

ON THE RADAR

NEWS, EVENTS AND MUSINGS



FREE 'N easy

If Bangkok is on your itinerary, here are five fun activities that won't cost a baht.

- 1 Visit Baan Silapin, a rickety wooden house on the river, that has Thai puppetry shows each day (except Wednesday).
- 2 Get your zen on during a meditation class with Buddhist monks at Wat Mahathat temple.
- 3 Watch from the sidelines as some of the best Muay Thai boxers fight each other in the MBK shopping centre every Wednesday night.
- 4 Eyeball the oddities at Wat Hua Krabue temple, where an eccentric monk with a hoarding problem has accumulated more than 100 Mercedes-Benz limos and 8000 buffalo skulls.
- 5 Get informed at the Museum of Counterfeit Goods, where you'll learn just how destructive your fake designer bag really is.

Image: Amio Calander

FOR THE DIARY

PAIN MEETS PURITY



Only the brave and psychotic venture to Laza for lent. Entroida is the Spanish city's *carnaval*, and it's far from the merry visual feast that outsiders expect of the Catholic holiday. The festival, to be held this year between 12 and 22 February, is all about pain and

humiliation, which folklore insists purifies the soul. Purge the devil raging inside by hurling balls of mud and angry fire ants into the faces of other revellers. Be warned though: Entroida celebrates a cast of uncanny characters like Moreno, a horned pervert who lifts up women's skirts, cat calls and makes outrageous sexual gestures.

THE MILD WEST

Cowboys are kinda loners, aren't they? Men of few words with big hats and noble steeds? If you believed everything you saw on television this description would be true, but each year thousands travel to Elko, Nevada, for the National Cowboy Poetry Gathering. Words – lots of them – are spoken and sung all in the name of life on the land. This year, from 25 to 30 January, ranchers, poets, musicians and artists will celebrate the expansive horizons and endless grasslands of the Northern Plains. Pull on your boots and saddle up for a festival like no other.

westernfolklife.org

IF YOU DO ONE THING THIS SUMMER...

You should head to the northern hemisphere and catch the last of the ski season. For our money you can't do better than Mayrhofen in Austria, where, from 4 to 9 April, days spent careening down slopes on skis or a board are just the start of it. Snowbombing is the ultimate off-piste party, with six nights of the best live acts and DJs from around the world. The 2016 carnival has the likes of The Prodigy, Mark Ronson, Groove Armada and Driis (aka Idris Elba) bringing the beats. So book your ticket and prepare to wave your hands in the air like you just don't care that in the morning you'll be bombing down the Harakiri, Austria's steepest slope, with two planks of wood strapped to your feet.

snowbombing.com

Image: Jenna Foxton



meet the bloggers

Kia Abdullah and Peter Watson of Atlas & Boots reveal their top pick for a far-flung adventure.

“We've been fortunate enough to swim with whales in Tonga, trek to Machu Picchu in Peru and dive with sharks in the Galapagos, but it was the less-famous island of Tanna in Vanuatu that offered the most breathtaking adventure of all: Mount Yasur, one of the most accessible active volcanoes in the world. Yasur has been erupting nearly continuously for 800 years and continues to do so several times an hour, guaranteeing fireworks for most visitors. We trekked to the top late one afternoon and were greeted by a stomach-churning roar and red-hot lava shooting into the air above. At one point, a single flare landed threateningly close by. As a nearby French tourist put it, it felt 'super dangereux'. As darkness fell, most visitors returned to their waiting transfers. Thankfully, we had agreed an extended stay with our driver so by 7pm, we had the volcano all to ourselves – undoubtedly one of our ultimate travel experiences.”

atlasandboots.com

HotelTonight

Last-minute hotel booking sites are as ubiquitous as narcissists on Facebook, but HotelTonight is different. The app-only portal is geared towards the more discerning traveller and offers cut-price rates for stays at a select portfolio of properties up to seven days in advance. Register, choose your property and in two taps you're in the room. We bagged a stay at The Olsen Art Series Hotel in Melbourne for \$149 (the rack rate was \$185) and were checked in pronto. Unlike some booking sites, there was no trawling through hundreds of (sometimes dubious) properties, as only the top rated and most competitive make the cut (a maximum of 15 hotels are featured for any one destination and they compete with each other for a listing). We were impressed with the ease of booking and the little extras, including the app's interactive map and weather forecast. There were a few hiccups checking out and some of the hotel information on the app was outdated, but overall it was a winner. HotelTonight bills itself as having the lowest online rates around and, when we booked, the closest tariff we could find elsewhere was \$182. The app also has the ability to geo-target users who are at the airport or in a two-kilometre radius of a hotel, and it forward-reserves a supply of rooms at peak times, such as New Year's Eve, so your chances of getting a last-minute bed are good. HotelTonight launched in Australia mid-2015 and hopes to have about 10 destinations available by early 2016. Worldwide there are 15,000 hotels in more than 2000 destinations.

hoteltonight.com



The Olsen, Melbourne

BEEN THERE, DONE THAT



APP MATHS

With the Aussie dollar all over the shop, we can't live without the Currency app.

LIST MANIA

All the 'don't miss in 2016' line-ups are giving us tonnes of travel ideas.

HOLIDAY AT HOME

During school break, we're giving high prices and packed airports the flick to be a hometown tourist.

love it
loathe it

DARK ARTS

Dear hotel designers, we don't want to spend half an hour trying to turn off our room's lights.

TAX TRAP

The price on the product should be final. Spare us the add-ons.

LOUNGE LIZARDS

Chucking your towel on a sunbed at dawn doesn't reserve it all day.

