

The Top 14 Books to Read Before Backpacking Asia: Unleash Your Bookworm

Reading is an integral part to traveling, and this list is your undeniably top 14 books to read before backpacking Asia. First off there's the long-haul flight to get you there, then lots and lots of transport, relaxing evenings and long days at the beach. Chances are, you'll have plenty of time to get your nose into a good book.

Before we get started, be aware that this isn't going to be a short list. We're not about to recommend the Lonely Planet and be done with it. In fact, we wouldn't recommend the Lonely Planet at all, not when there are so many great independent guides out there.

There's a slim chance that you won't get through these all before you leave. That's fine. But no one is going to be able to carry these around in paperback form and still have any clothes with them. If you've got a Kindle or similar, then great! If not, backpacking Asia is great for book swaps. Most hostels have one and you'll find most of these books will be on their hallowed shelves.

These are in no particular order, they're just books that we here at Bodega like and enjoy, and found to be the best books to read before beginning to backpack around Asia. There's a whole range from fictional fun stories to incredible real-life true stories. Each of them is a work of art, even if you can only find the time to read a couple before you leave, you'll be happy you did:

[The Beach – Alex Garland](#)

The quintessential book about heading to Thailand and finding yourself (and a whole lot more). This title was made wildly famous by the Leonardo Di Caprio film, and the immaculately beautiful setting of Koh Phi Phi. Whilst the setting is beautiful, the characters are wildly unpredictable and danger is always around the corner. Thankfully, the hostels mentioned in the first few chapters are fewer and further between now...

[The Damage Done – Warren Fellows](#)

This book could also be titled, "Why you shouldn't ever consider bringing drugs into Thailand ever." It's the true autobiographical story of Warren and his 12-year long stint in a Thai jail. This poor guy saw and went through some unbelievably terrible things. It's a stark reminder that human rights practices aren't perfect everywhere around the world. Frankly, it's remarkable that he survived. Read this before you leave, it'll put any foolish ideas to bed pretty damn quickly!

[Crazy Rich Asians – Kevin Kwan](#)

Recently turned into a smash hit film, Crazy Rich Asians is an almost fairytale-esque story of an American-Chinese girl who goes to visit her boyfriend's home city of Singapore. She quickly finds out that he is due to inherit one of Asia's greatest fortunes. It's a story of lavish lifestyles, infamous partying and essentially the world of the rich and famous. It's genuinely funny in parts and an easy read.

[I Am Pilgrim – Terry Hayes](#)

Not a travel book necessarily, but this thriller is one to save for the flight or a long bus ride from one end of the country to the next. This globetrotting novel chases a chain of unexplained but connected murders, and (of course) there's only one person who can solve them. It's a classic page turner that'll keep your mind occupied for hours on end. Pick it up, dive in and you'll be at your destination before you know it.

[Drink. Play. F@#k – Andrew Gottlieb](#)

Move over *Eat. Pray. Love*. there's a new kid on the block. The title alone is pretty much a mockery of the much-loved travel book, the content is an almost complete parody. Take it with a pinch of salt, whether you loved the inspiration or not, this is a funny, laugh out loud tale of a man who decides to quit and drop everything so that he can travel and live out some of the world's deepest fantasies. From Ireland to Vegas to Thailand, it's a fun read!

[The Life of Pi – Yann Martel](#)

If you were forced through this at school, you'll probably either love or hate it. If you're coming to this one in adulthood, then you're in for a treat. The book, when you look beneath the initial layers, is packed full of life ideas and metaphysical resonance. The story arch is about Pi Patel and a tiger, Richard Parker, trying to survive after a shipwreck. This isn't your standard novel but is well worth getting your head into. Especially for the conversations it'll prompt with other travellers.

[First They Killed My Father – Loung Ung](#)

If you're spending anytime in Cambodia, you won't be able to escape the historical legacy left by the Khmer Rouge and their leader Pol Pot. This story is the true story of Loung and her childhood during the height of the genocide. After her initial separation from family, she was sent to train as a child soldier, her siblings to labour camps. It's an incredible story about the strength of human spirit coupled with the darkest side of humanity.

[Home is Where the Heart is: Geraldine Cox](#)

Geraldine worked in Cambodia during the 1970s and 1980s in Foreign Affairs. This is her true story, the story of finding her true calling in life. That calling? To take in, care for and provide for the orphans of Cambodia. It's a deeply moving story and one which shows just what can be achieved with tenacity and boldness.

[Embers of War – Fredrik Logevall](#)

With a title that conjures images of flames and napalm, it couldn't be a more apt set of words that documents the fall of the French colonialism and the American war in Vietnam. This Pulitzer Prize winning piece is considered to be one of the greatest historical books of our time.

[The 4 Hour Working Week – Tim Ferriss](#)

One of the digital nomads, aspiring or otherwise, amongst those backpackers. The 4 Hour Working Week seeks to release you from the 9-5 and office-bound workplace and turn your adventures and travelling into a permanent lifestyle rather than a short-term holiday. Even if you don't end up working for yourself, Tim's mindset and completely different outlook at work will create some new ideas for you.

[The Art of Racing in The Rain – Gareth Stein](#)

Need to unleash those emotions? This book is as hilariously relatable as it is devastatingly sad. It's set from a family dog, Enzo's perspective, and shares the events of his whole family life up to the moment the book is set, (no spoilers) his death. It's a beautiful book, it'll make you reconsider what's really important and allow you to see the joys in the world through the eyes of the happiest animals on the planet.

[The Second Coming – John Niven](#)

God took a short (2000 year) fishing trip and isn't happy with the state that the world is in now. The only thing for it is to send back his first and only son and see if things can be put right. This is the tale

of modern-day Jesus trying to get his message heard without sounding completely insane. Whilst it's a fun story in its own right, there's a great moral behind it. There is but one commandment, be nice. That's all it takes to get by. Just be nice to people.

[Around the World in 80 Days – Jules Verne](#)

Is this the original travel book? Maybe. This is the classic tale of the eccentric Phileas Fogg and his manservant Passepartout. You'll need to excuse some of the ideas in the book, but take it as a historical work of fiction. The best part of reading this story is Verne's description of the various stops around the world as they were in the 1800s. Plus this is a book which we can guarantee is better than the modern-day film...

[Tales of a Female Nomad: Living at Large in the World – Rita Golden Gelman](#)

Sure, this is set in 1986, but the premise is the same. It's never too late to pack your bag and go. The story follows the adventures of the ordinary woman who shut up shop, sold everything and took to the nomadic lifestyle. If this doesn't inspire you to book a ticket then we're not sure anything will.

[Those Were Our 14 Top Books to Read Before Backpacking Asia](#)

From exciting fiction to devastating real life stories, this is a list that should keep you busy for some time to come. They'll prove to be inspirational, entertaining and talking points to get into with the fellow travellers that you'll meet along the way.

That's just a start and there are some absolute classics that we haven't covered in this list. You're never going to be short of a good read but this is a great start. There's not a great deal else to say, find a copy of them, get reading and book a ticket. Asia is calling and Bodega is waiting for you, with open arms and cold beer.