

Travel



Home is where the hut is
A cultural experience awaits at
Phum Baitang in Cambodia

The lap of local luxury

Tired of over-stylised, over-designed hotels which look at total odds with their surroundings? The *Time Out* team checks out a quartet of luxury Asian resorts that pay tribute to their local indigenous cultures

When you arrive at your luxury hotel in Asia, sometimes you just don't really care what the outside looks like. All you're concerned about is whether there's a butler service, whether the food is exquisite, whether the interiors are grand and whether your four-poster bed is going to wrap you comfortably in its arms for the night. But, sometimes, you want much more than this – especially if you're the more culturally minded type. You want a sense of place. You want to feel part of the local area and culture. Well, we're here to help you enjoy a more 'local' atmosphere on your luxury summer trip.

We've chosen four of the best across Asia when it comes to getting an exquisite hotel or resort experience that fits in perfectly with the local indigenous tribes, villages, history and arts. Step this way and get far more than just five-star rooms and luxury spas at these fantastic locations that take their lead from the traditional cultures that surround them...

Phum Baitang, Cambodia
Nothing quite compares to the magnificence of the Angkor Archaeological Park in Siem Reap, Cambodia. This Unesco heritage site of quiet, stirring beauty has made Siem Reap a tourist

hotspot of late, with luxury hotels sprouting up on every corner in this modest town. But if you're looking for something other than the colonial-era Raffles or the stylised Park Hyatt, then head for the newly opened Phum Baitang, which is located just 10 minutes from the temples of Angkor.

This eight-hectare property resembles a typical Cambodian rural village, with rice paddy fields and lush gardens that surround 45 villas, each boasting either a private terrace or a plunge pool. The wooden stilted structures are inspired by traditional Khmer design and the interiors are also rustic – emphasising the use of raw

materials without sacrificing any five-star creature comforts.

Adding to the traditional feel is the simple method of transport: the bicycle. Grab a bike and pedal around the resort, making a stop at the Spa Temple for an indulgent treatment that's inspired by Cambodian techniques. Or pull up your wheels at the 50m outdoor infinity pool. Or even just stop and smoke a cigar in the cocktail lounge, set in a 100-year-old Cambodian farmhouse.

Also a plus at Phum Baitang is the fact that each guest is treated to a complimentary breakfast at the Hang Bay restaurant. Take a seat on the outdoor terrace and gaze out at the greenery. This is a fantastic retreat from the strenuous walking required to see the Angkor temples and there're plenty of cultural touches to make it feel like you're part of a local village.

One of the biggest bonuses to Phum Baitang is the discreet

service. There are no personal butlers here but your room is quickly freshened up when you take your breakfast, and the concierge arranges all your sightseeing excursions, sets you up with a private tuk tuk or car to explore the city – the night market is a must-visit – and even offers a free airport transfer. One of the hotel's first guests were Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt. These A-listers probably also came here to feel closer to Cambodian culture too. *Phum Svaydangkum, Sangkat Svaydangkum, Siem Reap, Cambodia*, +855 63 961 111; *phumbaitang.com*. Prices start at \$3,800 a night for a pool villa or \$2,910 a night for a terrace villa.



The cultural touches make it feel like you are living in a local village

Sireeampan Boutique Resort and Spa, Thailand

Few places come more tranquil than Thailand. And few places in this glorious country come more traditional than Chiang Mai. This is a city that's steeped in Buddhist tradition. If you're looking to head over this summer, then maybe you want a hotel that reflects all the customary Thai motifs.

The intimate 11-suite luxury Sireeampan Boutique Resort and Spa is tucked away in a luxuriously oldy-worldy Thai manor near to Chiang Mai's cultural attractions. It offers a 'highly personalised' luxury experience for each guest and the emphasis is heavy on heritage, which runs in tandem with the impeccable Thai hospitality and the five-star facilities. There's a plethora of intricate, native architecture, particularly on the buildings that are situated around a beautiful central courtyard that sports a fishpond and a lap pool. And there's lush gardens encircling the property too.

