

10 reasons we love asean

[Life](#), [Love](#)



A baby orange utan chills out at Sepilok, East Malaysia's world-famous centre for rescued orange utans. Smart, strong and found only in Southeast Asia, the orange utan was an easy choice to launch our lists of the 40 things we love most about this region.

Orange Utan

Smart, charming and much stronger than they look, orange utans are Asia's largest apes. Scientists have discovered that orange utans even have their own cultures, with different groups developing their own style of tools. Some orange utans have even taught to use sign language.

There are fewer than 55, 000 left in the wild, on the islands of Borneo and Sumatra.

Coral Reefs

Life gets pretty complicated in Tubbataha Reef Marine Park, Phillipines. With 396 coral, 479 fish, six shark and two sea turtle species, it has greater biodiversity than any other reef of its size in the world. This World Heritage Site was once threatened by pollution but the Filipinos are fighting to save it for the next generation to swim in. Tubbataha is part of Southeast Asia's "coral triangle", which also covers Malaysia and Indonesia.

Elephant

Southeast Asia has marched to war and riches on the back of the elephant. These intelligent giants have carried kids and kings, and are still used for heavy work in Myanmar and other countries. They're also worshipped in Laos and Thailand – especially if they're white or albino. Laos used to be called

Pathetlao Lanexang, or “ Land of a Million Elephants”, but the region now has fewer than 30, 000 in the wild.

Orchids

What do Queen Elizabeth, Kofi Annan and Laura Bush have in common?

They’re all orchid hybrids that can be found in Singapore’s famous National Orchids can be found in many parts of the world, Southeast Asia has one of the widest collections. Singapore and Indonesia have orchids as their national flowers. These flowers don’t just attract bees – they can also be used in food and medicine.

Kiten

Kites have a long history in Southeast Asia, with the Sejarah Melayu mentioning kite fighting as far back as the 1400s. Each village has its own style, often drawing inspiration from batik designs, architecture or gods. There are fighting kites and singing kites, and giant ones as much as 6 metres in width.

Major kite-flying festivals and competitions take place during the northeast monsoon, when strong winds carry the kites even through the night.

Roller-Coasters

Life’s full of ups and downs in Brunei – in a good way. The country holds the world record for the most roller-coasters per person: there are 0. 8 for every 100. 000 Bruneians. To join in the fun, visit Jerudong Park, the country’s theme park.

Bakilbayan Boxes

Millions of Southeast Asians live and work in foreign countries, but they don't forget everyone at home. Filipinos working in faraway places love sending huge gift boxes to their families.

These care packages are called balikbayan (meanine returnee) boxes, and contain novelties from the foreign country, like food and toys.

SMS

Southeast Asians don't need a lot of space to have a lot of fun. Just look at how wild we can go on our mobile phone screens. Young Singaporeans won the title of fastest SMS-fingers in the world, not once, but twice. The Philippines, sometimes known as the SMS capital of the world, uses SMS for everything from poetry to political protests.

Puppets

After a hard day working in the rice fields, it's great to chill with a fun puppet show.

Southeast Asia has a puppet love affair, celebrating it every year with the ASEAN Puppet Festival. Vietnam is famous for its water puppets, with carved wooden puppets (above) making a splash on the surface of flooded rice fields. Then there's wayang kulit – the shadow plays that have entertained villagers and kings from Indonesia to Thailand for over 800 years.

Formula One

Every year, thousands satisfy their need for speed with the F1 Malaysian Grand Prix, Racing legends like Michael Schumacher have burned rubber on the Sepang circuit. Singapore will have F1 races from 2008.