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# Yes, You Should Visit Southeast Asia During The Rainy Season. Here's Why.

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*I'm a consumer advocate. I write about customer service.*

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Breakfast at the elephant camp at Anantara Golden Triangle. Guests can spend the night in a bubble, ... [+] CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT

The conventional wisdom about traveling to Southeast Asia during the rainy season is that you shouldn't. But the

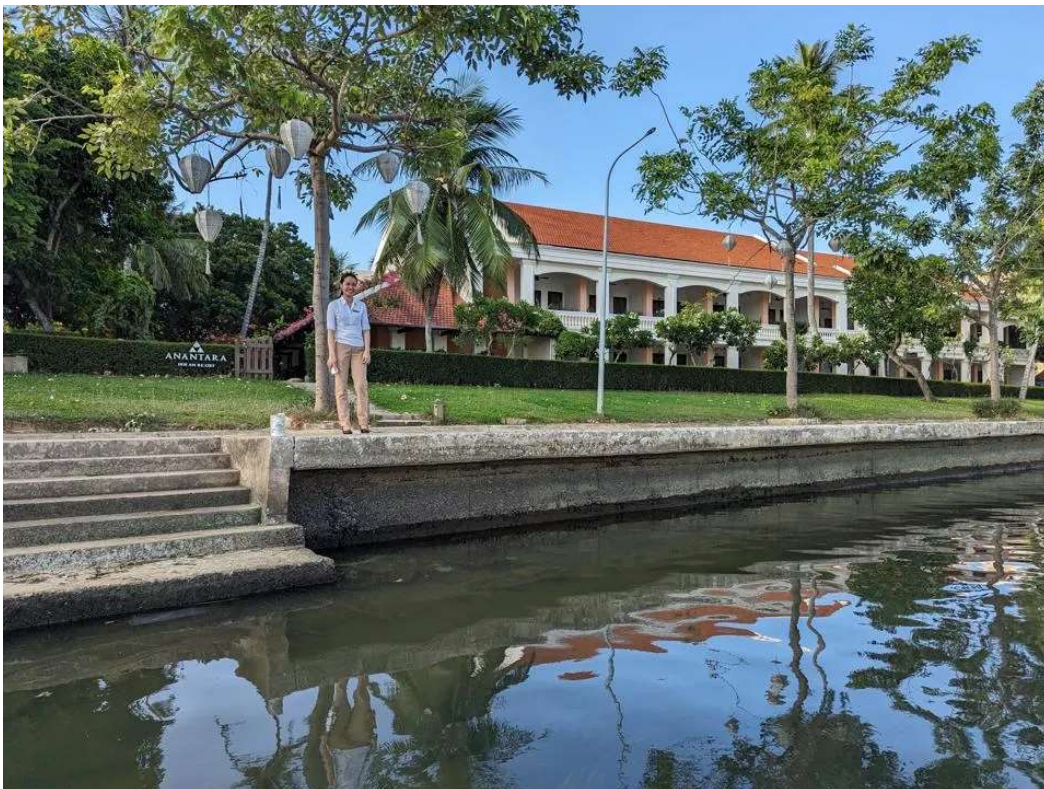
conventional wisdom is wrong, says Supratik Guha, general manager at [Anantara Angkor Resort](#).

The rainy season, which runs from May to October, is one of the best times to visit a destination like Cambodia.

"People feel the rain is a hindrance, but for a destination like this, I think the rain is a complement," he says. "When you drive out into the countryside, and it's green, and you see the rice being planted, it's super nice."

Here's something else that's super nice: Many American guests avoid the rainy season — also known as the green season — and wait until November to come to Southeast Asia. But if they visited during the rainy — sorry, *green* — season, they would find few crowds and prices that are between 30 and 40 percent lower than high-season rates.

On a recent tour of Southeast Asia during monsoon season, that's what I discovered. The rainy season may be the ideal time for an adventure in this part of the world.



The Anantara Hoi An as seen from the Thu Bon River. AREN ELLIOTT

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# When is the monsoon Season in Southeast Asia?

Monsoon season in Southeast Asia typically starts in May and ends in October. But it varies by country. In Thailand, the monsoon season lasts between July and October. In Vietnam, it's May through November. And in Bali, the wet season lasts from November to April. But it depends on your location within the country. For example, in Hoi An, in the mountainous central part of Vietnam near Da Nang, monsoon season doesn't really get underway until September, according to locals.

# How bad is the rainy season in Southeast Asia?

It really depends on where you are. When I was staying in Bali in June — which is technically outside the rainy season — it rained nonstop for two weeks. In Thailand this August, the mornings were usually clear and there were brief but intense rain showers in the afternoon.

