SOTC
For Holidays

Your Holiday Inspiration

The Holiday
You Didn't Know You Needed

Discover new ways to travel, experience and escape.

What if your next holiday was more than just a destination?

Imagine this: a van pulling over on a mountain road because the light hits the valley at just the right moment, and no one wants to miss it. A plate of noodles eaten standing at a street-side stall in Bangkok, still hot, still a little too spicy and somehow exactly how it should be. A town that was never on the itinerary, discovered simply because you took a turn no one had planned for.

That's the shift we want you to make this September. Not a longer trip. Not a farther one. Just a different one.

Long-haul travel has its own kind of magic; the anticipation, the sense of discovery, and the feeling of arriving somewhere completely different. But sometimes, an extraordinary holiday can be found much closer to home, too. It can be about the experiences you collect, the places that surprise you and the moments that stay with you long after you've returned. Southeast Asia offers all of that in abundance, as does India, closer to home and no less captivating.

This month, we're exploring both. From the vibrant streets and hidden corners of Southeast Asia to the landscapes, flavours and slower rhythms of India & Surrounds, these are journeys that remind us that there's more than one way to escape the everyday.

Whether you're ready to cross continents or simply take a different road, the perfect holiday might be closer or farther than you think.

It's not about how far you go. It's about where the journey takes you.

GO FURTHER WITHOUT GOING FAR

Some holidays are about the destination. This one is about how you get there, what you eat along the way, and who you bring with you. Three ways to travel differently this season, closer to home than you'd think.

THE JOURNEY IS THE HOLIDAY- INTRODUCING VAN JOURNEYS: FREEDOM ON FOUR WHEELS

There's a particular kind of holiday where the itinerary is more of a suggestion than a schedule. And more often than not, it turns out to be the best kind.

Van Journeys offer the freedom to travel at your own pace. You leave when you're ready, stop when something catches your eye, and linger a little longer when a place deserves more than a passing glance. Some of the most memorable discoveries are the ones that were never on the itinerary: the roadside viewpoint you hadn't planned for, the little town you stumble upon, or the moment someone in the front seat says, Wait, should we stop here?

It's a style of travel that lends itself naturally to travelling together. Families can share the experience without being tied to a rigid schedule. Two or three families can set off together, children can swap seats and stories along the way, while adults have the time and space for conversations that everyday life rarely allows. For close-knit groups of friends, it means shared playlists, spontaneous detours and the simple pleasure of having the whole journey unfold together.

SOTC offers van Journeys experiences across destinations designed for exactly this kind of travel:

Central Asia & Caucasus Route: Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Georgia - a journey through Silk Road cities, dramatic mountain landscapes and cultural experiences that feel far removed from the familiar holiday circuit.

Southeast Asia Route: Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos - a journey through rice paddies, riverside towns, ancient temples and vibrant local life, with enough time to experience each destination rather than simply pass through it.

Neither route is about rushing from one attraction to the next. That, after all, is the point.

Best for: Multi-family groups, close-knit friend circles and travellers who believe the journey should be just as memorable as the destination.

EAT YOUR WAY AROUND THE WORLD – FOOD TRAILS

Sometimes, the best way to understand a place is simply

to sit down and eat.

You know a destination is doing food right when one of your most memorable meals had standing up, perched on a stool beside a street-side stall that has been serving the neighbourhood for years.

In Vietnam, Hanoi's Old Quarter offers bowls of fragrant pho, freshly made banh mi and the unmistakable rhythm of a city that seems to revolve around food. Across Thailand, night markets come alive with flavours and aromas - papaya salad pounded to order, smoky grilled skewers and tom yum with its signature balance of heat and sourness.

Malaysia brings another layer of character to the table. There's nasi lemak with its bold sambal, laksa built around rich, aromatic broths.

