

PART C

Life!

THE
STRAITS TIMES
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Seoul secrets

Insider tips
to the South
Korean city

C4

Home educated

90210 actress
never
attended
school

C14



Good friends (from left) Kelly, Minzi and Crystin can consider Vientiane, Laos, home of Buddhist temple Pha That Luang (below).



Gal pals get rugged

Former schoolmates and gal pals marketing executive Crystin Chiam, lawyer Kelly Fan and advertising executive Teo Minzi, all 27

The brief

"We want to get away from job stress, widen our horizons and immerse in different cultures. It's an all-girl thing and boy-friends are not included.

We don't want to crack our brains over planning. The dirt path less travelled would be good. And Asia's backyard is the best place for cheap getaways from the hustle and bustle of Singapore.

We'd love to soak in waterfalls, bask in the sun, camp under the stars and bath elephants. We can poop in bushes. We don't have to be clean and pristine.

We'd like plenty of sightseeing with rich history and culture, such as old and architecturally interesting buildings and churches."

What the experts suggest

Ms Hajar Ali, founder of Urbane Nomads (tel:6728-8614, www.urbanenomads.com): "I'd recommend Sri Lanka where you can indulge in the things mentioned: affordable luxury, bathing elephants, camping under the stars and watching the sunset.

From Colombo, you have a choice of Galle in south-western Sri Lanka or any of the beachside resorts in between.

Make sure to head for Yala National Park and stay in one of the lodges or go on a mobile tented safari for an unforgettable experience. There are also eco-lodges with a barefoot chic ethos - houses made of mud and lit by hurricane lamps after sunset. You'd be able to indulge in camping under the stars in some style."



Approximate cost: \$1,500 (five days)

Mr Rufus Tan, Asian destinations specialist from Quotient TravelPlanner: "Laos is somewhere off the beaten track. Head to the capital Vientiane for architectural wonders. Highlights include the symbolic Buddhist temple of Pha That Luang, Patuxai - a large monument in the style of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris - and Talat Sao, a morning market that is open all day.

Fly to Luang Prabang (for approximately \$200) for elephant rides along Nam Khan River. Spend another two days visiting the Plain of Jars in Xieng Khuang, one of the great mysteries of Asia. There are more than 300 giant stone jars scattered across the plateau.

For accommodation choices, pick from converted French colonial houses, traditional Laotian-inspired hotels or modern international hotels.

To get there, either take Air Asia to Vientiane from Kuala Lumpur (\$360++) or fly via Thai Airways, with a stopover in Bangkok (approximately \$875)."

Approximate cost: \$1,900 (seven days)

Gal pals get rugged.

Travel experts plan holidays for this bunch of rugged girls who are looking for an all-girl thing - boyfriends not included. -ST

It is not only the 11th month but also the 11th hour if you are thinking of a year-end holiday but have not decided where to go.

From child-friendly places to romantic getaways to rugged adventures, Life! asks travel experts to plan holidays for different groups of people with various needs.

(Note: All prices cited are estimates only and include airfare and accommodation on a per-head basis.)

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