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In Cambodia, also in August, the rain started in the afternoon, and it came and went for the rest of the day, but was never intense. In Vietnam in August, it never rained, but people there told me that I could expect floodwaters next month. Then again, with the weather we've been having lately, who knows what will happen? (Here's my [guide to planning a trip at any time of the year.](#))



The restaurant at the Anantara Angkor Resort. The hotel's architecture is inspired by the area's ... [+] IDEN ELLIOTT

## It wouldn't be Cambodia without a little rain

Take Siem Reap, Cambodia, for example. On a typical day during the rainy season, the sky is clear in the morning, affording a postcard-perfect sunrise over the temples of Angkor Wat. As the day progresses, clouds build up and the rains start in the afternoon. But sometimes they don't, says Cedrick Ragel, a spokesman for the [Grand Hotel d'Angkor](#).

"There's a perception of It never stops raining here," he says on a recent morning in August, pointing to the sky. "But the sun is

right here."

Supratik Guha of the Anantara Angkor Resort, says even when it rains, the effects are minimal. Before the government upgraded Siem Reap's roads, the streets would flood during heavy rains. But now, with new drainage systems in place, there have been no floods. A [new airport is scheduled to open in October](#), adding to the region's upgraded infrastructure.

Guha says that visitors who want a luxury boutique hotel experience — plus the benefits of Angkor Wat's one-of-a-kind temples — should consider a visit during rainy season. His pitch is pretty compelling: Angkor Wat just isn't the same without a little drizzle on the moss-covered ruins. And there's something to be said for a little moisture and authenticity.



Photographer Iden Elliott on a waterways tour of Bangkok's canals CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT

## Vietnam: Waiting for the rain in Hoi An

Rainy season hasn't really started yet in Vietnam at this time of year. But it's warm in Hoi An, a resort town just south of Da

Nang. It feels like August in Manhattan — hot and humid, with temperatures pushing the triple digits.

I asked Ross Sanders, the area general manager for Vietnam with [Minor Hotels](#), about the rainy season. In September, which is the official start of the monsoon season, the area can be deluged with rain and the nearby river may flood. But the floodwaters recede quickly.

"It's not that bad," he says.

Visiting a hotel like the Anantara Hoi An during the shoulder season is a special experience. The luxury hotel is uncrowded, and you can always find a table at the Hoi An Riverside restaurant. There you can experience authentic Vietnamese fare while you watch the boats with their colorful lanterns floating up and down the Thu Bon River.

In the town of Hoi An, a short walk from the hotel, you'll find some colorful Chinese temples, as well as a marketplace with shops selling clothing and souvenirs. In the summertime, Hoi An comes alive during the early morning and late evening, so if you want the place to yourself, try taking a walk into town after breakfast.

Sanders recommends a visit to Vietnam during the summer because rates are lower and you get a lot of individual attention. And the locals seem genuinely happy to see you at a time when most tourists stay home.





A view of Angkor Wat in Cambodia. CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT

## Bangkok's best-kept secret

The biggest surprise for me was Thailand, a place where the rainy season is legendary. In early August in Bangkok, it stayed relatively dry. During the afternoon, it would rain every now and then, but not the sheets of rain you would expect from monsoon season. Insiders say late July and early August can be relatively clear, which is something I never knew.

"Late August and September, that's when things get started," says Dan Schacter, a spokesman for the [Four Seasons Bangkok](#).

So there are a few weeks between the official and actual start of the rainy season, when you can experience a less rainy Bangkok, according to insiders.

One of the highlights of my visit was a boat tour of the canals of Bangkok, departing from the dock at the [Anantara Riverside Bangkok](#) and ending at the newly completed Buddha statue of Wat Paknam Phasi Charoen, a temple whose giant 230-foot

statue is visible from most of the city. The canals are fascinating ancient waterways, a reminder of old Siam.

## Rainy mornings in the Golden Triangle — and relatively quiet

In northern Thailand, along the border of Laos and Myanmar, I got the closest thing to a true monsoon experience. The rain started early in the morning before dawn. It was a downpour the likes I haven't experienced since I lived in Hilo, Hawaii. I was spending a night at the [Anantara Golden Triangle](#), an upscale property with an elephant camp and stunning views of the Mekong River. Only on this particular morning, there were no views.

But just after sunrise, the rain turned off like a switch, revealing the river and the smoke-covered mountains of Myanmar and Laos in the distance. I asked a manager if this was typical for green season. No, the rain lingers for longer, I'm told. But this monsoon season has been drier, at least so far. August is "relatively quiet" at the hotel — the perfect time to visit with the elephants and save some money, too.

Traveling to Southeast Asia during the rainy season is a bit of a gamble, but it can pay off in many ways. In a place like the Golden Triangle, you can enjoy a little solitude along the paths leading to the Ruak River, one of the tributaries to the Mekong. You can have the spa all to yourself. You can walk with the elephants without feeling as if you are at a press conference, with tourists all around you taking pictures. It may actually be the ideal time to visit this part of the world.

And the rain is like a character in a novel. It is always there, adding authenticity and a little unpredictability to the equation. That's what turns an ordinary trip into an adventure. But bring your raincoat, just in case.





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When I was stationed in Thailand there were very large drainage ditches, like 5 feet deep and 15 feet wide, along the roads on base. In spite of this, the ditches would fill and the roads would flood. I heard of someone driving a pickup into one of the ditches.


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