And then there's home ground. South India has a culinary theatre all its own: a dosa arriving paper-thin and crisp, served hot from the griddle, while Kerala's coastal cuisine brings together coconut, spices and curry leaves in flavours that are simply rooted in the region. Further north, Kashmir offers the grandeur of wazwan, an elaborate traditional feast served across multiple courses, followed by kahwa, fragrant with saffron and cardamom, and steeped in the warmth of Kashmiri hospitality.

This isn't sightseeing with something to eat along the way. For some travellers, the food is the itinerary.

Best for: Anyone who plans their holidays around what they prefer to eat rather than the other way around

YOUR FIRST JOURNEY AS TWO - HONEYMOON ESCAPES

A honeymoon isn't simply the final celebration after the wedding. It's the first chapter of a new life together, and it deserves to feel like one.

The best honeymoon experiences leave room to slow down. A beach where there's nowhere else you need to be. Mornings that begin without an alarm. Long lunches, unhurried afternoons and dinners that belong entirely to the two of you.

The Maldives lends itself beautifully to this kind of escape. Think overwater villas surrounded by turquoise lagoons, private moments on secluded sandbanks and days that seem to have no agenda beyond being together. Bali offers a different kind of romance, from the lush terraces of Ubud to private pool villas where the outside world feels wonderfully distant.

Vietnam brings a more immersive kind of romance. An overnight cruise through Ha Long Bay, followed by an evening wandering through the lantern-lit streets of Hoi An, gives you the chance to experience the country at a gentler pace.

Mauritius brings its own sense of escape, with catamaran cruises and the otherworldly landscapes of Chamarel. In Kashmir, Dal Lake, traditional houseboats and sweeping mountain views create an atmosphere that makes slowing down feel completely natural. Thailand's Krabi offers dramatic limestone cliffs, beaches and island escapes, while the Andaman Islands combine pristine shores such as Radhanagar Beach with the history and character of Port Blair.

There's no single way to plan a honeymoon. Choose the destination that feels most like the story you want to begin together and the one you'll still be talking about years from now.

Because the best honeymoons aren't simply about where you went.

They're about how the beginning felt.

MINI STORIES

Every traveller is chasing something different this season, even if they haven't quite put it into words yet. Maybe it's a city that comes alive after dark or water so clear it barely seems real. Maybe it's silence, the kind you only find deep in the wilderness or mountain air cold enough to make you remember what winter feels like. Four moods, four very different ways to travel. Take your pick.

CHASE THE NIGHT

Some cities don't really come alive until the sun goes down.

Bangkok transforms after dark, with rooftop bars glowing against the skyline and night markets drawing crowds long into the evening. Head to the city's bustling food markets for grilled skewers, spicy salads and mango sticky rice or simply follow the lights and see where the night takes you. In Ho Chi Minh City, the energy shifts with the traffic. Neon spills across the streets as scooters weave through the city, while an evening Vespa ride offers a distinctly local way to experience its nightlife and food scene. In Kuala Lumpur, Jalan Alor fills with the smoke and sizzle of open-air grills, with satay, noodles and seafood competing for attention beneath the glow of the city. And then there's Dubai, where the skyline takes on an entirely different character after sunset. Watch the Dubai Fountain performances around the Burj Khalifa, enjoy the nightlife and then settle in for dinner with the illuminated city stretching out around you.

These aren't destinations you simply tour. They're destinations you stay up for.

THE BLUE ESCAPE

Some water looks so impossibly clear that you need to see it for yourself to believe it.

At Uluwatu, Bali's dramatic cliffs meet the deep blue of the Indian Ocean, while Phuket offers island-hopping adventures through limestone landscapes, hidden coves and clear Andaman waters. In Langkawi, mangrove forests, secluded beaches and surrounding islands make the sea as much a part of the journey as the land. Then there's the Maldives, where turquoise lagoons surround private villas and coral reefs bring you face-to-face with an extraordinary underwater world. Depending on the season and location, you may encounter manta rays, reef sharks, turtles and schools of tropical fish. Closer to home, the Andaman Islands offer some of India's clearest waters and remarkable marine life. Around Havelock Island, snorkelling and diving reveal colourful coral reefs and tropical fish. For a truly unusual experience, bioluminescent plankton can sometimes illuminate the water at night under the right conditions. Further south, Lakshadweep's coral islands and lagoons offer another world of turquoise water, white-sand beaches and exceptional marine life.