The suites are all exquisitely decorated in indigenous Thai style and each is named after a gemstone to honour 'Thailand's rich jewellery heritage'. Plus, each suite features an array of colours, textures and artworks that complement the unique surrounds of the country's spiritual capital. Then there's the signature breakfast, which you can

take anywhere, and the Sayomporn dining room that has plenty of dishes modelled on local Siamese flavours. You're also in the lap of local culture with sightseeing tours to temples and elephant habitats, and with the customary Thai cooking classes on offer. All in all, Sireeampan is more than just a hotel. It's a traditional experience with all the luxuries you'd expect from a five-star paradise. *88/8 Moo 1 Tambon Changpuak, Amphur Muang, Chiang Mai, Thailand*, +66 53 327 777; *sireeampan.com*. Prices start at \$3,455 a night or \$19,940 for a week stay.

Yagyu-no-Sho, Japan

Izu is a city in one of Japan's most picturesque prefectures, Shizuoka. The region is known for its exquisite onsen, which are hot spring resorts. And the most authentic of these are called ryokans. These are historic inns that originated in the Edo period of 1603 to 1868 and served Japanese travellers who needed to relax.

Yagyu-no-Sho is nestled in a beautiful woodsy environ in Izu. It personifies the traditional ryokan while also boasting an array of luxury facilities. It has only 15 rooms and some of them come with their own outdoor hot-spring soaking area. This is as zen as it comes, especially if you follow a soak with a walk around the old bamboo groves in the area.

As for dining, enjoy a private kaiseki experience in your own room, which features orthodox tatami mats and culturally inspired surrounds in 'sukiya' architectural

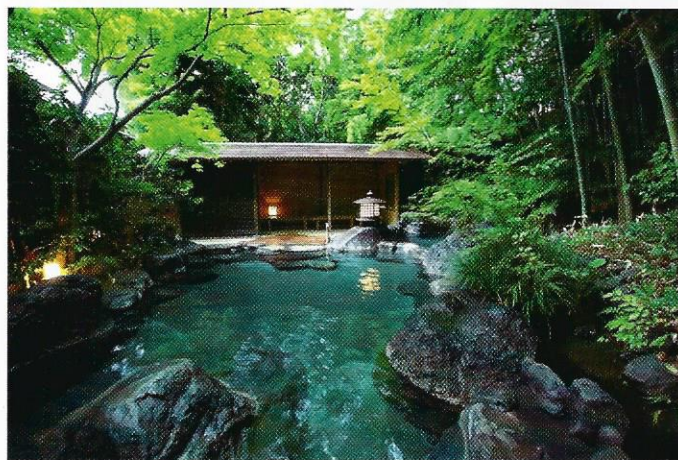
style. Sleep tatami-style and chill out in the morning on your own private terrace. The service at Yagyu is, of course, impeccable. A touch of tradition while you live the high life. *1116-6 Syuzenji, Izu, Shizuoka-ken, Japan*, +81 558 724 126; *yagyu-no-sho.com*. Prices start at \$3,030 a night.

Fijian Resort and Spa, Fiji

When it comes to a luxurious stay at a cultural and educational indigenous-themed resort, then the Shangri-La's Fijian Resort and Spa on Yanuca Island is a must-do. It's all about five-star facilities combining with a native Fijian feel when it comes to the design of the villas and the activities on offer. There are 10 Premier Lagoon and Ocean Bure huts here, all inspired by traditional Fijian beach bungalows. The private getaways are adorned with rich woods and fabrics that evoke the warm spirit of the South Pacific. There's

authentically designed décor, as well as private balconies and views of the Pacific Ocean. And, when you're up, there're plenty of chances to trek out across the island and see the local settlements that add to the native ambiance. Also, at night, marvel at the Fijian fire-dancers during regular shows.

One of the highlights at the resort is the Shangri-La Marine Education Centre, which is a collaborative project with the local indigenous community. It teaches you about life in the area and out on the coral reef. Also enjoy the spa, Chi, which is set in an abode that's modelled on traditional architecture, with homegrown produce on offer. Basically, if a local village feel is what you're after alongside a high-end experience, this place needs hitting up. *Yanuca Island, Coral Coast, Fiji*, +679 652 0155; *shangri-la.com*. Prices start at \$7,532 a night or \$39,842 for a one-week stay.



Temple of beauty
Thai a little tenderness
at Sireeampan resort:
(above) Yagyu-no-Sho's
stunning onsen