterstock

10. Komodo National Park, Indonesia

“New flight connections have made Komodo National Park more accessible than ever. Aside from laying eyes on the illustrious Komodo dragon, visitors to this cerulean-silhouetted archipelago can hike to hallowed viewpoints on Padar, sample laid-back beachside living on Kanawa and dive with a mind-boggling array of marine life in the reefs. A nature enthusiast’s nirvana”.



While glimpsing a dragon is a highlight, Komodo is home to a wealth of other wildlife attractions
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