Bring your goggles. You'll want to see what's beneath the surface.

INTO THE WILD

Somewhere beyond the trail, a tiger may be moving silently through the forest, leaving little more than a set of paw prints behind.

Ranthambore National Park brings together dry deciduous forests, open grasslands and the striking ruins of Ranthambore Fort. Early-morning safaris offer the chance to spot Bengal tigers, along with leopards, sloth bears, sambar and other wildlife, often around the park's lakes and watering holes. Further south, Kanha National Park unfolds through vast sal and bamboo forests. Tigers remain the park's most celebrated residents, but barasingha, gaur and leopards make every safari an unpredictable encounter with the wild.

Beyond its wildlife, Yala National Park in Sri Lanka captivates with its raw, coastal beauty. Explore a stunning wilderness landscape shaped by ocean breezes and complemented by some of Sri Lanka's finest luxury resorts.

THE COOL ESCAPE

Right about the time the city starts to feel unbearable, somewhere up north the air turns crisp, and everything makes sense again.

Gulmarg's gondola, hot kahwa waiting at the top for anyone who remembered to order it. Sonmarg earns its name honestly, gold light settling over meadows that lead up to Thajiwas Glacier. Manali keeps its pine-scented lanes quiet even in peak season, and Spiti Valley pushes further still, past cliffside roads to Key Monastery and a post office that claims to be the highest in the world. If you've been missing the snow, this is where you go looking for it.

DESTINATION IN FOCUS:

VIETNAM

Where Every Journey Tells a Story

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From lantern-lit streets and limestone islands to fast-moving cities and a food scene that rewards standing on a pavement, Vietnam brings together the kind of experiences that make a holiday memorable from the moment you land.

Start in **Hanoi**, where the old quarter never quite settles down. Motorbikes weave past shopfronts selling everything from lanterns to lacquerware, and somewhere in the middle of it all is a bowl of bun cha too good to rush through, egg coffee thick enough to eat with a spoon.

Then **Ha Long Bay** takes over, and it does something to you that photographs never quite manage. Limestone islands rise straight out of emerald water, hundreds of them, closer together than seems geologically reasonable. Spend the night on a cruise through them and wake up to mist still sitting low over the karsts, like the bay hasn't decided to fully wake up either.

Da Nang brings you back to the coast, long stretches of beach backed by a skyline that's grown modern almost overnight. From there it's a short drive to Hoi An, where motorised traffic disappears after dark, and thousands of silk lanterns take over instead, strung above a river that carries their reflection downstream. Rent a bicycle. Get a little lost. It's designed for exactly that.

Ho Chi Minh City closes the loop with something faster, colonial buildings standing next to glass towers, rooftop bars overlooking a city that never really stops moving. And if you've got the time, **Phu Quoc** waits at the end of it all, an island built for doing absolutely nothing, which by that point in the trip, you'll have earned.

Food, culture, coastline, jungle, city, island. Vietnam gives you the whole spread without asking for a long-haul flight in return, and there's something quietly satisfying about that.

Maybe the best holiday isn't the one you spent months planning. Maybe it's the one you almost didn't take. The trip that made you ask, halfway through, why you hadn't done this sooner. The one that didn't need a fourteen-hour flight to earn its place in your memory. Distance was never really the thing that mattered.

You've got the list now. Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Kerala, Kashmir, Rajasthan, Andaman- all of it closer than you think, all of it capable of the thing you thought only far-away places could give you.

Go book the one that's been sitting in the back of your mind for too long.

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