

Fun in the sun

► You don't have to freeze this winter – the whole of Asia is your playground!

By Tom Pattinson

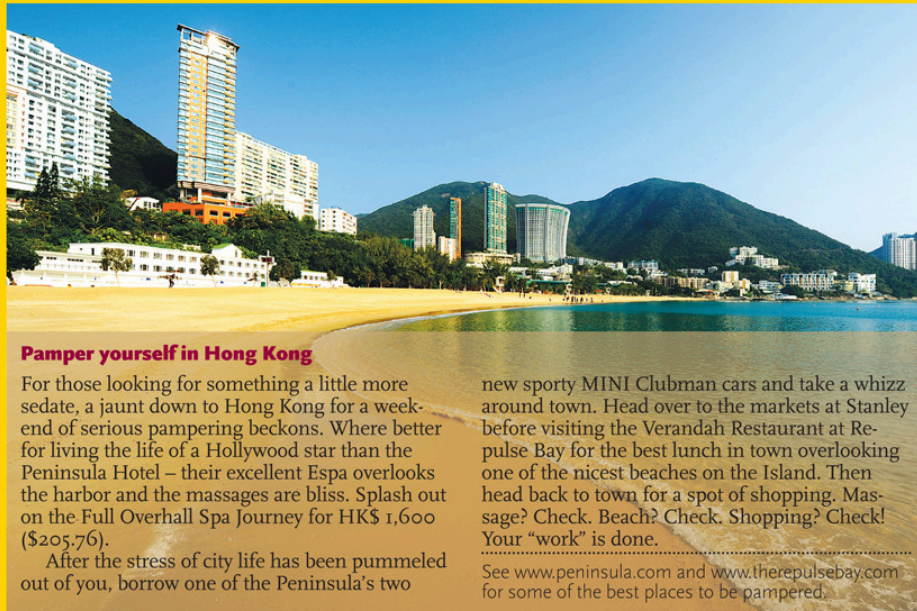
China might be going into hibernation for the winter but there's still a whole array of fun things to do in warmer parts of Asia this December. Here are a few of our top picks...

Off-road motor biking in the jungle

For those looking for adrenaline-fuelled adventure (and a fair splattering of mud, too), head to northern Thailand's jungle region of Chiang Mai for a week-long off-road motorbike tour. What better way to see one of South East Asia's most beautiful regions than from the back of a bike? From Chiang Mai, tours can consist of anything from three days around the local region to ten-day tours across the Mekong River and into Laos. After avoiding elephants and driving through jungle paths, you can unwind with a well-earned beer and an idyllic rural retreat.

According to Sam Bryant of Motorbike Thailand, there are two 6-day off-road jungle tours starting tomorrow with a New Year 650cc road tour beginning December 29. Get your leathers on and get going!

Check out www.transmotosport.com or www.motorbikethailand.com for more information.



Pamper yourself in Hong Kong

For those looking for something a little more sedate, a jaunt down to Hong Kong for a week-end of serious pampering beckons. Where better for living the life of a Hollywood star than the Peninsula Hotel – their excellent Espa overlooks the harbor and the massages are bliss. Splash out on the Full Overhaul Spa Journey for HK\$ 1,600 (\$205.76).

After the stress of city life has been pummeled out of you, borrow one of the Peninsula's two

new sporty MINI Clubman cars and take a whizz around town. Head over to the markets at Stanley before visiting the Verandah Restaurant at Repulse Bay for the best lunch in town overlooking one of the nicest beaches on the Island. Then head back to town for a spot of shopping. Massage? Check. Beach? Check. Shopping? Check! Your "work" is done.

See www.peninsula.com and www.therepulsebay.com for some of the best places to be pampered.



Go diving in Sipadan

South East Asia has some of the best diving destinations in the world but it's hard to find one better than Sipadan. This beautiful tropical island is not only picture perfect but also a divers' paradise with turtles, manta rays, huge schools of barracuda and even hammerhead sharks being regularly spotted in the waters around the island. Barracuda Point is thought to be in the top three dive spots in the world and a once in a lifetime visit. If it's unspoilt natural beauty that you're looking for, you'll be hard pressed to find somewhere

more perfect than this. To get there, fly Air Asia to Tawau via Kuala Lumpur and transfer from there. Accommodation on the island itself is restricted to protect the island but there is a wide range of places to stay on nearby Mabul Island, with very affordable dorm beds in the Longhouse from as little as 150 yuan (\$22.55) per night or private luxury villas for those who want to splash out.

Check out www.sipadan.com for more information.



Live it up in a Thai party resort

Beach Republic is the place to go for sun, sand, sea and good splash of glam thrown in for good measure.

Forget those lazy backpacker beach huts full of college drop-outs and gap-year students. This is Ibiza-style beach party meeting private villa in the sun. Expect to find the European elite lazing by one of the nine pools, American divas in the Beach Republic Asian Fusion Spa and Asian pop princesses at the stunning Ocean Club. This December a stellar line up of musicians will be performing, including hip-hop mogul Damon Dash (of Rock-a-fella Records fame), female singer-songwriter McKenzie Eddy and dynamic trio London Souls. Not only are these international acts performing but Beijing's own DJ Wordy will be heading down to Koh Samui too, to mix it up on the beach from December 24 to January 1.

With Club Suites from 7,500 Baht (\$249.75) and private pool villas from 13,000 Baht (\$432.9) per night, what are you waiting for? Isn't this the best way to spend Christmas with a gang of mates?

For offers, promotions and further information check out www.beachrepublic.com.