

#TRAVEL

# Tired of crowds? Explore these 5 hidden Asian escapes

If you are a travel enthusiast and want to roam around exploring the hidden gems in Asia, you have arrived at the right place. Join us as we take a deeper look at the underrated tourist destinations in Asia.

## Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan is, in itself, one of the more underrated Asian countries to travel to, but when it comes to exploring its rich culture, its uniqueness puts it in a class of one. The trails of apricot orchards and the piercing alpine meadows in Zaamin national park in Jizzakh will astonish you.

Next up is the Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa Palace, which translates to “Palace of Moon-Like Stars” in English, where you will fall in love with the glass verandas and luxurious Central Asian architecture. If you are lucky enough, you will get the chance to be greeted by gorgeous peacocks.

Indulge in the oriental flavours and the bustling vibes at Chorsu Bazar in Tashkent.

Pro tip: Don’t miss out on the local kebabs and tandoori lambs.

## Armenia

The majestic landscape of Sevan Lake,

located around 60 km from the capital of Armenia, will capture the heart of any traveller. You must visit the Sevan Writer’s house to witness this fabulous Soviet architecture.

From the Smbataberd fortress in the Vayots Dzor region, you can enjoy scenic views of Mount Teksar and Yeghegis village. There are also some nearby religious landmarks such as Tsaghats Kar Monastery and Zorats church.

Armenia also has places to visit for history lovers. When you walk through the 120-meter-long swinging bridge connecting the Old Khndzoresk to New Khndzoresk, it feels like stepping into a whole another world. Khndzoresk is full of mysterious caves, where stories of foregone dwellers echo.

## Turkey

Other than the overhyped, tourist-swamped places in Turkey, there are some locations you would not believe exist unless seen with your own eyes. One such place is Pamukkale, known not only for its dazzling, snowy-white beauty but also for the therapeutic effects of bathing in Cleopatra’s Thermal Pool.

Varda Viaduct in Adana is famous for being one of the filming locations for

the movie *Skyfall*. As one of the tallest railway viaducts in Turkey, it stands as an engineering spectacle.

It is quite hard to believe that something as peaceful as the Ihlara Valley in Cappadocia is the result of several volcanic eruptions in the past. The carvings inside the old churches and the cave paintings will make you ponder the lives of the Byzantine monks who lived here centuries ago.

## Kazakhstan

In northern and central Kazakhstan lies the Great Steppe, also called Saryarka. This place is of remarkable ecological importance, as it offers the opportunity to observe unique wildlife, including beautiful migratory birds. Away from the confines of daily life, here you can set yourself free in nature and embrace its vastness.

Located near the Inder Mountains in Atyrau is the picturesque salt lake known as Inder Lake. Besides being an ideal destination for breath-taking photographs, the lake’s minerals are also believed to offer healing benefits for various ailments.

To the southeast of the Almaty region lies the alpine lake Tuzkol. This location

is perfect for timelapse photography, featuring majestic sky views. Sit by the lake’s shore and admire the awe-inspiring panoramic views of the Tien Shan Mountains.

## Thailand

Even though Thailand is a very common tourist destination, it is also home to some unique places that usually don’t see too much crowds, meaning you can spend some quality time. A quick bus ride from Chiang Rai city leads you to Phu Chi Fah, where you can hike to witness one of the best sunsets in Thailand.

Visit the “walking temple,” Wat Tham Pha Plong in Chiang Dao and take a pause to appreciate the artworks at the Makhampom Art Space. The Chiang Dao Hot springs can be a great addition to your to-do list if you want some rejuvenation in nature.

Anyone will fall in love with the turquoise waters of Koh Kradan Island. Snorkelling in the coral reefs of Paradise beach would certainly be one of the most memorable experiences of your life.

By Labiba Tasnim

Photo: Collected



Phu Chi Fan Chian Rai

## Marriage equality begins with the nikah

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

In the northernmost part of the city, Faiza sat on her bed in silence, head pressed against warm pillows. For two hours, she hadn’t moved, trying to calm the nervous throb in her chest.

The quiet was shattered by the sudden rush of a large crowd into her room. Overdressed guests jostled for space; among them, Sima aunty glittered in gold-plated jewellery over her crimson saree. Faiza’s gaze flickered briefly to her sister; they quickly exchanged looks before her eyes landed back on the floor.

Moments later, a tall, dark-bearded man in a white turban and black sherwani

entered. It was the Qazi, the Islamic judge. He looked at Faiza, sneered, and asked, “Are you quite ready for your lifetime of unquestionable commitment, dear?”

Without missing a beat, Faiza smiled calmly. “Of course, uncle! Just as ready as he is to wash my dishes from tonight!”

The room froze. A wave of raised eyebrows and disapproving murmurs swept through the guests. Sima aunty’s lips tightened. The Qazi shifted uncomfortably, tugging at his beard.

Faiza leaned in, voice still polite. “Clause number 17 of your register, uncle — parties can list special conditions as long as they don’t break Shariah law. For me, it was

simple. I can’t handle slimy stuff in the sink, so my husband’s agreed to wash the dishes.”

The words hung heavy in the air, seeping through the room like a slow-spreading truth. Faiza’s mascara-lined eyes glinted, her lips curling into a triumphant smirk. In that moment, she had quietly overturned the script of a patriarchal tradition.

Just before the aunts could recover, Faiza looked up, and with the slightest trace of mischief, said her final word: “**Qubool!**”

As much as we try to promote women empowerment in a developing Bangladesh, only two to three per cent of women appear aware about the unquestionable right that religion provides them with: the

right to demand, make amendments to, negotiate for almost anything through the official contract (nikah-nama), before binding into the most important and life-changing relationship of one’s life: marriage.

It is now time to advocate for real changes for women in this country — by publicising the right that is already been granted to them without having to ask (*for once*): the right to curate the marriage document as per their own demands, protecting peace and sanity, even if it is to some extent.

By Zarin Khushnud

The writer is a Senior Economics and Business Faculty at Scholastica School in Dhaka.